

# **Discourse**

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

# Discourse:

## Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies

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# Discourse:

Volume 5, Number 2, Spring 2006

The journal of the *Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies* of the *Higher Education Academy*

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## Editorial: diversity, openness and the moral necessity of dialogue

This issue contains papers from internationally renowned scholars in theology and religious studies, alongside a discussion of non-Western texts and uses of online teaching in philosophy. During editorial stages in preparing the journal, I was struck by the quality of material we are publishing in *Discourse* and the high level of academic reflection that these papers represent. What education is, how it is conducted, how student learning is nurtured, and so on, are questions that engage issues that lie right at the heart of our disciplines. Our understanding of the self and society, of truth, of change, of morality and spirituality, of the other and the world, of language and meaning, of thought and emotion, and of being and becoming, all inform our theory and practice of education in some way or other. In these times of increasing quantification and standardisation of education, where models of what a person in education is are used by implication rather than being examined, pedagogical research in our communities is vital to

maintain diversity, openness and appropriateness in university education. We can contribute, not just to discussions about our own disciplines, but to wider academic and national dialogue on university education. Many of the papers in this issue present engagement in this way as a moral necessity.

The interview with Ursula King, and Loades' overview and analysis of the current state of theology and religious studies, provide different perspectives on the past and present of the disciplines. They show how academic life has changed in the UK, highlighting many of the features that have made it valuable and unique and that need rigorous intellectual defence if they are to flourish in the future. Bird makes these themes explicit in her discussion of the value of our openness to 'not knowing' in education. Dolin's paper then examines the role of tradition and openness in the Japanese context, demonstrating further how fundamental stances on the nature of the self in the world dramatically affect basic attitudes in

tudes in and to education.

All these papers also demonstrate the overlapping nature of philosophy and discussions of religion, a theme continued by I'Anson and Jasper, who give us a picture of how religious studies might be understood in the future, through the application of the philosophy of Deleuze. Lawrence then further analyses the community basis of education through an account of biblical study in Scotland. Panza's paper continues Dolin's themes in moving us beyond Western subject boundaries and looks at the use of non-Western sacred and philosophical texts in philosophy teaching. Finally, Carusi looks at how texts and group discussion are changed in fundamental ways by being taken on-line because of the nature of hypertext creation. These issues will have a profound impact on the nature of teaching in the future given technological development.

As always, we have strived to provide a range of interesting material of high quality and welcome feedback on any aspect of the journal.

David J Mossley  
Editor

## **News and Information**

## The Higher Education Academy

**T**he Higher Education Academy's mission is to help institutions, discipline groups and all staff to provide the best possible learning experience for their students.

Its aims and objectives are:

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

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

## The Subject Network

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

## The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies is based at the University of Leeds and at a partner site at the University of Wales,

Lampeter and covers the disciplines of Philosophy, Philosophy of Science, History of Science (including the History of Medicine and Technology), Theology, and Religious Studies.

### **Mission statement**

To support and promote Philosophical, Theological and Religious Studies higher education in the UK, and to build on its culture of dialogue and reflection.

### **Strategic Aims**

- To work in collaboration with PRS colleagues and students in order to be effective advocates for our disciplines in the development of national and regional policies.
- To fund and take part in projects and events that support the development and recognition of good teaching practice in PRS.
- To participate in relevant research developments.
- To provide a repository of relevant knowledge and expertise within our subject communities.
- To maintain a well managed, flexible and properly structured subject centre staffed by appropriately qualified people with academic and creative strengths.

Visit the website for the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies (formerly the PRS-LTSN) of the Higher Education Academy:

**<http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk>**



# Departmental Visits, Workshops and Contacts

## Departmental Visits

We have now visited almost all of the departments in our subject communities. We have contacted all the departments (either via your departmental Subject Centre representative or your Head of Department) and if we have not yet set up a face to face meeting then please do not hesitate to contact us at the address below to arrange one. The aim of the visits is to gather information about existing effective practice and to find out what the most pressing issues for your department and for individual lecturers and tutors are, so that we can better direct our resources and efforts to serve the PRS community in all learning, teaching and assessment matters.

## Departmental Workshops

We also offer a full programme of workshops. These are designed to help us help you with issues raised in our first visits and to see how things have changed in your learning and teaching environment. We aim to provide workshops and support advice on any learning and teaching issue that has a subject-specific dimension. These workshops can be tailored to your departmental needs and time and can cover topics such as plagiarism, assessment and tutor training. Please contact us to discuss how we might help you with a workshop for your department, free of charge.

## Contacts

Our list of departmental contacts continues to grow, but there is still a small minority of departments that have not registered a representative. If you would like to be a representative for your department, please contact us at:

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## Theology *and* Religious Studies or Theology vs Religious Studies

6-7 July 2006, St. Anne's College, University of Oxford

The last ten years have seen a growth in the teaching of religious studies in higher education and the development of a large number of departments which combine religious studies with theology in their titles. From the point of view of those teaching the subjects, this raises exciting possibilities but also potential difficulties. This two-day conference, sponsored by the Subject Centre, offers participants the opportunity to explore the evolving relationship between Theology and Religious Studies and to consider the challenges of, and strategies for, teaching both.

### Speakers

- **David Ford** (Cambridge): Theology and Religious Studies for a Multi-Faith and Secular Society
- **Kim Knott** (Leeds): Changing Conceptions of the 'Insider' and 'Outsider' in the Study of Religion, and Their Implications for the Relationship Between Theology and Religious Studies
- **Gavin D'Costa** (Bristol): Theological Theology and Theological Religious Studies: A Modest Proposal
- **James Cox** (Edinburgh): Religion Without Theology: Re-asserting a Distinct Identity for the Academic Study of Religion.
- Other speakers include George Pattison, Ursula King, Steven Sutcliffe, Hugh Goddard, Timothy Fitzgerald and Hugh Pyper.

For more information, and to register, visit:

<http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk> and click on

**Theology and Religious Studies or Theology vs Religious Studies**, or contact Dr D. L. Bird at [darlene@prs.heacademy.ac.uk](mailto:darlene@prs.heacademy.ac.uk), or the Subject Centre administrator on 0113 3434184.

Closing date for registration: **Friday 9th June**.

# Critical Perspectives on Religion and the Environment

18-19 September 2006, Woodbrooke Study Centre, Birmingham

**Keynote speaker: Dr. Bronislaw Szerszynski**

**Convenor: Dr. Emma Tomalin**

Sponsored by the Subject Centres for Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, and Philosophical and Religious Studies, this conference will feature participation from both established and new scholars, across disciplines, reflecting critically upon issues relating to 'religion and the environment'. Since the rise of the environmental movement, in the 1960s, the recognition that religious traditions can have an impact upon the way people interact with the natural environment has informed the activities and discourses of environmentalists and academics across the globe.

## Themes

The selection of papers has not yet been finalised, but it is envisaged that themes may include:

- Gender, religion and the environment: ecofeminism and beyond
- Environmental ethics and religion: Eastern and Western approaches
- Geography, place and religion
- Culture, religion and environment
- Post-colonial critique of religious environmentalism
- Environmental activism and religion
- Radical ecology and 'eco-warriors'
- Policy and practice; international development and religious environmentalism
- Ecotheology
- Indigenous religions and the environment

For more information, and to register, contact Dr D. L. Bird at [darlene@prs.heacademy.ac.uk](mailto:darlene@prs.heacademy.ac.uk), or the Subject Centre administrator on 0113 3434184.

# **Articles, Discussion and Practical Teaching**

## The *Discourse* Interview

# 2. Professor Ursula King

Professor Emerita of the University of Bristol

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**Interviewed by: Darlene L. Bird**

Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies  
Higher Education Academy

Continuing our series of interviews with noted academics, Dr. Darlene Bird, Theology and Religious Studies Subject Co-ordinator for the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies, talked to Professor Ursula King about her academic career spanning half a century, her views on the current position of TRS and UK higher education, and the importance of supporting female scholars. The interview was conducted in Bristol on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2006.

***Bird:* By way of introduction, would you say a little bit about your teaching career?**

*King:* I started teaching in London. When I first came to Britain in 1963, I taught at a College of Education outside London, where I was

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a lecturer in Divinity. Then, when I went to India in 1965, I did some part-time teaching in philosophy because I was studying philosophy there. On my return, I taught at the University of Leeds for many years, then at the University of Bristol, and in between I taught at the University at Oslo. I also taught two semesters in the United States in two American universities, a private one in Cincinnati, and a state one in Kentucky.

**And could you tell us a bit about your research interests?**

Well, that is quite a big story, and difficult to talk about in a few words. I started in German universities with studies in theology, philosophy and German literature, and, by sheer serendipity, came into a class on phenomenology of religion. So I began the comparative study of religions there, but my main studies were in theology and philosophy for many years. Then I went to Paris where I studied more theology than philosophy, though I did study philosophy at the Sorbonne.

My research interests were initially in patristics, and my first book was a translation from Latin into German of the anti-Arian treatises of Marius Victorinus, who was a predecessor of St. Augustine. However, I very much wanted to get into the contemporary era, and I eventually ended up doing a PhD on the writings of the French palaeontologist and religious thinker Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. This came about through my stay in Paris.

Then, very early on, I also became interested in women and religion, and I was very active in a Catholic women's association through people I met in Paris. Through that I got into feminist theology, and later into gender studies.

Also, through my stay in India particularly, I became very interested in Indian religions and inter-faith dialogue, and in wider comparative studies in spirituality.

**What do you consider to be the highlights of your career?**

There are so many, I don't know what to pick out, and I find it difficult to divide my career from my life. I had a meeting with the Dalai Lama in 1966, in Dharamsala, before he had ever come to the West, and that was most interesting, indeed unforgettable. That was certainly one of my highlights. The research on Teilhard de Chardin includes an

enormous amount of highlights, particularly staying with his family, going to the chateau where he wrote, and seeing his private papers—his notebooks and diaries—before they were ever published in the archives, so that was really very important for me.

A number of quite well known or distinguished lectures have also been high points. Relatively recently, in 1996, I gave the Bampton Lectures in Oxford, founded over 200 years ago; in 1985 I gave the Lambeth Interfaith Lecture at Lambeth Palace; in 1984 I gave the Hibbert Lecture, the first one to be broadcast on Radio 4, which led to my book on women and spirituality; in 1983 I was invited to lecture in Westminster Abbey on the occasion of a Teilhard de Chardin exhibition that celebrated, somewhat belatedly, his birth centenary; and in 1986, in India, I gave the Teape lectures on Hindu-Christian dialogue.

Another highlight has been the international recognition that I have received. Being appointed to the first Chair of Feminist Theology at the University of Oslo, and getting three honorary doctorates, from Edinburgh in 1996, from Oslo in 2000, and from the University of Dayton, Ohio, in 2003, were highlights, as was working on a Research Assessment Exercise, not in Britain, but in Switzerland, and doing European work. I've examined PhDs and MAs in Sweden, Norway, South Africa and other African countries, India and Australia, and I've been a consultant on the Gender and Religion section of the second edition of Macmillan's *Encyclopedia of Religion*.

### **What do you consider has given you the most career satisfaction?**

The reception of some of my books and lectures—the response from readers and audiences around the world—has probably given me the most satisfaction, and so has the success of some of my students. I came to teaching almost by accident, but that was the only thing I could do after my studies—the opportunity was there to do it, and I have always made use of opportunities. I've loved my subject and I've always loved teaching, I've really always loved it.

I am still in touch with one or two students who I taught more than 40 years ago, so that's very satisfying, and quite a few of my former doctoral students are now in university jobs in the UK and the USA, and some of them have got Chairs, so that's very satisfying as well.

**I know that you've discussed this already in your article, 'Feminist Theology: a Personal Journey',<sup>1</sup> but would you talk a little bit about which people or experiences were most influential in your decision to take up theological studies at a time when it was almost unheard of for a woman to study theology?**

That's a very good question, and it's not easy to unravel, because that's very much a personal journey. Between the ages of 10 and 15, I attended a Catholic girls' school, and I was influenced by one or two of the nuns who taught me, and then I went to a secular state school in Cologne, where a Dominican, who gave us R.E. lessons, as is customary in German schools, first got me interested in reading theological books. Through the Girl Guides, when I was 17 or 18, I went to a camp near a Dominican Academy, close to Cologne, where we met a very enthusiastic young Dominican who was studying theology in Rome, and from then on the study of theology simply became my dream. I read a lot about Thomas Aquinas and I was just very *interested* in theological questions. I felt it was almost like a calling—it was philosophical and theological questions that really motivated me very greatly, and that's what I wanted to study.

I came up against immense obstacles. I was in a school of almost all boys—there were only four girls in my class—and I had to do an extra year's schooling to get my school certificate, and take private Latin and Greek lessons to have the admissions requirements for a university course in theology. I was determined against all odds that I was going to do it, even though my teachers at school and my mother were very much against it. (My father had died during the war when I was only five years old).

**And who or what do you consider to have had the greatest influence in shaping your academic career?**

I started at the University of Bonn, where one of my professors was Joseph Ratzinger, the present Pope, who was an extremely good and very liberal teacher at that time. It was his first Chair, and his lectures

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<sup>1</sup> Ursula King, 'Feminist Theology: a Personal Journey', *Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift*, No.102, (2001)



were very inspiring and really helped to shape my thinking, although later I was disappointed when he developed into a far more conservative and reactionary thinker. Several other well-known professors from Bonn also influenced me, as did some from the University of Munich, where I studied subsequently before going to Paris.

In addition, I had a national scholarship which was quite prestigious in Germany, called the *Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes*, which still exists and which trains students in all subjects for academic careers, and this supported me. I was given a full grant and encouraged to study abroad.

I went to see the Dean at the Institut Catholique in Paris, and said, ‘Can I come and study with you?’, and he said, ‘Well, we have made enquiries from German universities, they allow lay-people, and lay-people include women, so you can come’, and that’s how I finished up being the only woman amongst 200 men studying Catholic theology in Paris. I got an additional grant from the French government, and I studied for three years and got a Licentiate of Sacred Theology, a Catholic degree validated by the Vatican.

While I was in Paris, I also studied at the *École des Hautes Études*, which is really for the science of religions and the comparative study of religions, and I read philosophy at the Sorbonne. I was taught by an incredibly engaging and very inspiring professor of dogmatic theology—we would say systematic theology—Paul Henry. He was an expert on Plotinus, and the editor of all the collated manuscripts in Greek of the *Enneads* of Plotinus. He used to lecture for one semester every year in the States; he was Belgian but he lived in France, and he had this incredible wide-ranging interest in theology and philosophy. He supported me a great deal—he was also instrumental in making me do my first book, the translation of patristic texts from Latin into German. He was always very supportive, and I remained in touch with him until his death in 1984.

Then there were other people. I used to go regularly to seminars at Gabriel Marcel’s house with other students, which was great, and I used to attend some of Merleau-Ponty’s lectures, and those of several other philosophers, at the Sorbonne. Paul Ricoeur examined me when I did my first oral philosophy exam, and he gave me lots of encouragement to continue with philosophy, so I had many very positive experiences.

**When you were in Paris studying theology in the 1960s, and you were the only woman out of 200 or so studying theology, how do you think that experience shaped you as an individual, as a scholar?**

Well, it did shape me in the way I've already indicated: it made me certainly very independent, very self-reliant, very determined, and I never took no for an answer. I always did what I wanted to do, and I always found people who somehow gave me the backing or the encouragement to achieve what I wanted.

Sometimes it was a bit lonely. There was no way of becoming friendly with the students in the theology class as it was a very large class, and they were all priests because the Institut Catholique was a seminary, although I did meet people through the philosophy classes.

In a way, I've only critically reflected on this unusual experience since I've developed a feminist awareness and consciousness. At the time it was just a question of getting on with my studies and making as much as I could out of the opportunities of studying in Paris—so many new people and ideas—and also going to the theatre, to concerts and exhibitions, visiting museums and attending public events.

**What do you think about the distinctive features of UK higher education?**

Well, I'm a great supporter of the UK higher education system in many ways. What I like, and what is really helpful when people come out of school when they are young, is the compactness of courses, so that you can get a BA or BSc in a relatively short time, compared with other European countries, and even with the United States, and then you can build on this further with an MA or an MSc.

And then, because it is so well directed, by and large, the drop-out rate is lower than in other European countries, and it costs less money, so the effectiveness of the teaching is obviously generally very good.

On the negative side, there is a certain lack of breadth and depth when compared with university courses in other European countries, and that is sometimes quite noticeable with some British students and academics.

Positively, what is also very significant, though perhaps less so

now, is the closeness that the students can have to university teachers. I like the democratic style and the accessibility. In the past, I've had German students who have spent a year in our department commenting very favourably on this, and for me, it was the same when I moved to France—I had much closer connections with my teachers there than I had had in German universities.

So it's the encouragement to develop your own critical thinking, that your views are wanted, and also the freedom to choose. It's not boundless—sometimes some departments don't provide enough choice perhaps, but then the external examiner system, I think, is very good for external checks and balances, so I have a great deal of admiration for the British system, which I have worked in for a long time.

**I wondered if you could comment on how you think higher education in the UK has evolved over the years?**

That is a really difficult question, because, from what I see, it's become certainly more open, less hierarchical, and more democratic, and it's more attainable for all social groups in a way that it was probably not before, so you have a mass education system which in itself provides a lot of opportunities for students.

However, I do think it's too finance driven and perhaps not enough value driven. Nowadays, utilitarian kinds of aims have come to dominate the learning process too much.

**Are you talking about the QAA influence?**

There are lots of different influences, but the finance-driven model of higher education, and the fact that it has become such a huge industry, doesn't seem to me to lead always to the right results. I feel that it is dangerous, and harmful, even, if students are squeezed too much into the same kind of pattern of learning, because people are very different psychologically. I really feel that the love and the passion for the subjects is most important. I think you need to find a balance.

Perhaps now, in the humanities, there is too much stress on information and instrumental knowledge, and not enough on personal knowledge—on a wisdom to live by, so to speak. You see, I think education is important for your job, and you want to learn things that are important for your job, but education is also about a lot more, and, in a

way, I see it as a process of growth and development which has ultimately spiritual aspects. If the process of education is done well, I think it is a process that leads to growth, which is personally very rewarding for people. And, if it's not, it can be very destructive.

I also see a problem now, in some cases, with loss of quality, and that not enough is done to cater for excellence. I believe this very strongly, particularly because I was so strongly supported by a selective system of scholarships. I don't believe in segregation, but I think you need something extra for the students who have incredible abilities. You get students who are such high flyers, and our system here doesn't always provide enough opportunities for them.

**What do you think of some of the current trends emerging in theological and religious studies?**

In one sense, I'm perhaps not the best person to comment on this because I'm not in a current teaching post. I was very unhappy with the later developments in the late 1990s and early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in terms of trying to specify and spell out in too much detail objectives and attainments for students. I felt it was really trying to push everybody into the same category, that there is a kind of standardisation which doesn't really correspond to life as it is lived, and I feel that students are very different.

Positively, I see that there's a lot of networking going on, and I see this very much in a global sense. Then I think there is, negatively, a danger of over-specialisation and fragmentation, perhaps.

Central, I think, to many younger scholars is the importance of ethical questions, perhaps in dealing with contemporary problems in society, whether violence, poverty, human rights or environmental ecological disasters. People are very engaged; quite a few younger scholars are also veering towards being activists. This isn't everybody, but there is this sense that you can't really cut off the academy from society, so that university teaching in theology and religious studies just happens and has no relationship to what else occurs in society. I think we can do this less and less. We have become much more aware of the vulnerability and precariousness of the human position, what it is to be human, and there is a much greater ecological awareness in theology.

Also, there is a greater openness, in some circles, to the science

and religion debates. I'm not on the Dawkins route here—as I was saying about ideology, scientists can be just as ideological and dogmatic as theologians.

**Richard Dawkins is very ideological, without recognising it.**

Yes, and very exclusive—by his own scientific criteria his arguments wouldn't stand up. He has no evidence for many of these statements he makes. I'm really more interested in scientists who see opportunity, possibilities of dialogical kinds of cross-fertilisation, and I think there is quite a lot happening, particularly in the States, but also there's also a European Society of Theology and Science. There are particular groups that foster this dialogue, and I think that's good.

Again, at a practical level, inter-faith dialogue comes into some theological reflections, although not perhaps in as many as it should.

**Much of your research has been on feminist theology and gender and religion. What contribution, if any, do you think feminist theology has made to the way theology is taught in universities now?**

It has made a difference, but not enough of a difference. When I was first interested in these questions, in the 1970s, there was nothing much on them in the universities, but since the late 1980s and 1990s, I think most places try to teach feminist theology. There is greater awareness that feminist theology needs to be studied, but it often still remains too ghettoised.

It has opened up new theological research agendas and theological ways of thinking, which can be quite creative and critical, so there has been a paradigm shift for some people more than others, but at the centre there has been very little movement, and sometimes feminist theology is very marginalised. I would really prefer there to be a wider consideration of gender studies in theology and religious studies, because feminist theology is too often an area that is siphoned off as something that only women teach and take, and I'm very much against this.

I taught a course on religion and gender, and we looked at feminist theology under the wider umbrella of gender and religion, so we looked at other religious traditions too. About a third of the students

were men, and that was very important to me and to the students, and the interaction between the women and the men was very lively—lots of debate—so I found that very helpful for everybody. It was very rewarding because students really engaged with the questions.

I used to say at the beginning of the course, ‘I’ll give you a health warning; if you start this course you won’t be the same when you finish it, it’s dangerous and if you feel frightened, don’t do it’, because it affects self-reflexivity—it does affect your life. It opens up so many questions which are very fertile for theology, so I think it’s a very important aspect, but I don’t think it’s sufficiently mainstream yet.

### **It’s still an add-on?**

Yes, it’s too much an add-on. The World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation have held consultations on theological education and educators to look at how feminist theology should really feed into all the different subjects, because it’s a theoretical and existential perspective which has a lot of repercussions for the way the whole subject is handled and taught, and the way society is organised. It should permeate all this, whereas people try to keep it tightly in just another box.

### **Do you think students have changed over the course of your teaching career?**

In the last few years I did mostly research supervision—MA teaching and directing doctoral students. I didn’t really do undergraduate teaching any more, because I was, to some extent, disillusioned with what appeared to be the indifference and apathy of many undergraduates. In the 1970s undergraduates seemed more adventurous, and more keen, particularly in the study of religions, when they had the whole hippy drive for going to India and so on. The students just loved studying Hinduism, Buddhism, sociology of religion, and the comparative study of religions. They just loved it and they were very engaged. I don’t think this is the same now.

The opportunities for travelling are so great, and the students seem so much more blasé, particularly the more privileged students, and I found this really quite puzzling, because some of them had gone to incredible places, but as far as I could see, it hadn’t really enlarged

their minds or made them more interesting or different people. And then, sometimes, people who come from very poor backgrounds who have really struggled to get to university, or come as mature candidates, make more interesting students than young school leavers because they have had to battle and struggle much more to get there. They are more committed to their studies, whereas some of these 18 or 19 year olds were good at just doing the minimum to get a 2:2 or a 2:1, but they were not really committed to their study as such, and, as a teacher, I found that very disappointing. You can't engage them, really, and they don't really develop any passion for the subject.

I do think it's important to get a good response from students, otherwise you question why you're doing it, if they're not interested.

**You've had the unusual experience of studying in four different countries: Germany, France, India and the UK. Do you think that your teaching has benefited from studying in a variety of contexts, or do you think it has influenced your teaching in any way?**

Yes, it has made me think particularly about different learning styles of students, which obviously correspond with teaching styles. Students in different cultures differ greatly. I've also taught Indian students and South African students, as well as Japanese students—largely in Leeds, but elsewhere, too.

As far as my own teaching is concerned, it's made me certainly more open, more flexible, more willing to experiment, and more inclined to give people from very different backgrounds and directions a chance.

**What would you say is the most important factor in good teaching?**

I have always felt that, with good teaching and good guidance, you can make a difference to the outcome of a student's studying and degree result. The big thing is to get a student motivated to desire to learn—it's really about a love for the subject. What I've always been told by my students, and also by audiences when I lecture, is that I convey enthusiasm for the subject, and I think this is very important, and helps students get really motivated.

Also, in all countries I've taught in, although I must say in India particularly, I have seen bad ways of teaching, in terms of rote learning,

and it really raises very fundamental questions about the authority of the teacher, the authority of knowledge and the authority of tradition. These questions have to be really fully addressed in order to make the student sufficiently free and enterprising to seek to move on. To get a paradigm shift you need invention, you need to overstep established boundaries.

The important questions to foster through your teaching are: what is learning all about? Why do you want to do it at all? And does it make a difference to your life, not just to your job? These are big questions, but I think it's very important to give more thought and reflection to these issues.

**In what ways do you think that your research in gender studies has informed your teaching?**

I have always liked to have mixed classes, and to give both women and men the same opportunities and choices, and I think this is very important. I've tried to be scrupulously fair, and sometimes that has been difficult for students and for me. Sometimes the women, particularly in gender studies and feminist theology, thought I should be more there for them than for the men students, and I should give them preferential treatment, but I refused to do that. I just would not be talked into this, so sometimes that led to conflict.

I have always tried to open up debate, and to give men and women the chance to enter into dialogue with each other. Sometimes that can be painful on gender questions, but on the whole I've had very good feedback. Students have said that these seminars were very empowering and non-threatening, because what I don't allow is the kind of adversarial, controversial kind of antagonistic debating style that some academics seem to revel in. I want to have an opening up of the debate which explores every possible intellectual and other aspect, but which is not painful and harmful to people. I don't want to score points. I'm very interested in the history of rhetoric and how this antagonistic debating goes back to the Ancient Greeks, and how it was subsequently developed in the medieval schools. Women were always left out of this, it was a very male attitude towards discussion, like having a fencing match. I don't like this, because I have often found that it hurts people very deeply, so that has influenced my teaching quite a lot.



**I know this isn't easy to talk about in a short period of time, but you are a scholar of both theology *and* religious studies, and some academics would argue that the two are at odds with one another. How do you manage to bridge the gap, if there is a gap, in your teaching of both theology and religious studies?**

I don't think there is a real gap. I see it more as different ends of the spectrum, because I look at the study of religions in a very comprehensive and inclusive way, and I don't like sharp disciplinary boundaries. I think more in terms of cross-fertilisation, and many of the skills that the traditional theology courses require—the linguistic skills, hermeneutic skills, historical or social scientific study of church communities and so on—are actually skills that belong to the wider study of religion. It's different if you teach for the nurturing of a faith, rather than academic theology; then of course you take a position which is very strongly informed dogmatically, but I don't think that the right place to do this is at university. I feel that non-dogmatic, open-ended teaching about any subject should follow a dialogical and exploratory model. How the study of religion in a wider sense relates to the study of religion in a more faith-conditioned, if not a faith-dependent, sense, is, however, an important question that should not be shunned but must also be debated. It doesn't only apply to Christianity and Judaism, but also to the study of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, for example, and some scholars from these traditions are also wrestling with this, so it's really a wider issue.

Certain dogmatic stances are just as strong among certain religious studies people as they are among certain theologians. I came across a wonderful phrase by a Dutch scholar, Karel von der Toorn, who said in an article on the modern study of religions that, 'freedom from theology is not the same as freedom from ideology'.

### **Ideology is still there?**

Ideology is still there, and the same kind of dogmatic approach occurs, even from an atheistic or agnostic perspective. I'm just as much against the idea that there's only one way to do the study of religion, or the study of science for that matter, and that's because I think such a position closes too many doors. Our studies are really about the quest

for knowledge, about going further and further, and seeing connections in a much more organic, process-like way. There are a lot of connections, and one cannot say, ‘This position or statement is theological, that one has nothing to do with it’. I remember a theology seminar in Leeds once, where I made various comments and asked particular questions which led one of the participants to say, ‘What a shame you are in religious studies and haven’t stayed in theology’, but I’ve never seen myself like that.

**But other people want to box you into one or the other?**

Yes, they want to put a label on me, but I am much more a person of multiple identities, and I believe much more in multiple kinds of connections. It is not exclusive, it is relational, making the bridges and the connections, and I can see the enrichment in that, the way the landscape becomes much more diverse and colourful than when you have only one little garden, and that’s what you cultivate exclusively.

So that’s basically what I would say about theology and religious studies. I favour a dialogical model and a spectrum, and a more inclusive and relational attitude. I don’t want to subsume one under the other—they obviously have certain fields of independence and specificity, but the specificity can nonetheless be related to others. Just as a person can’t divide herself—you can’t cut yourself up into your different roles, as an academic, as a mother, as a wife, as a friend, as a teacher—you know, it’s all the same person.

**What advice would you have for anyone who was considering an academic career in theology and or religious studies?**

Well, I obviously feel very positive about it. I’d say take advantage of every opportunity, be adventurous and exploratory, and be interested in the development and well-being of your students. Make your students flourish and you flourish yourself.

Having said that, it’s not so easy to see what theological teaching can lead to for students. You can have a theological or religious studies career, or work in those areas as an academic or as a school teacher, but how does it relate to what is happening in society? Do we really reflect enough, do the philosophers and theologians, the people in humanities, really think deeply about the most urgent questions in society? I some-

times ask myself whether I would advise someone to go into an academic career, because it's become so over-burdened with administration and there are so many categories you have to satisfy. One has to have so much approbation to do this or that, and go through so many hoops that it really takes away much of the thrill and adventure that it had 20 or 30 years ago.

**Do you think your experience has anything to teach women starting out now on their academic careers?**

Sometimes I would like to be 20 or 30 years younger, because there are far more opportunities now than there were in the 1950s and 60s, and I'm just thrilled to learn about so many new openings for women today. But I was fortunate in comparison to many young women today, because I had my family before I really had a full-time academic career; before I did my PhD. I had four children by the age of 32, and I always had to weigh up my teaching and my family. It wasn't always easy—it was sometimes very difficult—but I was just determined. In retrospect, it has worked out very well, but at the time I never knew for certain, when I was tired, exhausted or discouraged, or when a child was ill or there were family problems—all these kind of issues.

**You've done a lot of work personally to support female academics, and I wondered if you could say a bit more about that?**

I've always been particularly interested in encouraging and supporting women researchers. When I first came to Bristol, and the same was true in Leeds, I organised a day seminar for women in any kind of subject to discuss research, and I got some of the senior women who had done research all their lives to speak to them. Some of the younger post-doc researchers came up afterwards and said, 'This has been really important for us, because we are on contract research and we are really so fed up, and we've thought of giving it all up, but this has encouraged us to battle on'. I think you need support.

There was only one woman professor when I came to Bristol in 1989, out of 160. Bristol University had had one or two women professors before, and a woman registrar very early on, in the 1920s or 30s, but there'd never been an ongoing tradition. In 1988, I was the second woman professor, and now there are over 40 in professorial posts, but

then the male professoriate has also grown enormously. So this other woman professor and I organised a kind of meeting once a term for dinner, to develop contact between the women professors, and learn about each other's work and research.

I also belonged to a national organisation to bring together women in higher management positions, including women in universities. We held seminars, and learnt a lot from each other. Mainly that, in whatever subject, we women all had very similar experiences in terms of criticism or being treated in a condescending way, or having obstacles put in our path (by men or women colleagues) or being discouraged by certain male colleagues. I found that very liberating, and helpful, in the sense that you realise you're not the only one that has to struggle.

I've just been asked to join the IAHR, the International Association for the History of Religion, who now have a woman president, to join a panel of women scholars on gender and religion, just to strengthen people around the world, to give encouragement to young female religious scholars around the world, because they can become very discouraged. I think encouragement is very important. The mentoring system is wonderful—it wasn't in place when I was in university, it had just begun to come in during my last university years.

To nurture an academic, to get to the level of research and the required competence, to establish yourself, to get a name and get recognised takes at least 10 years, if not more. It takes 10 years for men, but, for women, sometimes this is interrupted by having children and so on, so it is really important to look at this specifically, and a lot could still be done for women. I feel that's very important; that's why I like to go and speak particularly to younger women scholars. They have a particularly difficult task, for personal and professional reasons, because there is still so much hidden sexism, and so many patriarchal attitudes still exist, within society at large and within universities.

**Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us.**

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you. Of course, there is so much more that could be said on any of these issues.

# Whither Theology and Religious Studies in Ireland and the UK?

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**Ann Loades**

President of the Society for the Study of Theology

This is the Presidential Address given at the final event of the joint conference of the Society for the Study of Theology and the Irish Theological Association, held at Trinity College, Dublin, in 2005.

## Introduction

**T**his paper attempts to get some discussion going about the present and the future of theology and religious studies (T/RS) in HE, and, as such, is very broadly conceived, and attempts to allow for national and cultural differences. I assume nothing about what is meant by ‘theology’ or ‘religious studies’, since nowadays it is essential to attend to the staffing and programmes of particular subject-

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groups/departments to see what is on offer under various headings. For instance, ‘religious studies’ need not necessarily include ‘other’ religious traditions any more than ‘theology’ necessarily excludes new methods and resources or sources of reflection and critique, least of all the challenge of studying another major religious tradition.

## I. Institutions

At one level, it might appear that we have nothing to worry about. A trawl through websites reveals at the very least forty universities or university colleges offering degrees involving T/RS (including the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies). There is an astonishing variety on offer, from RS offered as a joint subject in a modular honours degree at the University of Wolverhampton, with an emphasis on field-work in relation to local religious communities in the West Midlands,<sup>1</sup> to degrees in theology completed under the aegis of Queen’s, Belfast.<sup>2</sup> In addition, very many institutes, theological colleges/courses and seminaries are responsible for degrees of different kinds—in some cases now extending into doctoral work, in tandem either with a neighbouring university or under the aegis of the Open University. Important points here are that the boundary-line between degree and non-degree giving institutions has shifted, and that at the doctoral level new part-time modular degrees (including thesis work) are being developed, not least for ‘practitioners’. There also exist some venturesome ‘distance learning’ degrees which foster T/RS among a

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Dr. George D. Chryssides for information here.

<sup>2</sup> My thanks here to Dr. Richard Clutterbuck for information about the concerns of the Irish Inter-Church Committee about the state of theology in Irish universities and public life. Constituent colleges of the Institute of Theology (Belfast Bible College, Edgehill Theological College, Irish Baptist College, St. Mary’s University College and Union Theological College) teach and supervise degrees administered by Queen’s, Belfast. The BD includes biblical languages; languages are not compulsory for the BTh; the MDiv is for good graduates in another discipline and the MTh is part module, part research. The PhD and MPhil are both research degrees. The Methodist and Presbyterian colleges share a joint degree programme and also deliver QUB degree modules as evening classes; and the Methodist College also has an arrangement with the Mater Dei Institute in Dublin to deliver ecumenical courses for mature students. Access and A-level courses are also on offer.

range of candidates.<sup>3</sup> Given the large size of undergraduate groups for supposedly full-time degrees nowadays, there may be more to learn from ‘distance learning’ programmes than we may as yet be prepared to acknowledge! And we can attend to some significant achievements where there are neither departments of T/RS nor their predictable degree options, such as the Centre for the History of Religious and Political Pluralism led by the Revd Professor Richard Bonney at the University of Leicester, with its Geza Vermes Lectures in the History of Religions, the Dr. L.M. Singhvi Lectures in Pluralism, and the Sir Sigmund Sternberg Lectures in Inter-Faith Dialogue.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, some of the groups teaching T/RS are very small, and in some cases on the receiving end of the threat of ‘being too small to be viable’—though from whose perspective, or in terms of what criteria, is not always clear, to put it mildly. Administrations precipitate ‘being too small’ if they fail to fill posts promptly and then fail to fill them at all; take departments out of ‘clearing’ to prevent them from reaching their ‘quota’ of new entrants; control admissions centrally, and gradually ensure the demise of a subject group without any public policy decision being made, beginning the process by amalgamating them into some larger groups of disciplines. Some university departments are as vulnerable as those in university colleges, and may be closed in a manner worthy of ‘worst practice’ in some of the business world; staff have been ‘exchanged’ or re-grouped between universities, and no doubt other such shufflings are in view in a number of places. Of course, better that people should still have positions to fill than be pitched out into the job-market, as in the Sunderland case, or the point at which the department at the University of Derby disappeared, though the excellence of most of the academic staff so pitched out was speedily exhibited by their employment in other academic institutions. Even if representatives of T/RS have been more coura-

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<sup>3</sup> T/RS at University of Wales, Lampeter, is one impressive example, and, in tandem with the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies (formerly the PRS-LTSN), actively examines issues associated with Open and Distance Learning (ODL). The Subject Centre is also concerned with Philosophy, History of Science and Philosophy of Science.

<sup>4</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> Sir Sigmund Sternberg Lecture was given on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2005 by Cardinal Cormac Murphy O’Connor, Archbishop of Westminster, on ‘Christianity Among the World’s Religions: Forty Years after *Nostra Aetate*’.

geous in making the academic and intellectual case for their subject area, this alone will not secure it in the context in which we now find ourselves.

The position of T/RS in some former Church colleges looks good at first sight (the University of Gloucestershire originated in one<sup>5</sup>) for the survivors of the closure/amalgamation of so many Church-founded institutions in the last quarter of a century. There are, in England and Wales, now just nine HEI colleges with Church of England foundations, two ecumenical colleges (i.e. Church of England and Roman Catholic foundations) and several Roman Catholic college foundations, in addition to Heythrop College, University of London. Degree awarding validation may be by a local university; some colleges award their own undergraduate degrees, and some, degrees beyond that. Church of England colleges alone serve at least 5% of HE candidates in England and Wales. Commitment to teacher training varies from 13-85% of students, and some of these will become RE specialists, or will opt to work in Church schools where opportunity arises. As is the case at QUB, a substantial proportion of those reading T/RS will be laity, and intend to remain so.

Indeed, some colleges may well continue to flourish by offering networks of opportunity for ministerial training as well as for teaching or general education. York St. John, for instance, offers a theology and ministry foundation degree and a Master's in T/RS, with courses available not just in York but in Ampleforth Abbey, the Wilson Carlyle Church Army College and the Sheffield (Roman Catholic) Diocesan Centre. The impact of the Church of England's Hind review of ordination training, with its encouragement to draw on a whole range of existing resources, has yet to be fully evaluated.<sup>6</sup> Shifting patterns of

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<sup>5</sup> At Gloucestershire, two undergraduate programmes in T/RS have closed, but two new programmes are agreed: religion, philosophy and ethics (RPE); and applied theology. An existing BA Hons. in theology (by distance learning) continues, as do MA programmes in T/RS and PGR. The RPE degree may be taken as a joint degree, and will also be 'an attractive complementary element for those taking a range of humanities degrees and other programmes across the University'. I am grateful to Dr. Peter Scott for this information.

<sup>6</sup> See the essay by Professor Dianne Willcocks, Principal of York St. John University College, who published her reflections, entitled 'Church Colleges: Keeping the Faith' in *Borderlands*, St. John's College, University of Durham, (summer 2004) pp. 10-11.



the age of candidates for ordained ministry make a difference to education in T/RS, inevitably. Even in the college context, however, there are worrying signs. In a very few colleges, numbers of full-time staff in T/RS are down to just one or two people. Can T/RS survive there? Or are colleges, like universities, going to wake up to find themselves without the places for a 'growth market' of students in T/RS? (Of which, more shortly.) And what of 'life-long' learning in T/RS if teachers are not available for those who want to be taught? I will return to problems to do with fostering and funding doctoral work specifically towards the end of what I have to say.

So, no university college or university department of T/RS can feel complacent about how its administrative bodies regard its future. A different kind of problem occurs when, for instance, departments which hitherto thought of themselves as being of a good size, with long-established reputations and distinctive traditions, find themselves amalgamated into 'colleges' or 'schools' in which they become 'small' departments in comparison with some of their new neighbours, and they in turn begin to feel somewhat dependent on the good will of administrators, even when their continued existence is not, for the time being, in question. Feelings of insecurity, and the tensions they produce, are thoroughly detrimental to the confidence and energy needed to sustain good work of all the different kinds now expected of HE academics, not least 'performance' which meets RAE criteria. We should not underestimate the way in which the RAE is now being used as a kind of lever or crowbar to force the attention of academics in some directions rather than others, arguably to the detriment of their relationships with the communities of which they have hitherto been interconnected. Unsurprisingly, there is evidence, I think, that some academics continue to find it difficult to distinguish between 'publications' and 'RAE publications', and this has knock-on effects of a kind we could not have predicted. For instance, one effect of the RAE is to inhibit moves from, say, a theological college/institute or seminary post into a university one. Someone's publication list looks good—but is it RAE material? And there's the problem of finding a publisher, since work which is RAE 'top-grade' may not be the kind of work which will sell. And if the bottom continues to fall out of religious book publishing more generally, the problem of finding financial subventions for

publication will increase rather than diminish.

So there have been, arguably, several quite unforeseen consequences of the RAE, quite apart from its effect of positively devaluing not only some kinds of scholarly work thought to be valuable until very recently (and on which some ‘research’ crucially depends) but devaluing particular persons and their contribution to the success of enterprises shared with colleagues and of great interest to students. Who can afford to edit even the most scholarly journal nowadays, or mastermind that crucial encyclopaedia or reference book? Not being ‘entered’ for the RAE can be more destructive of a sense of self-worth and collegiality in a group of people who need to hang together rather than let one another hang separately than most other things I can think of. Which friend and colleague is going to be nudged out when the cash runs short, or taken out of study leave as well as out of research leave lists?

A good deal more hanging-in-together might support the needs of those staffing theological colleges/courses/seminaries/institutes too, currently without time safeguarded for reading/reflection/writing, and thus no model for those they teach, who themselves need to establish appropriate patterns of work to sustain the revitalisation of their own theological heights and depths, and the congregations they may serve. Given the numbers of theologically literate laity the ordained may encounter, at least in some congregations, surely time for reading and reflection, and such old-fashioned habits as the daily reading of a commentary, need to be re-secured as a priority? And we might all benefit from those whose work helps to establish a clear sense of their own ecclesiastical identity, in contexts where ‘ecumenism’ means anything but being well-informed and sustained by distinctive traditions. It is certainly not necessarily the case, but sometimes those institutions most concerned with ‘ecumenism’ seem to produce people theologically/liturgically so rootless and undifferentiated that the much-proclaimed ‘respect for difference’ can make little sense in their cases.

## 2. Recruiting into T/RS

The lifeblood of all institutions where T/RS is learned depends on its ‘recruits’, and here again there are important signs to which we need to

attend, though just how we are to attend to them is by no means clear.<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, there is unequivocal evidence that RS is the fastest-growing of all A-level subjects (using data from WJEC/OCR/Edexcel/AQA). It is certainly of considerable interest to the examination boards looking for their ‘markets’, and to teachers determined to secure the viability of their departments. In 2004, there were 14,418 A-level candidates in RS, and at A/S level 20,081, an increase of 13.8% over the previous year. RS is ahead of other subjects which are increasingly popular including law, psychology, media/film/TV studies, sociology and mathematics. At GCSE level, the full course RS numbers went up from 132,304 in 2003 (up 8.9% on 2002) to 141,037 in 2004, and the short course figures went up from 223,885 to 246,905. Apparently, the increase at GCSE level has risen every year for five consecutive years, and the number of entries for RS is greater than those for history, geography and French. Its popularity is held to be based generally on ethical issues underpinned by religious traditions and tenets. Put the full and short course figures together, and, at GCSE level, RS is now taken by over half the school cohort. (I have no comparably detailed information about what is happening in the Scottish education system, except that I understand that a new ‘Higher’ option of religious, moral and philosophical studies is proving popular and having an impact on recruitment to university departments). At one level, this is certainly good news, and it is in everyone’s interest, I would have thought, that good graduates (including those with non-specialist degrees) are encouraged to apply for teacher training in RS—indeed there has been an increase of some 30% applying for PGCE courses in England and Wales. There is plenty of opportunity for them at the school level. So need we worry?

It is worrying if we attend to the fact that by far the majority of candidates are studying philosophy of religion and ethics, with relatively few of them studying biblical material, or indeed the specific study of non-Christian and non-Western religion, and even fewer specifically Christian history/belief (though this probably represents little change at the school level).<sup>8</sup> I’ll return to problems arising from the current

<sup>7</sup> Grateful thanks here to Dick Powell of the Culham Institute, Oxford, for information.

<sup>8</sup> It is not that a variety of possibilities are not on offer. One example: ...study one or

limitations of philosophy of religion at a later point. My concern at the moment is with the disjunction between what people study at school and what is on offer in HE. This is revealed when we look at numbers applying for T/RS at university, where there is only about an 11% ‘transfer rate’ from school to HE, where one might expect about 28%, as is the case with many other subjects (compare the increase in applications for sociology). How do we negotiate the shifts and persuade more applicants to think of T/RS for their first degree? How are they to be encouraged to risk critical reflection on religion, with or without a confessional stance towards particular religious traditions?<sup>9</sup> And what about new concerns, such as the interests of the British Association for Jewish Studies and its promotion of the scholarly study of Jewish culture in all its aspects within HE? What of the interests of the British Association for the Study of Religions, deliberately distinguishing itself from ‘theology’ on the one hand, and from its reduction to one of the social sciences or cultural studies on the other, when we are thinking about our degree programmes?<sup>10</sup> What of concern about the misrepresentation of Islam in our societies?<sup>11</sup> We cannot all of us tackle everything, but what changes still may have to be made, and how are we to identify and evaluate them when we think about our possible

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more religions across one or more of the following areas: Textual Studies, Theological Studies, History of Religious Tradition(s), Religious Ethics, Religious Practice, Philosophy of Religion, Psychology of Religion, Sociology of Religion.

<sup>9</sup> In Christopher Lamb’s article, ‘The Theology Generation’ in *The Tablet* (2 October 2004, pp. 16-17) he writes that ‘More people want to study theology as part of a search for understanding that goes beyond academic enquiry. The subject treads the delicate balance between personal belief and critical distance, while providing young people with a depth of meaning in what they often perceive as the dry world of academia.’

<sup>10</sup> Note also that, since its foundation in 1975, the Sociology of Religion Study Group has become the second largest discipline study group within the British Sociological Association, concerned with contemporary religious issues and the sociology of religion. The 2004 conference topic was ‘A Sociology of Spirituality’, with participants from Asia, North and South America as well as Europe. The theme for 11-13<sup>th</sup> April 2005 was ‘Religion and Gender’.

<sup>11</sup> For the 2001 census in England 3.1% of the population stated that their religion was Islam (0.7% in Wales), with 21% of Leicester’s population born outside the EU, from a range of geographical areas. There are some 1.2 billion Muslims world-wide.

applicants for HE?<sup>12</sup>

Applicants for degree study cannot be said to be afraid of critical thinking as such if applications for philosophy are anything to go by. The increase in applications to read philosophy is at least 70% in just the last few years.<sup>13</sup> This has significant consequences for those T/RS departments who have, in somewhat predictable ways, been trying to respond to the changes in interest at GCSE/A-level. In some cases, Oxford for instance, applicants for joint honours theology/philosophy now outstrip those for theology, and in other places constitute an increasing proportion of applicants (e.g. a third of those applying to Durham's Department of Theology and Religion). Where there are

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<sup>12</sup> See David F. Ford, Ben Quosh and Janet Soskice, (eds.) *Fields of Faith: Theology and Religious Studies for the Twenty-first Century*, (CUP, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> There has never, I think, been anything for T/RS comparable to the UGC Review of Philosophy in 1989, which at least produced a valuable public statement about 'The Place of Philosophy in the Humanities'. I am not aware of anything comparable for T/RS. So, from the review: 'A philosophy department may be concerned with issues such as the appraisal of argument, the nature of thinking itself and the nature of the mind that thinks. It is interested in the concepts and the language through which our understanding of the world and of ourselves is expressed, and interested (no less) in the world we perceive, affect and think about. To raise questions about the rational foundations of morality, or about the nature of explanation in the physical or the social sciences, or in history, is to raise philosophical questions. These include also basic questions about human nature, human freedom—its presuppositions—and questions about the meaning of life. Philosophy also seeks to articulate the best available view of the overall setting of human existence—its cosmic environment.' Philosophy 'interpenetrates with an extraordinary range of subjects, examining their central concepts, their methodologies'...stretching from 'highly technical, abstract and systematic work...' to 'applied philosophy...The case for keeping philosophy among the "core" subjects rests partly on its content and partly on the intellectual training that studying it provides. It furnishes an invaluable training in the interpretation of demanding texts and in the appraising and inventing of arguments and theories: training in lucidity and the acquiring of critical and constructive power through discussion and writing about complex and difficult abstract problems. These are skills transferable to many sorts of non-academic professional work' but a proper defence of the subject should also 'unashamedly affirm the value of philosophical thought in its own right as an element in civilized life. Human beings would be diminished if they ceased to raise and (some of them) explore in a disciplined way the fundamental questions with which philosophy engages.' (Taken from the Subject Centre for PRS website: [http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/documents/miscellaneous/ugc\\_review\\_of\\_philosophy.html](http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/documents/miscellaneous/ugc_review_of_philosophy.html)).

other successful joint honours with philosophy competitors, and/or lots of applicants for single honours in philosophy, JH in philosophy/theology may attract excellent applicants who have to make their way in a much tougher competition for entrance than is the case for single honours candidates—and the same problem surfaces in competition for graduate funding, as I will show. If they negotiate the competition, it is important to keep them in their JH programme! Three modules of one degree course bolted onto three of another is hardly fair to the candidates. They need to learn a strong central ‘core’ from each, but they also need modules which explore the areas in which the two disciplines most directly and obviously interact with one another. At Durham, it is within theology that we have devised such modules specifically for them to integrate the two disciplines together, and most of them stay in the joint honours programme, with many choosing their dissertation supervisors from theology.<sup>14</sup> Another option is to distinguish clearly (as at King’s, London, or the University of Gloucestershire, Heythrop or Lancaster), between a degree in theology and a degree in religion, philosophy and ethics which recruits at least equally well.

But do we not need to think beyond these options? Do we not need to think to what extent T/RS degrees can be so ‘profiled’ with some appropriate mode of philosophical theology and of theological ethics sufficiently in view as to attract more than that 11% into first degree work? Having got them there, how might we teach them the areas currently so largely overlooked at school, so that these areas may be rejuvenated, eventually, at the school level? And will not departments themselves have to make some significant shifts if that ‘profil-ing’ is to be possible? For instance, given the importance of theological ethics/moral theology/social ethics etc., and the success of the network represented by the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics and its journal, what is the value to departments of T/RS of continuing to undersupport this area, of such interest to our applicants, to the life of our churches and in our shared social and political life? How could our specialisms be reconfigured to allow for the shifts which surely need to be made? Is there no space to re-think the inter-relationships of the different facets of T/RS so that staffing can be appropriate to the

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<sup>14</sup> A quarter of Durham’s joint honours philosophy/theology graduates go on to at least Master’s degrees, and another quarter to PGCE courses.

interests of our candidates whilst getting them to think somewhat differently about the texts and traditions and practices of which they are currently so wary? To take one obvious example, quite whose responsibility it is to re-think and imagine how all the new developments in biblical work can be transmitted into school syllabi, and even into GCSE/AS/A-level, seems to be an open question, but must at some point be a concern of the Society for New Testament Studies and the Society for Old Testament Study, if it is not so already. How might we support the spokespersons who have the energy and enthusiasm to rebuild interest in schools? Of course, circumstances alter cases, and certain subject areas—such as biblical studies—have not been so treated in the past in every culture and context as to have bred a kind of indifference to them, or a presumption of their irrelevance, if that is indeed part of our problem.

At present, some of our students face formidable problems on arrival as it is—e.g. learning the habits of focus, concentration and attention which build competence (and which will hopefully be recognised and supported by those who want to build their confidence) as well as having to make the move from virtually ‘paper-free’ schools to library-based disciplines. Must we also continue to confront them (if we do) with expectations about how much of ‘traditional subject areas’ taught in terms of ‘traditional methods’ they can assimilate which may be simply unreasonable in the circumstances? Are we offering degree courses still predicated on the assumption that undergraduates are candidates for ordained ministry, whereas in fact the vast majority of them are laity whose mode of engagement is via ‘ethics’ and the kinds of problem-solving they will encounter in many non-ecclesiastical contexts? Some of them, of course, apply because they want to learn about subject areas they have not had the chance to study before, and they may sometimes be learning about them in ways new to many of us, unless we are certain kinds of biblical specialists. The same may be true of the study of doctrine and tradition/theology-and-history, etc. That said, I still think we need to consider how best to re-frame some areas of T/RS rather than simply refresh work done within familiar boundaries, valuable though that may be. None of us can be complacent here, for no subject area is free of the dangers of being marginalised over the course of time—least of all some of those currently the most popular. How much can we learn from new ventures not least at

the school level, such as the Government of Ireland Religious Education Syllabus, rather than thinking that the process must always, so to speak, run the other way, from HE to school?<sup>15</sup> And, re-framing

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<sup>15</sup> At Junior Certificate Level, the documentation repeats the aims of education published in the White Paper on Education (1995). Such aims include the fostering of ‘an understanding and critical appreciation of the values—moral, spiritual, religious, social and cultural—which have been distinctive in shaping Irish society and which have traditionally been accorded respect in society’. Of the ten aims, the fourth is ‘to develop intellectual skills combined with a spirit of inquiry and the capacity to analyse issues critically and constructively’, and the fifth and sixth are ‘to develop expressive, creative and artistic abilities to the individual’s full capacity’ and ‘to foster a spirit of self-reliance, innovation, initiative and imagination’. The specific aims of religious education have to do with the human search for meaning, and how this has found, and continues to find, expression in religions; how such understandings, and in particular the Christian tradition, have contributed to the culture in which we live; appreciation of the richness of religious traditions and the acknowledgement of the non-religious interpretation of life, and the contribution of study to the spiritual and moral development of the student. Options for study include, in Part 1, two of Communities of Faith; Foundations of Religion—Christianity; Foundations of Religion—Major World Religions. All of Part 2 is required: The Question of Faith; The Celebration of Faith; and The Moral Challenge. The Celebration of Faith is particularly interesting, it seems to me, including material on ‘The World of Ritual’, particular places and times and their significance; ‘The Experience of Worship’; ‘Worship as Response to Mystery’; ‘Sign and Symbol’ or ‘Sacrament’; and ‘Prayer’, including ‘important people in the spiritual traditions’ and with key concepts including meditation and contemplation, praise and thanksgiving, penitence, personal and communal prayer as well as petition and communication with God.

At Senior Certificate Level the summary rationale points out that ‘religious education can justly claim an integral part of any curriculum which aims to promote the holistic development of the individual in the light of the stated aim of education’. There is notable emphasis on ‘the value of religious belief and on diversity and mutual respect is of particular relevance for national and global citizenship’ and the student must ‘assume the roles of critical questioner and reflective searcher: roles which are at the heart of a commitment to lifelong learning’. The course is taken in three units. The first consists of ‘The search for Meaning and Values’. In the second unit, the student chooses two of ‘Christianity: Origins and Contemporary Expression’, ‘World Religions’ and ‘Moral Decision-Making’. In unit three, (excluding two sections designated for course work in any one year) students choose one of ‘Religions and Gender’, ‘Issues of Justice and Peace’, ‘Worship, Prayer and Ritual’, ‘The Bible: Literature and Sacred Text’; ‘Religion: the Irish Experience’; and ‘Religion and Science’. It could be both interesting and important to see how the patterns of choice work out over a period of time.



apart, what might we learn from such documentation about how to justify T/RS as an academic university subject at all levels including HE, (and at that level comparable to the statement produced by philosophers for the UGC so many years ago [see footnote 13 above]) as well as of importance for the churches and their associated colleges, where its study and significance at research level is certainly undervalued, as we have already noted?

### 3. The realm of the AHRC

Let me now turn to the context in which I first became somewhat unnerved about the understanding of the whole T/RS area—the Arts and Humanities Research Board, (AHRB) which became the Arts and Humanities Research Council AHRC) on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2005. Whatever our problems with the RAE, it has had the merit of providing unambiguous evidence of the sheer wealth and diversity of intellectual vitality and published research in the Arts and Humanities, and so supported the case for a Research Council comparable to those for other disciplines. As some of you will know, one of the benefits of the AHRC has been to provide funding for research leaves of a term/semester or even a year, not to displace, but to add on to those already provided by someone's institution. There are eight research panels to assess applications, exactly paralleling the panels for postgraduate funding, but with separate assessors. Panel 8 in both cases is for applications in philosophy, T/RS and law and you can look the results up on the AHRC website. The lists are not absolutely up-to-date, but, whilst the number of awards to each panel is equal, the distribution of awards within a panel can only relate to the number of applications received and to their quality. So far as I can see, T/RS get nowhere near a third of the awards, and it is pretty clear that the main competition on Panel 8 comes from the philosophers. What is happening in T/RS to inhibit applications for time to complete books? Have the philosophers licked the problems we all face?

I never had to face the problems of being on the Research Awards panel but I had some limited experience of being on the Research Centres Committee in the years when there were T/RS bids, and the

very interesting experience of chairing five years of the Postgraduate Panel 8 (for philosophy, T/RS and law), being on the overall Postgraduate Committee, and a couple of years on the overall AHRB Board (when I could get to it). The fate of T/RS in respect of Research Centres was particularly disturbing. To my knowledge, there were very few bids. Why so few, given the size and clout of some major departments? Few of these even had a chance to succeed, not least because people did not understand that what was being asked for was support for something more or less up and running, and aiming to make a real conceptual shift in a discipline. Some bids suffered, as too many (but by no means all) bids do in Arts and Humanities, from what seems to be a chronic inability to map out in respect of a particular project just what postgraduates might do for a doctoral degree in respect of the overall enterprise. Just one, which was excellent, was pipped at the post for reasons which had little to do with the particular Centre involved, which was indeed up and running, had unrivalled proposals for the dissemination of the work of the Centre to the wider public, and had an international profile. It is true that, by that time, the AHRC was becoming uneasy about the whole Research Centre enterprise, and that there was some worry about giving another Centre to a major University which already had one. All that said, what struck me most forcibly was the level of sheer incomprehension (and I might add prejudice) on the part of some members of the Committee about T/RS, and about the importance of T/RS within particular cultures and national traditions. They certainly were not going to learn much about its importance (as we might claim) from so meagre a range of applications. And just let me refer you to one significant achievement which connects up with a major shift which has taken place over the last few years, as I shall point out in a few minutes: the fact that it is the Universities of Reading and of Southampton, neither of which have a T/RS Department, which secured AHRC Research Centre funding for the study of ‘The Greek Bible in the Graeco-Roman World’—concerned with ‘evaluating the Greek Bible as a source for Jewish interpretation of the political, social and intellectual culture of the Hellenistic world (continuing into the early Roman Empire)’.

My closest acquaintance with T/RS and the AHRC was through chairing Panel 8, which was concerned with postgraduate applications for funding, both one-year and three-year. It is important, actually, to

notice what some referees still have not noticed, believe it or not, i.e. that such funding is no longer handled by the British Academy but by the AHRC; and that applications for the competition are no longer connected to institutions but are student-led. Of course, many candidates for higher degrees in T/RS come from overseas, or fund themselves by one means or another. However funded, they are likely to be the pool from which the next generation of teachers and researchers in HE are going to come.

You may recall that, a few years ago, the British Academy conducted an investigation into why more students from the UK were not opting for postgraduate work—assuming that they could embark on 1+3 years of study free from debt—and the answers were predictable. Many of our students know all too well that, at the end of another four years of study, they will begin work earning much what they would have earned four years earlier, even if their longer-term prospects are better, and that, if they enter HE, their pay and prospects for promotion are not exactly enticing. So, if they do opt for postgraduate work, we need to ensure that they emerge having made a significant contribution to knowledge, are trained researchers, may be prospective teachers in HE, and, above all, are employable. We need to ensure (to quote one Research Council statement) that they are ‘generally highly-qualified and talented people, who will use a wide range of knowledge, understanding and skills that they have gained through doctoral research in wide variety of contexts, in employment and beyond, enriching their own lives and the lives of others.’ We also need to be clear that a doctoral thesis ‘shows substantial evidence of original scholarship and contains material that can be prepared for publication, and can be produced by a capable, well qualified and diligent student, properly supervised and supported within the period of the award.’ The target-time for submission of a thesis is four years, but with the fourth year regarded as a ‘year of grace’ (seven years in all from the start of a part-time award) and the AHRB’s figures for 2003 show an overall four-year submission rate of 75%. Penalties for departments which do not get their candidates through in the agreed time-frame are severe: no candidates from such departments will be awarded funding for a period of two years.

Applicant, supervisor(s), referees and institution are together making a bid for public funding (full or part-time) for someone who is

going to emerge as employable—hence the emphasis on ‘skills’ training from all the Research Councils; and if you look at the statements which are publicly available, you may find them invaluable in helping to construct references and identifying what needs to be put in place for candidates not simply in the initial stages of their 1+3 programme, but throughout it. The institutional statement is very important to the assessors, and pleading RAE scores, antiquity of foundation, years of experience, etc. will get a competitor nowhere. What is needed is the case for the ‘fit’ of the particular competitor with a particular supervisor or supervisors and the institution, and the precise justification for the bid for public funding being made. Recall too that EU candidates are in the competition (for ‘fees only’ awards) as well as that excellent applicants are not all concentrated in one or two universities.

I will spare you comment on the process, the outcome of which will be that approximately 28% of applicants will receive an award across all the eight panels. I would, however, like to emphasise the importance of the references which need to be written from a knowledge of a competitor’s overall performance, which provide detailed and accurate evidence about them, including marks for particular pieces of work if known, and refer to the judgment of other colleagues and if possible, external examiners. I also want to stress here how damaging to an application it is when examiners in arts and humanities perpetuate the indefensible habit of taking 30% off any piece of work before they have so much as read a line of it, find themselves incapable of using the top 30% of the mark scale, and then claim that ‘x’ is the most outstanding candidate encountered by ‘y’ in thirty years. The claims made for a candidate must be matched by the evidence provided. And, if someone has already begun doctoral research, it must surely be possible to provide information about the progress of thesis planning, how many chapters are in draft, what presentations of work have been made and to whom, publications so far, and so on. What I am saying, in a nutshell, is that we need to remember that we are involved in a competition; and that for competitors to be successful requires high standards of professional competence on our part. Many competitors, to be frank, are let down by the lack of such competence.

2003 was the first year in which panels were asked to analyse the distribution of applications (and I concentrate here on the competition for three year awards—those for one year awards follow much the

same pattern). I think that the first thing that needs to be said is that to the extent that postgraduate applications constitute indications of the intellectual vitality of a subject area, I think we have to ask questions about whether T/RS is making a good showing if we look at the numbers of competitors for T/RS (94) as compared with philosophy (160)—the major group under Panel 8's remit. I have checked, and so far as I know the pattern has not shifted very much so far. First of all, the biblical specialist (New Testament as it happened) on the Panel in 2003 (and still on in 2004) thought that applications in NT (11) are weaker in quality than those in Hebrew scripture etc. (12), where there are some highly qualified specialists emerging. Then there are very few applications in patristic and medieval theology (8). Here we can identify one marked shift—which is that 'patristics' has to some extent migrated to departments where students study classics and ancient history. The latter now stretches to CE 700, and some departments of classics are thriving on the interest of undergraduates in ancient history. There may well be much for T/RS to learn from the revivification of classical studies and the ability of the Classical Association to defend the interests of its members. Patristics in non-T/RS departments may be less 'theological' (though the series edited by Andrew Louth with Professor Gillian Clark of *Oxford Early Christian Studies* thrives) and Byzantinists may yet be more interested in theology than previously. All in all, however, it looks as though there is much to be done to foster applications in this area, and we will need to move out of T/RS to do so by linking up in new ways with the classicists. So far as the medieval world is concerned, there is a dearth of applications to the History Panel as well. I would have thought, however, that T/RS might well be concerned both about that and about another shift—that of Reformation/Counter-Reformation (5) and ecclesiastical history more generally, to history, where again, theological interests may not be given much weight. As for the rest, there is little as yet in theology and the arts; and virtually nothing in liturgical studies/liturgical theology, sacramental theology, the Orthodox-Oriental Churches, ecumenical studies, missiology, hermeneutics or gender studies. There seems to be little interest in Judaism, though some interest in the conceptual study of Buddhism, and the study of Islam and of Hinduism is largely socio-cultural (14 in the area of major religious traditions). The most signifi-

cant problem with the study of religion/applied theology (15+10) area is the lack of the appropriate relevant methods which have to be built into all four years of postgraduate training programmes. The same has to be said about some inter-disciplinary work, e.g. where expertise in law, criminology or medicine may be needed. All of this needs much greater inter-departmental co-operation of a kind that takes time and energy which cannot therefore be disposed of in other directions. And there is one self-evident problem which now affects many disciplines but which is key to development in many areas of T/RS, and that is the need and provision of opportunity to learn both ancient and modern languages at all stages of postgraduate work. This is clearly a problem across all universities that needs to be tackled. We hear much about inter-university co-operation in postgraduate ‘training’, but, as yet, the issue of language-learning, which cannot be tackled by any one department, or even institution, on its own, seems hardly to be on the agenda, but it is surely crucial for T/RS.

Finally, let me return to a point which connects up with recruitment from school and how we ‘profile’ or re-configure what we do at first degree level at any rate. In 2003, there was just one application in philosophy for philosophy of religion, a matter, I may add, which has received no attention whatsoever at the British Society for the Philosophy of Religion, though, when established in 1993, it aimed ‘to advance the education of the public in the philosophy of religion, with special reference to the Christian religion’. I understand that philosophy of religion as we know it in the UK, a phenomenon of the last half-century and dominated by the analytic tradition, is a minority interest in philosophy departments, though not in the US.<sup>16</sup> Having said that, there have been some important conferences sponsored by the Royal Institute of Philosophy<sup>17</sup> in the UK. I suggest that the shift of ‘philosophy of religion’ from philosophy to T/RS (19 applications for system-

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<sup>16</sup> See Ann Loades, ‘Philosophy of Religion: Its Relation to Theology’ in Harriet A. Harris and Christopher Insole, (eds.) *Faith and Philosophical Analysis* (Ashgate, 2005). The American Philosophical Association sustains interest, and importantly, there exists the Society of Christian Philosophers with its distinctive journal, *Faith and Philosophy*. Writers from the US dominate the pages of *Religious Studies*.

<sup>17</sup> *Talk of God* (1969), *Reason and Religion* (1977), *The Philosophy in Christianity* (1989), *Religion and Philosophy* (1992), *Philosophy, Religion and the Spiritual Life* (1992).

atic/philosophical theology in 2003) obviously affects or should affect what ‘counts’ as philosophy of religion, (as is also true of ‘theology’, ‘religion’ and ‘religious studies’ and ‘philosophical theology’!) For it does not look as if philosophy of religion is going to be sustained at postgraduate level unless it is sustained in T/RS, where, crucially, it need by no means be limited to the current range of topics tackled via the ‘analytic’ tradition as understood in the UK,<sup>18</sup> and to which it must not be limited if it is both to engage the attention of school-age and undergraduate students in T/RS alike. *This is most emphatically not a plea for giving priority to philosophy of religion, either as we think we have known it, or as we think it might be transformed*, but simply to point out that, for the foreseeable future, it is something-or-other philosophical in relation to ethics which is capturing the attention of candidates for RS at school level, and affecting applications for HE. We cannot afford to let it collapse under the weight of its own predictability, as may have happened in the case of other areas of T/RS we have neglected to our peril in the past, and about which, for the moment, we seem to attend with great difficulty so far as schools are concerned. Nor should ethics in relation to T/RS allow itself to be hijacked by non-religious/theological ways of thinking about ourselves either, and there is a whole agenda for consideration there, too.

Overall, indeed, I would suggest that we face a number of opportunities and problems, and I would welcome discussion and debate about how best we might identify and make progress in respect of some of them. It may be that we need something akin to the new British Philosophical Association, formed in 2002, to support T/RS, unless we can act together to rejuvenate AUDTRS with its new Chair, so far as getting institutional ‘clout’ together is concerned. It may be that we need some sort of equivalent of the AAR systematically to address some of the intellectual and conceptual shifts which beset us. So, how do we move from here?

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<sup>18</sup> See for instance David Brown, ‘Experience Skewed’, in (eds.) K. Vanhouzer and Martin Warner, *Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology* (Ashgate, 2004).





# Theology and the Outcomes-Based Curriculum: the Value of 'Not Knowing'

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## Introduction

In 2003, the then Minister for Education, Charles Clarke, is reported to have dismissed learning for learning's sake as 'a bit dodgy' and described scholars working in the humanities as 'ornamental' and 'an adornment to our society.' He asserted that the state ought to fund only those higher education courses that could be argued to have a 'clear usefulness' for the British economy.<sup>1</sup> This emphasis on the mar-

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ketability of higher education has led to the valuing of product (or outcome) over and above process/experience. Education—or rather ‘knowledge’—according to Clarke, is only ‘useful’ if it can be measured by narrowly defined outcomes, and if it can be exploited for the world of work.

In this paper, I argue that such a materialist and utilitarian understanding of higher education is deeply impoverished, and I will assert that theological education, when it is at its best, has less to do with the acquisition of ‘useful knowledge’, and more to do with exposing students to the uncertainties and the unknowns of our world. A genuine theological education provides the necessary space for open inquiry—inquiry that is not cut off by overly prescribed outcomes—one that allows students to begin their life-long discovery of the unexpected, the unknown. For how students choose to respond to not knowing will have more to do with the kind of people they will become than any measurable knowledge they may acquire.

## Knowledge as ‘Saleable’

More than twenty years ago, Jean-François Lyotard saw the emerging trend towards utilitarianism in higher education. In *The Postmodern Condition* he wrote,

The question (overt or implied) now asked by the professionalist student, the State, or institutions of higher education is no longer ‘Is it true?’ but ‘What use is it?’ In the context of the mercantilization of knowledge, more often than not this question is equivalent to ‘Is it saleable?’<sup>2</sup>

This emphasis on the saleability of education implies a fundamental shift in the understanding of what knowledge is or what it means ‘to know’. Knowledge, in the context of contemporary higher education, has come to be ‘understood as a commodity’ (Barnett, p.1), something

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1 Vasagar, Jeevan and Smithers, Rebecca. ‘Will Charles Clarke have his place in history?’ *The Guardian*, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2003.

2 Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1984), p. 51.

that is purchasable, usable and also disposable. Ronald Barnett, of the University of London's Institute of Education, states that there has been a shift in 'knowing as contemplation to knowing as operation'.<sup>3</sup> Says Barnett, 'If there is a dominant ideology emerging in HE it is that of operationalism.' That is to say, in recent years higher education has been called upon to focus on developing in all students the 'ability to operate effectively in society,' (p. 15); it has been called upon to provide students with the transferable skills and useful knowledge deemed necessary for the workforce.

Some of the words associated with this understanding of knowledge include: skill, competence, outcome, information, work-world, materialist, utilitarian, prescriptive, value-neutral (or presumes to be value-free), purchasable, deployable and disposable. Notably absent here are such terms as wisdom, reflection, truth, understanding and self-awareness (p. 16). These are absent because they are difficult to measure, because they vary from one person to another, because they cannot be prescribed, and because they leave room for uncertainty and unpredictability. Also missing from this view of education is the notion of transformativity—that the student may be transformed, changed in some way. In this operationalist approach, there is little sense of education offering the opportunity for—to quote Barnett again—'a genuine transaction, in which not only the student is changed but also the acquired knowledge is transformed in the mind of the student' (p.15).

This materialist approach to higher education, which favours the acquisition of measurable, 'useful' outcomes over the process of transformation, has more to do with 'training' than with 'educating'. The end goal in this approach is to acquire practical, generic skills that can be transferred from one work-place environment to another. Thus, subject-specific content becomes secondary to relevant 'transferable learning'.

There has been concern from the start that the idea behind the development of the QAA subject benchmark statements—which were drawn up to 'provide national standards against which subjects should be measured'—is directly linked to this kind of utilitarian agenda. With

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3 Barnett, Ronald, *The Limits of Competence: Knowledge, Higher Education and Society* (Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, 1994).

the benchmark statements now undergoing a review, Emma Wisby, also of the Institute of Education, sees the dangers of their becoming nothing but a marketing tool, ‘focused on the employability of a subject’s graduates rather than on its inherent worth.’<sup>4</sup> Writes Wisby, in *The Times Higher*,

The standards-based quality assurance framework, introduced by the QAA from 1998, was a significant development. No longer were institutions to be judged against their own aims and objectives. Instead, departments were to be assessed against national standards that set out the learning outcomes students should achieve.

Wisby’s research suggests that, when subject groups first developed the benchmark statements, they were keen to protect “‘liberal” notions of higher education and academic autonomy’—these were priorities, she says. However, she also discovered that subject groups,

considered how their benchmarks would play to students and how they could be used to market their subjects. In so doing they typically looked to graduate employability and “generic skills”.

With the five-year review of benchmark statements now underway, the QAA has called upon those responsible for re-visiting the statements to place greater emphasis on transferable skills and employability. But Wisby warns that subject communities must resist reducing benchmark statements to marketing tools and ‘ensure that statements reflect the inherent value of their subject’.

So...the bad news is that the QAA appears to be moving further in the direction of promoting an outcomes-based curriculum that values marketable skills over and above subject-specific content, and training over education. The good news, however, is that—at least so far—the academics responsible for the benchmark statement for theology and religious studies have resisted adopting this reductionist and impoverished approach and have managed to draw up a statement that recognises the value of process over product (or outcome) and the transfor-

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<sup>4</sup> Wisby, Emma, ‘A degree is not just about a job’, in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2005.

mational aspect of the subject. The TRS benchmark statement says:

Whatever the subject [Theology or Religious Studies], the acquisition of knowledge and understanding is usually transformative at some level, changing a person's perspectives and often their attitudes. *The nature of TRS means that studying the subject may have a profound impact on the student's life and outlook..* (emphases added)

'Beware!' this statement seems to be saying. 'If you do a degree in TRS you might never be the same!' The statement continues:

The experience of studying this subject may contribute to a student's personal development, transforming horizons by engaging with cultures and societies other than their own, whether ancient or modern. It may foster a lifelong quest for wisdom, respect for one's own integrity and that of others, self-examination in terms of the beliefs and values adopted for one's own life, and not least, the challenging of prejudices.

We note the language here—instead of words such as skill, competence, information, etc., we have wisdom, respect, integrity, and self-examination. What is suggested in the TRS benchmark statement is that the point of studying these subjects is not merely to acquire marketable and useful knowledge but rather to be transformed in such a way as to develop as a useful human being.

Even one of the founding fathers of Utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill, understood the role of the university to be first and foremost about cultivating human beings. In 1867, Mill made just this point in his inaugural lecture at St Andrews University. He said that the object of universities is not 'to make skilful lawyers, or physicians, or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beings....'

...what professional men [sic] should carry away with them from a university is not professional knowledge, but that which should direct the use of their professional knowledge...<sup>5</sup>

That is to say, what an educated person ought to carry away with her from university is the discernment and understanding enabling her to

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<sup>5</sup> Mill, John Stuart. Inaugural Address at St Andrews, 1867.

apply ‘useful knowledge’.

## Not Knowing as the Beginning of Wisdom

But even this is not enough. It is not enough merely to become a useful person, understanding how to apply useful knowledge. A true higher education goes much further. It has to do with challenging beliefs and exposing prejudices. It has to do with opening up the space for the student to ask questions—questions that do not necessarily have an answer—and providing the opportunity for her to reflect on how she will respond to not having an answer, to not knowing. I would like to suggest here that not knowing—or acknowledging that one does not know (which is an informed ‘not knowing’ rather than mere ignorance)—is the beginning of wisdom, and that higher education institutions ought to be a place where students can begin their life-long discovery of the unknowns and uncertainties of our world. Moreover, it ought to be a place where students can begin to reflect on how they are going to respond to not knowing.

In my consideration of the value of ‘not knowing’, I turn to the greatest of all stories concerning the desire for knowledge and its consequences: Genesis 3: 1-13. In this story, the forbidden fruit is the desire for knowledge and this knowledge, we are told, will bring death. It begins:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made

loincloths for themselves. They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." (NRSV)

Reading the Genesis narrative closely, we observe something very interesting: eating from the fruit of the tree does not bring the man and woman to a satisfying knowledge of the world; rather, it brings them to an understanding of their own ignorance. It is not that by eating the fruit they suddenly see the world and know; it is that they suddenly see themselves and understand that they do not know—they understand that they are ignorant, imperfect, and finite—that they will surely die. In this moment of revelation, they recognise their vulnerability—their nakedness—and are ashamed. And their response curiously enough is to hide: to hide from one another, from God, and also from responsibility (we note that they blame one another: she did it; he did it; the serpent did it).

I wonder, what is the greater sin here in this passage—is it the disobedience in eating the fruit or is it the response after partaking? Is it the pair's desire for knowledge, or is it their fear to acknowledge their lack of knowledge—to admit their ignorance and vulnerability?

True knowledge, it seems to me, does not lie in the recitation of facts nor in the acquisition of skills; true knowledge has to do with understanding—and facing up to—our human condition. And a true higher education, in my view, has two main purposes: first, it should bring us to an awareness of our finiteness, our limitedness, and remind us that we do not—and perhaps cannot—'know' in any final way. Thus the role of higher education ought to be to disturb, unsettle and destabilise. Second, it ought to call upon us to make a choice: it should call upon us to decide how we will respond to our imperfect and vulnerable condition.

But much is at risk in this kind of higher education because it cannot make the choice for us. It can demand a response, but it cannot dictate a response. All can go wrong—students can decide that it is too hard; they can make poor choices; they can give up, shrug their shoulders and go home. They can take the easy way out and choose to hide from their ignorance, imperfection and finiteness. This is to say that a true higher education can, and should, expose students to the difficulty of life, to the difficulty of living without ‘knowing’, but it can only go so far in developing in them the courage necessary to live in a world of unknowns and uncertainties. For this, they must find the faith to risk saying ‘I don’t know.’



# Sacred Writings of East-Asian Religions in the Context of Comparative Cultural Studies

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**S**acred writings played a crucial role in the formation of the Asian civilisations, which were based predominantly not on oral tradition but on carefully recorded texts. Among the most important classics, which have to be introduced at least by reference, by digests and by reading brief excerpts from the texts, we can mention the following works:

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- For India: *Veda* books plus *Bhagavadgita* (with a special reference to the classic *Sruti* canon) and *Yoga-sutra* by Patanjali;
- For China: *Tao-te Ching* by Lao-zu, *Analects (Lun-yui)* by Confucius, with a reference to two sets of the so called *Confucian Classics* (4 and 5 books in each respectively);
- For all the Buddhist domain of Asia: Some fragments from the major Buddhist sutras like *Pradjanparamita Sutra* and *Lotus Sutra*;
- For the whole area: Some Chinese and Japanese Zen-Buddhist writings (like ‘*The Sutra of Trust to the Spirit*’ (‘*Sin Sin Mei*’) by Hui Neng, classic koan from ‘*Umen juan*’ and the poems of the Way (*doka*) by Ikkyu;
- For Japan exclusively: Shinto mythology in two sacred books, ‘*Records of the Ancient Deeds*’ (*Kojiki*) and ‘*Annals of Japan*’ (*Nihongi*).

The problem is that this required minimum, even if represented by general descriptions, digest-like adaptations and short excerpts of the texts in English translation or in original, proves to be extremely difficult for the understanding of an average Japanese student, both in the respect of language and in the respect of philosophic discourse. Why is this the case in a country of refined spiritual culture such as Japan?

Reading sacred texts presumes, in any case, adequate cultural background as a prerequisite. For a student this should be basic knowledge of at least one religious tradition whatever it might be: monotheistic or polytheistic, Christian, Judaic, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Shinto or something else. Without it, a student faces many problems in conceiving the true meaning of the sacred texts, divine imagery, and mythological symbols in other religious systems. A purely atheistic and pragmatic mind—which often characterises Japanese students—is alien to any kind of spirituality except for the inspiration drawn from Internet websites. It is extremely difficult to change this atheistic predisposition at the age of 20—and probably not many Japanese students would really like to be changed.

Usually, at the big universities, this process is regulated in the most natural way: students who are really interested in religion and philosophy enter a relevant faculty, then enrol in the relevant courses and major in some of them. All the rest choose different faculties and different subjects. However at some schools in Japan, which can be placed as ‘business-oriented’ universities of liberal arts, the needs of students are different, and, on their scale of values, humanities in general occupy a not very important place. The point is, that at some universities, students have to take certain courses in humanities irrespective of their specialisation. I observed this at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, where I have been working for 12 years. Now, at the newly established Akita International University, which is a small elite experimental university with a limited number of students, the same trends are getting more distinct and the same problems need imminent solutions. The number of the students is relatively small. So is the number of the courses offered in humanities. It means that, usually, we have, in the same class, just a few students who come ‘by vocation’, and many others who enrol out of sheer curiosity or for the need of extra credits. In Japan, despite all the obvious differences, both groups still have much in common: a lack of elementary background in history, literature and ‘spirituality’ which is simply the direct reflection of middle and high school programmes in modern Japan, with their focus on ‘practical knowledge’, including practical rules of conduct for daily life.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not to speak of medieval Japan, spirituality was cultivated much more efficiently. The evidence can be easily found in personal contact with the intellectuals of an older generation. In imperial pre-war Japan, education had a strong, nationalist, ideological foundation, built of the appropriately adjusted State-Shinto militant doctrines, neo-Confucian moral dogmas, and Buddhist faith—in their respective order of importance. However reactionary it was, this kind of ideological basis required a certain level of knowledge of Shinto mythology and comprehension of nature-worshipping. That was also a link to indigenous Japanese spiritual traditions deeply rooted in the nation, to the rites performed on a regular basis in the hundreds of thousands of shrines all over the country, as well as to the cult of the emperor regarded as a ‘Son of Heaven’, a descendant of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu.

The Confucian classics (at least some of them) were a school subject studied from elementary school level, making a bridge to Chinese antiquity but even more so to the glorious Samurai past of Japan with its *Bushido* ethics. *Bushido* code, according to the concept of the Meiji Ministry of Education, was to cement the whole nation after the earlier decline of the Samurai class. Religious ethics of the upper class were deliberately and successfully transplanted to the whole body of the nation, making it eventually a docile tool in the hands of the aggressive totalitarian regime.

Consequently, reading the Confucian classics (in original and also in their later interpretations by Japanese Confucian scholars) became an indispensable part of education at all levels, especially of higher education. This kind of reading required fluent command of classic Chinese (*wenyan*) and/or at least its Japanese adaptation (*bungo*). Since the Middle Ages, being an intellectual in Japan has meant being a master of ‘Chinese Learning’ (*kangaku*)—primarily Confucian texts and some classic Chinese poetry. The pattern did not change, even after the advent of Western culture in the Meiji period, and Confucian elements of ‘Chinese learning’ were widely promoted at public schools and national universities. However conservative they were, these texts would give people a general understanding (although not quite adequate perhaps) of the relations between the authorities and subjects, between the state and its citizens, between parents and children, between elder and younger brothers, and between spouses. As an ideal of family and social relations, they would convey the principles of humanity, loyalty, filial piety and the major concept of one’s personal duty: duty of honour, duty of respect, duty of gratitude.

Undoubtedly, the great teaching was perverted and abused by the leaders of military Japan, but this fact does not diminish its role. There have been many cases of distortion and perversion in the history of great religious teachings. Christianity was used by the Holy Inquisition, which not only persecuted thousands of victims in Europe, but also gave a blessing to the elimination of millions of native inhabitants of North America. Islam, originally one of the most tolerant of confessions, was repeatedly used by cruel tyrants and fanatics for genocide against ‘the infidel’, as it is being used now by Islamic terrorists. Nonetheless, these facts cannot diminish the value of the Bible or the Koran, or negate their extraordinary role in the history of humanity.

Buddhism, as a basically peaceful religion promoting the ideas of non-violence, was put in an inferior position by the militarist government in pre-war Japan. Nevertheless, its heritage, revealed in the hundreds of thousands of temples and monasteries, in the huge libraries of precious manuscripts and in its overwhelming influence on hearts and minds, just couldn't be pushed aside by official ideology. So it was taken as a part of the traditional religious complex which encouraged people to celebrate Buddhist festivals, attend Buddhist sermons, listen to some sutras, read the texts and some comments to them, and participate in the life of the local temple communities.

Considerable proficiency in classic Japanese (and often Chinese) based on diligent learning was a pre-requirement for participating in the cultural life of the community.

All these components put together tended to create a specific spiritual climate in pre-war Japan, which was certainly very vulnerable to strongly biased ideological impacts, and therefore could be easily used by the militarist regime in its attempt to forge the ideal subjects of the Great Japanese Empire. On the other hand, it was able to provide strong moral support to any individual, whether on a profane level or on a highly intellectual level.

The situation couldn't be more different in post-war, democratic Japan, where religion, according to the Constitution, was separated from the state, the social status of Shinto institutions was limited to purely confessional functions, the Emperor lost his divine status and the whole syncretic complex of religious beliefs based on the nationalist concept of 'organic entity' (*kokutai*) was dismantled.

All these democratic reforms initiated by the American Occupation Forces were aimed at the radical brainwashing and general purge of mentality. New generations of the Japanese had to be free from the military heritage of their country and from its 'evil past'. To guarantee this new quality of human resources, it was decided after fierce debates by the Ministry of Education (and approved by the Parliament):

- To reduce to the minimum descriptions of Japanese military operations in the period of New and Modern history in school education.

- Never to mention in textbooks any damage caused by the Japanese aggression to the Asian nations.
- To eliminate from textbooks any mention of the notorious reactionary social doctrines like *Bushido* (Samurai code) or *Shushin* (endeavour of a model citizen) and their crucial religious components, like Shinto, Confucianism or Buddhism, so that these religions would never again be associated with war.
- Not to mention either Shinto mythology, Confucian ethics or Buddhist doctrines of enlightenment and salvation in school courses.

As such policy had to be consistent, no mentioning of any other world religions was also assumed.

All these points did not put any restrictions on the freedom of conscience or the freedom of word in the country, because the media were always free to discuss any of the above mentioned problems and libraries were full of reference materials. In fact, this policy was aimed only at schools and was probably supposed to protect children from any vicious influences. It was felt this was possible because the world of children is separated from the world of adults in Japan much more distinctly than in the West. However, the results exceeded all expectations. In the country of three religions, where, judging by the official statistics, the number of believers is much larger than the total population of the country, and where hundreds of thousands of shrines and temples need priests, the new generation is completely ignorant about any elements of religious spirituality, and is mostly not interested at all.

This fantastic combination of official acceptance of certain confessions with the unofficial negation of them is a typical feature of modern Japan. 90% of students call themselves natural atheists—which does not prevent them from participating in some traditional ceremonies with their parents and grand-parents just for fun or to fulfil their family duty. However, they don't attend sermons and never read any sacred texts. Moreover, the overwhelming majority know not a single name from the Shinto or Buddhist pantheon, cannot say a single word of prayer and often even cannot distinguish Shinto from Buddhism.

Christianity is also mostly associated among the youngsters with such symbols as Christmas trees, crucifixes, and the so-called chapel weddings (for non-believers) with decorative Christian ritual.

Of course, some individuals do read supplementary literature and know some basics, but there are very few of these students at the Junior High School level, and, as they have never received any guidance, their understanding of the major world religions, and of Japanese spirituality, is sometimes grotesquely distorted.

Here we come to the crucial point, which gives a vivid illustration of the role of language in transmittance and formation of culture, and also provides an explanation of the enigmatic phenomenon of contemporary Japanese students.

As a result of the post-war reforms in the school education, written Japanese was revised, the number of characters for mandatory learning was reduced, many characters were simplified, and the language of the textbooks, along with the language of books for children, was considerably adapted to the level of 'easy reading'. Chinese was excluded from the school programs and classic Japanese (*bungo*) with its most difficult part *kanbun* (adjusted Chinese) was cut to a ridiculously primitive programme called *kobun* (old texts).

These reforms, along with the recent invasion of computers and electronic dictionaries (which can, allegedly, prompt any character) affected the language so much that modern students can barely struggle through several pages of the pre-war fiction of the 30s and 40s, even if the problematic characters and words in the texts have supplementary alphabetic subtitles. In fact, even the best novels of the *Meiji-Taisho*-early *Showa* period (1868-1945), not to mention the medieval masterpieces, became almost incomprehensible for the new generations, as did the traditional *tanka* and *haiku* poetry, which even now has to be written predominantly in *bungo*. Instead of the real textbooks of National Literature, the thin reader-books for schools contain just occasional short excerpts from a few classic texts, which remain alien to the students. Almost nobody can now overcome the language barrier and start reading books, rather than brief commented excerpts. Serious reading (including special intellectual journals) became very difficult for the public at large, and available almost exclusively for the special contingent of readers in every specific field (which almost never overlap) not lower than the university graduate level.

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the process was almost complete: the classic heritage of Japanese literature, with its Chinese background, was put on the bookshelves and in the showcases of the beautiful new museums. All the best classics are supplied with commentaries being published, as a rule, in great series with parallel translation into contemporary Japanese. Despite this fact, modern Japanese school students (with extremely scarce exceptions) up to the moment of graduation never touch classics in their original form, and only some of them get a general idea of random masterpieces from the television versions and *manga* (comics) series. The *History of Japan*, too, was reproduced a few years ago in a long animation series for the same reasons.

Unfortunately, sacred books can be neither radically adapted nor transformed into television drama or manga—which makes them a conventional taboo for the school students. Consequently the whole domain of spiritual writings, alienated from schools—national, Chinese, Indian and Western alike—became *terra incognita* for the new generations of young Japanese. They are never advised to read it, they cannot read it in Japanese due to the terrible historic language barrier and they cannot read them in English either because both their English proficiency and their ‘philosophic basis’ are critically insufficient. Even in the clubs of traditional martial arts or fine arts, lately, young students (at the mass level) are not instructed in philosophy or spirituality of the relevant disciplines at all. The major result of this strange policy can be characterised as ‘despiritualisation’ of the nation, which inflicts the dramatic lack of self-identification of the individuals, often accompanied by low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence and confused perception of their national identity by the Japanese. ‘Infantilism’ of the Japanese students has become a truth universally acknowledged.

When students in Japan enter the university and come to the serious classes of comparative cultural studies, civilization studies or history of religions, they encounter difficulties which hardly can be imagined by their Western counterparts. They actually discover, for the first time in their lives, the New World of spirituality from which they were carefully protected at school—and reluctantly start exploring it from zero.

If the language of instruction is Japanese, a professor can only



give a general overview of the basic religious beliefs, and describe in simple terms the content of the sacred books, as the texts will be still too 'language heavy' for the students. For those who major in philosophy or religion, it will take another two or three years (which they don't have) just to master classic *kanbun* well enough for reading, not to mention real classic Chinese. In fact, they will be ready for real studies, involving reading of the original texts, only at graduate or postgraduate level.

However, acceptance of English as the primary language of instruction (which is still a very rare case for Japan) changes the situation drastically. Assuming that English proficiency of the students is high enough (for these courses pre-requirement is TOEFL-500), we can give assignments which include reading of some major classic texts of Asian religions in a carefully arranged selection of samples aimed at enhancing students' knowledge of the spiritual evolution of humanity, giving them a broad panoramic view of the principal religious and ethical oriental teachings.

The course begins with a few introductory classes familiarising students with some major concepts, notions and special terms of cultural anthropology, religious studies and social science, which will be applied to the studies of religious and cultural traditions of India, China and Japan. It continues with an outlook of historic cultural ties between these countries, and the role of each respective culture in the world civilization, follows, with special references to the successive transmission of religious traditions. Finally comes the comparative analysis of area cultures and religions, which is based on the textbook materials and on the reading of classic texts (almost exclusively in English translation although the students can choose the language of the sources freely).

We begin with the sacred writings of Hinduism. The spectrum that ranges from the level of popular Hindu belief to that of elaborate ritual technique and philosophical speculation is very broad, and is attended by many stages of transition and varieties of coexistence. Magic rites, animal worship, and belief in major gods and demons are often combined with the worship of minor deities or with mysticism, asceticism, and abstract and profound theological systems or esoteric doctrines. The concept of a Supreme God also can be traced in Hindu cults. Local deities are frequently interpreted as manifestations of a

high God.

Hinduism accepts all forms of belief and worship, trying to incorporate any kind of spirituality into the universal system of a mysterious and omnipotent *Knowledge*.

The *Veda*, meaning ‘Knowledge,’ is a collective term for the sacred scriptures of the Hindus. Since about the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the *Veda* has been considered to be the creation of neither human nor god; rather, it is regarded as the eternal Truth that was in ancient times directly revealed to or ‘heard’ by gifted and inspired seers (*rishis*) who transcribed it into Sanskrit. The absolute authority and sacredness of the *Veda* remains a central tenet of virtually all Hindu sects (with the exception of some Tantric sects which stick to alternative traditions). Even today, as they have been for several millennia, parts of the *Veda* texts are memorised and recited as a religious act of great merit.

The most important texts of Hinduism are the four collections of the *Vedas* (‘Books of Knowledge’): the *Rigveda* (‘Wisdom of the Verses’), the *Yajurveda* (‘Wisdom of the Sacrificial Formulas’), the *Samaveda* (‘Wisdom of the Chants’), and the *Atharvaveda* (‘Wisdom of the Atharvan Priests’). Of these, the *Rigveda* is the oldest monument.

In the Vedic texts following these earliest compilations, the *Brahmanas* (discussions of the ritual), *Aranyakas* (books studied in the forest), and *Upanishads* (secret teachings concerning cosmic equations) should be mentioned.

Together, the components of each of the four *Vedas*—the *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas*, and *Upanishads*—constitute the sacred canon of Hinduism, or the *Sruti* (‘Heard’). All other works—in which the actual doctrines and practices of Hindus are encoded—are treated as having been composed by human authors and are thus classed as *Smriti* (‘Remembered’). For Hindus, the *Veda* is a symbol of unchallenged authority and tradition.

Students are given an overview of the *Sruti* and have to read two hymns from *Rigveda* in the course of learning the core of Indian mythology.

Complicated philosophic concepts of *Veda* were popularised and explained in the classic epic tales *The Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.

*The Mahabharata* (‘Great Epic of the Bharata Clan’), a poem of 100,000 verses (some say the longest poem in the world) attributed to the sage Vyasa, was preserved both orally and in manuscript form for

many centuries. The central plot is focused on the struggle and the decisive battle between the five sons of Pandu, called the Pandavas, and their cousins, sons of Pandu's brother Dhrtarastra. The battle eventually leads to the destruction of the entire nation, save for one survivor who continues the dynasty. As each of the heroes is the son of a god, the epic is deeply infused with religious implications. There are many passages in which *dharma* (sacred Law) is treated, so that Hindus regard The *Mahabharata* as one of the sacred writings (*Dharma Shastras*).

Much of the didactic material focusing on ethical teaching is found in the *Book of the Forest* (book 3), in which sages teach the exiled heroes, and in the *Book of Peace* (book 12), in which the wise Bhishma expounds on religious and moral matters.

The *Bhagavadgita* ('Song of the Lord', part of book 6 of *Mahabharata*) which became known as a book in its own right, is probably the most influential Indian religious text ever. It is comparatively brief—700 verses divided into 18 chapters—in the form of a dispute. When the opposing parties in the great Mahabharata war stand ready to begin battle, Arjuna, the hero of the favoured party, falls in frustration at the thought of having to kill his kinsmen and lays down his arms. Krishna, his charioteer, friend, and adviser, argues against Arjuna's reluctance to fulfil his duty as a noble warrior. The argument soon becomes elevated into a general discourse on religious and philosophical matters.

Three different ways of releasing the self from transmigration are suggested. Putting forward the discipline of action (*karma-yoga*) against the views held by Buddhist philosophy, which states that all acts bind, and that therefore abstention from action is a precondition of release, Krishna argues that it is not the acts that bind but the selfish intentions with which they are performed. On the other hand, he acknowledges the importance of the discipline of knowledge (*jnana-yoga*), in which one seeks release in a yogic (ascetic) course of withdrawal and concentration. Revealing himself eventually as a supreme God, Krishna grants Arjuna a true vision of his inner essence. The third, and perhaps superior, way of release he recommends is through a discipline of devotion to God (*bhakti-yoga*).

The *Bhagavadgita* encompasses all the three dominant trends of Indian religion: dharma-based Brahmanism, enlightenment-based

asceticism, and devotion-based theism. The influence of the *Bhagavadgita* was crucial for all later Hinduism.

By demanding that God's worshippers fulfill their duty and observe the rules of moral conduct, the *Bhagavadgita* linked the ascetic practices with their search for emancipation, on the one hand, and the needs of daily life, on the other. For those who lead a normal life, not quitting this world, the *Bhagavadgita* gave a moral code and a prospect of final liberation. It founded what may be called a social ethic, which demands the selfless dedication of all actions, duties, and ceremonies to the Lord and obliges a person to promote both individual and social uplift and welfare.

Students are given a brief digest of the *Mahabharata*, a review of the *Bhagavadgita* philosophy, and about 30 verses from the text.

The classical narrative of Rama is recounted in the Sanskrit epic the *Ramayana* by the sage Valmiki. Rama's reign in the tale becomes the prototype of the harmonious and just rule, to which all kings should aspire. Rama and his beloved Sita set the ideal of conjugal love; Rama's relationship to his father is the ideal of filial piety; and Rama and Laksmana represent perfect fraternal love. Everything in the myth is designed for harmony, which after being disrupted is at last regained.

The *Ramayana* identifies Rama with Vishnu as another incarnation and remains the principal source for widely spread Ramaism (worship of Rama). The book contains a great deal of religious material in the form of myths, stories of great sages, and accounts of exemplary human behaviour.

As the epic tale presents a romantic adventure story, students who have to read the digest are usually interested in the plot. They even recognise, in the King of the Monkeys, Khanuman, one of the popular characters of the Japanese and Chinese medieval novels revitalised by Japanese comic books and animation.

In addition, the excerpts from the *Yoga-sutra* by Patanjali are given as an illustration to the concepts of spiritual ascent, with a reference to the popularity of Indian yoga in the contemporary world.

Switching to China, we start with the exploration of Taoist thought, which has dominated Chinese culture for several thousand years until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, laying a solid foundation for various philosophic schools, ethic and aesthetic theories, science

and technology. The most important of these concepts, articulated by Lao-zu, Chuang-zu and other Taoist sages, are: the idea of Void; the dialectical unity of two opposed forces, *Yin* and *Yang*, in the universe; the interaction of five elements; the idea of the Natural Way (*Tao*); the solidarity of nature and man; the interaction between the universe and human society; the existence of the cosmic energy *Chi*; the cyclical character of time; the universal rhythm; and the law of return. The religious projections of the teaching are the worship of ancestors; the cult of the divine superhuman 'yogi' (*Hsien*) sages; and the cult of Heaven.

Emptiness realised in the mind of the Taoist who has freed himself from all obstructing notions and distracting passions makes the Tao act through him without obstacle. An essential characteristic that governs the Tao is spontaneity (*tzu-jan*). The inexplicable Tao governs the universe:

The ways of Heaven are conditioned by those of the Tao, and the ways of Tao by the Self-so. This is the way of the wise who does not intervene but possess the total power of spontaneous realization, the natural mind (*tzu-jan*).

The manifestation of the Tao in the realm of Being is *Te* (translated as virtue or moral merit), which is placed by Lao-tzu in his classic treatise on Tao as natural properties of the things. Those who understand Tao just subdue to its order, and it endows them with the 'mysterious power'. Real wisdom is in avoiding unnecessary action (*wu-wei*):

The man of superior virtue never acts (*wu-wei*), and yet there is nothing he leaves undone.

The text of *Tao-te Ching* is rather short but extremely condensed and overwhelmed with complicated abstract philosophic notions. Therefore, only several principal paragraphs are recommended to the students for reading.

Chuang-tzu's writing is the earliest surviving Taoist text to present a philosophy for private life, a kind of direction for the individual. Whereas Lao-tzu in his book was concerned with Taoist rule, not severing the ties with the establishment, Chuang-tzu, some generations later, rejected all the conventions of society. He compared the civil servant to the well-fed decorated ox being led to sacrifice in the temple

and himself to the happy untended piglet in the mire.

The style of Chuang-tzu, much different from *Tao-te Ching*, is full of metaphors, fables and parables—and therefore much easier for comprehension. The author depicts simple people who, through the perfect mastery of their craft, conceive the Way and exemplify the art of mastering life. In his view, life and death are equated, and death is seen as a natural transformation, a fusion with the eternal Tao. A free spontaneous spirit roaming through space and time, according to Chuang-tzu, animates human existence and brings sense to it. It overcomes the laws of conventional logic and social restrictions being always inspired by the all-perceiving Tao.

Some parables from Chuang-tzu (like the parable of a sleeping butterfly, a parable of a perfect cook, etc.) are given to the students for reading with a reference to the Taoist philosophy.

The Confucian doctrine of social justice and individual perfectionism became the corner stone of the administrative system and moral education, not only in China, but also in Korea, Japan, Vietnam and other countries of South-East Asia. Confucius found a key to social order in the creation of a scholarly community, the fellowship of *chun-tzu* (the noble-minded) who would observe their duty, defend justice and cultivate humanity in their hearts.

To do it properly, people had to follow regulations and respect the ties between the parents and the children, between the lord and the subjects, between the members of the family, and between the teacher and the disciples. The virtues of loyalty and filial piety were treated as the pillars of social morals.

The *Lun-yui* (*Analects*), the most revered sacred scripture in the Confucian tradition, which contains the Master's sayings, preserved in both oral and written transmissions, was compiled by the second generation of Confucius' disciples. Dialogues between the Master and the disciples are used to show Confucius in thought and action. Through the *Analects*, Confucians for centuries learned to reenact the ritual of participating in a conversation with the great sage.

Confucius stated his credo in a simple but significant formula: 'To bring comfort to the old, to have trust in friends, and to cherish the young'.

The major merit of Confucianism as an ethical and political teaching was the assertion of mutual responsibility between the author-

ities and the citizens based on moral duty, not on force. Government's responsibility is not only to provide food and security, but also to educate the people and give them security. Law and punishment are the minimum requirements for order. The higher goal of social harmony, however, can only be attained by virtue expressed through ritual performance. To perform rituals, then, is to take part in a communal act to promote mutual understanding.

One of the fundamental Confucian values that ensures the integrity of social structure is filial piety. Confucians used to apply the family metaphor to the community, the country, and the universe, defining the relations of the heavenly monarch with his subjects in terms of a state-family. The *shoguns* of the Tokugawa dynasty in Japan ascribed the same functions to the military dictator—as their imperial followers did later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Neo-Confucian teaching became the foundation of the *Tokugawa Shogunate* as well as of the *Meiji-Taisho-early Showa* theocratic imperial regime. The role of Confucianism in Japan was overwhelming, and much evidence of it can be seen not only in the works of Japanese Confucian scholars, but also in the Japanese ideology of the New Time with its perverted values, which led to the tragedy of the Second World War.

Unfortunately, the works by the Japanese scholars are linguistically unavailable for the students. Instead they have to read the English translations of selected episodes from the *Analects* and some relevant parts of the famous *Hagakure* ('Hidden in the Leaves') by Yamamoto Tsunetomo, the sacred book of *Bushido* warriors (partly in original).

Moving to Buddhism, we presume that this Pan-Asian religion has played a central role in the spiritual, cultural, and social life of many Eastern countries. It spread from India to China, Tibet and Mongolia, to South-East Asia, to Korea and Japan, from where the teaching was transmitted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to America and Europe.

Analysing the *Four Noble Truths* and the *Eightfold Path* of Buddhism, and studying the differences between *Mahayana* and *Theravada* Buddhism, students have to trace the proliferation of the teaching through several specific schools from India and China finding their successors or analogs in medieval and modern Japan.

Ancient Buddhist scripture and doctrine were deeply influenced by the speculative and mystical Indian traditions rooted in the Indian

philosophy. *Prajnaparamita-sutra* (Sutra of the Truth of Holy Law), claims that the world as it appears to us does not exist, that reality is the indefinable, that void is an absolute. The fundamental assumption of the *Prajnaparamita* is expounded in a famous verse:

Like light, a mirage, a lamp, an illusion, a drop of water, a dream, a lightning flash—thus must all compounded things be considered.

Students have to read these revelations as a prerequisite for understanding of the essentials of Japanese culture. They are also introduced to the *Lotus-sutra*, to some excerpts from the writings of the great Master Kukai (founder of the *Shingon* school in Japan), to the writings of Chinese Chan patriarch Hui Neng and Japanese Zen Masters Dogen, Ikkyu and Ryokan—which gives a panoramic view of the Buddhist spiritual domain with a special reference to arts.

The major literary sources for Japanese Shinto mythology, which constituted the basis of official state religion and ideology in Japan for over 12 centuries, are the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Deeds, 8c.) and the *Nihongi* (Annals of Japan, 8 c.). These works were assembled at imperial command from a wide assortment of no longer extant texts. There are many other sources, too, but *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* contain the main components of Shinto religion along with the *Engi Shiki* (Ceremonies of the Engi Era, 10 c.) a collection of *norito* prayers and court religious liturgies. For centuries, Shinto was entangled with Buddhism in a complex admixture of rituals and beliefs.

For the students, reading the original, even with modern translation, is out of the question, but luckily many adaptations of some popular myths have been made which can serve as a good illustration to the doctrine.

The last classes of the course are dedicated to the placement and comparison of various religious traditions, ethical teachings and ideological doctrines in the spiritual continuum of Medieval Japan, to the analyses of their role in modern society and prospects of their survival in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

By the end of the course, we usually can see a real transformation of the world outlook in many students, who change their attitude towards spirituality as a useless rudimentary component of the old-fashioned education style. Many of them develop a strong interest in



culture, history, religions and arts, which can hopefully give them a motivation for further studies in humanities.

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# New Lines of Flight?

## Negotiating Religions and Cultures in Gendered Educational Spaces

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### Introduction

In the final chapter of *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari (1994:203-4) draw upon an image from D.H. Lawrence (1961/1928) that both affords insight into how poetry is produced, and the ways in which uncertainty is kept at bay, whether in philosophy, science, or the arts:

People are constantly putting up an umbrella that shelters them and on the underside of which they draw a firmament and write their conventions and opinions. But poets, artists make a slit in the umbrella, they tear open the firmament itself, to let in a bit of free and windy chaos and to frame in a sudden light a vision that appears through the rent—Wordsworth's spring or Cezanne's apple, the silhouettes of Macbeth or Ahab. Then come the crowd of imitators who repair the umbrella with something vaguely resembling the vision, and the crowd of commentators who patch over the rent with opinions...

Our paper is concerned with: (i) the kinds of firmaments that are constructed in religious studies: how certainty in regard to difference is produced and what the effects of this are; (ii) an ethical problematic of hospitality to difference: in which we inquire into what the implications of such hospitality might be as regards making sense of difference—whether this be characterised in cultural, religious or gender terms; and (iii) the effects of becoming open to difference: is it possible to characterise the performative dynamics of this openness? And, if so, what forms might these take?

This is part of a larger research project which is concerned with a problematic of knowledge practices in religious studies within educational spaces. This research engages both the performative (Denzin, 2003) and spatial (Peters, 1996) turns within the social sciences and draws upon Boltanski and Thevonet's (1991) work on multiple regimes of justification and critique. We implicate the geophilosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (1987; 1994), amongst others, in order to try and think differently about knowledge practices in relation to cultural difference. There is an empirical dimension to this project, where a focus is research currently being undertaken at a large, multi-ethnic secondary school on the outskirts of Glasgow, funded by the Scottish Arts Council. This aims to explore the limits of sense-making within the constraints of school spaces. However, the project's larger aims have more ambitious implications, initially for educational spaces at both higher and primary levels but also for an analysis from a variety of different performative spaces.

The project connects with issues relating to women in the experience of learning and research at various levels, through its implicit and explicit references to feminist and gender theory, its programmatic

concern with gender in relation both to the personnel of the research project and the themes it aims to address, and its underlying assumption that gender is a determining factor in any performative space, including the class or lecture room.

## I. Defining the problematics

Any genealogy of religious studies over the last forty years needs to take some account of the highly influential approach associated with Ninian Smart. He exercised world-wide influence upon the framing and practice of religious studies. Indeed, according to Cunningham (2001: 321), he was:

...the single most important figure in the development of the subject in British education, and a strong influence more widely in Australia, North America and New Zealand.

Whilst most of Smart's work was written for higher education contexts (Masefield and Weibe, 1995) he also wrote specifically for the school sector (Smart, 1966, 1968) and therefore exercised considerable influence over the future direction of religious studies within the UK context (Barnes, 2000). So to what did Smart put his signature? From the 1960s, he was associated with the construction of approaches to religious studies that sought—in terms of the problematics faced at that time—to create a space for the study of religion that distanced itself both from implicitly theological or confessional, and explicitly reductionist positions.

The approach to teaching religious studies that Smart sought made the assumption that the UK was no longer a Christian society and that religious studies was taking place within an increasingly pluralistic and multicultural context. Rather than becoming informed about one religion and assuming commitment to this, it was argued that young people needed to be equipped for living in communities that now included many different cultural grammars. His argument with approaches characterised as reductionist—that tended to redescribe terms used within religious traditions—was that to dismiss another culture's concepts from the outset was to overlook the need for a

patient description of the phenomenon in all its complexity. Whether or not the putative referents of religious discourse exist, people act as if they do: they are therefore consequential and can be regarded as religious ‘facts’ (Smart, 1973). The new approach, therefore, argued for what might be characterised as a ‘third way’, which neither assumed the truth or untruth of the phenomena under consideration, but nevertheless recognised their significance. A form of ‘methodological neutrality’ was advocated wherein the person studying religion was to ‘bracket off’ their own standpoint and assumptions leading to the possibility of disinterested enquiry. This approach preserved a space for religion and the study of religion in its own right, and decisively slowed down the speed at which religious phenomena might otherwise have been reinterpreted by other disciplines such as sociology and psychology (Lee, 1998).

Smart’s project was, therefore, concerned above all with creating a space for the sympathetic hearing of difference. As such, it was a profoundly ethical project characterised by hospitality to the other—which it is clear he instantiated both personally and professionally. This concern with the other also extended to his writings, a number of which were deliberately written in an accessible style so that a wide audience might be addressed (e.g. Smart, 1964; 1969; 1989). Within the context of its time, Smart’s account was deterritorialising in its attempt to work beyond the then obtaining theological-extrareligious binary. He sought to create a space in which new approaches to the subject might be developed that differed from those currently available. Furthermore, his advocacy of multi-disciplinary approaches went beyond textually based studies and brought within the frame of analysis ‘non-religious’ approaches such as Marxism.

### Territorialising religious studies

However, since the time of Smart, the specific terms in which he articulated his response to this ethical imperative of hospitality to difference have been territorialised by the state to produce, in the UK, what we have called the official account of religious studies or OARS (e.g., SCAA, 1994; SOED, 1992). This approach has become, in Bloomer’s (1997) terms, the prescribed approach to religious studies. OARS has

become a territory with fixed attributes: ‘a strongpoint, a fortress, which has achieved the double satisfactions of clarity and self-identity’ (Law, 1999:10). This has enabled religious studies to take its place alongside other curricular modes according to a map that continues, albeit with different legitimations, from Isocrates to Hirst (Muir, 1998; Mackenzie, 1998).

The achievement of such a stabilisation and hegemony with regard to meaning and approach is all the more remarkable when this is contrasted with the situation in a number of universities today, where the nature of religion, culture, and knowledge practices appropriate to its study continue to be hotly contested (Fitzgerald, 2000; I’Anson, 2004). In these contexts, many of the assumptions that underpin OARS have become subject to critique as no longer appropriate to a contemporary gendered and post-colonial milieu.

### **Critique of OARS: problematising smooth overviews**

So what precisely is wrong with OARS? A major source of difficulty stems from its rhetoric of neutrality, which derives from a selective appropriation of some aspects of phenomenology. In particular, this assumes the possibility of a singular, innocent rationality which can process all the phenomena it observes and bracket its own subjectivity sufficiently to present an objective account. Such innocence has become subject to sustained critique both theoretically (Wyschogrod, 1998; Baumann, 1989) and as regards the political deployment of knowledge within situations of colonial encounter (Chidester, 1996a, b; 2003). Furthermore, the construction of a field of enquiry through appeal to phenomenology is vulnerable to far-reaching critique on a number of other grounds (Flood, 1999). Foucault (1974), for example, denounced phenomenology’s irredeemable naivety, whilst Deleuze (1994) objected to its Kantian emphasis on rational judgement over and above experimentation. A new set of problematics interrogate would-be stagings of the real, asking questions such as: ‘whose account of religion and rationality is being privileged here?’ and ‘what are the effects of this in constituting a field of translation for cultural difference?’ (Chakrabarty, 2000). This is to question the extent to which the mobilisation of concepts such as ritual, myth and doctrine, constructs a

plane of sense-making that is characteristically Western, thereby obscuring from view the particular idioms, expressions and concepts through which a people know themselves and make sense of their surroundings (Long, 1986). In other words, the assemblage of concepts used for the exploration of cultural difference within OARS is insufficiently diasporic (Simon, 1995); far from being neutral, contemporary critiques point to ways in which such approaches reinscribe assumptions that inform what Derrida (1982:213) called a 'white mythology':

...the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own logos, that is, the mythos of his reason, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason.

Within OARS, we contend, accounts of cultural difference are constructed within a particular episteme that neither challenges the assumption of a universal (rational) subject (Simon, 1995) nor the practice of constructing difference upon the prior construction of sameness.

### White mythologies: the politics of location and representation

Phenomenology's wager upon the meaning dimension alone (Zizek, 2005) ignores issues of power that operate independently of particular rationalisations (Asad, 1993; Said, 1985). Change what is bracketed and a different focus comes into view that enables one to attend to issues of power and political effects. Looked at from this perspective, the use of bracketing in the official account can be seen to reinforce the exclusion of the political from the understanding of religion and to allow religious studies to sit all too comfortably within the state's definitions of religion and subjectivity, without serious problematisation (Fitzgerald, 2003). Such critiques suggest that, rather than conceiving religion as a distinct category, as in the official accounts, we need instead to consider 'the mutual imbrication of religion, culture and power as categories' (King, 1999:1). Awareness of such imbrication implies that other voices than our own need to emerge in order to 'destabiliz[e] our practices of telling stories that belong to others' (Lather, 2002:6). This is to encounter difference as alterity, which,



according to Simon (1995:90), involves ‘a confrontation with the incommensurability of that which cannot be reduced to a version of oneself’. This is especially important in ‘contact zones’ such as the religious studies classroom, which constitute a significant way in which ‘disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination’ (Pratt, 1992:4). This raises crucial questions about how such texts are used to produce an understanding of the other in practice (Everington, 1996).

### The move towards interdisciplinarity

If, however, communication, exchange and interchange between areas of enquiry are to characterise the study of religion, then the strategy of creating a stable object of enquiry can no longer be sustained. And if the construction of the bounded disciplinary field of ‘religious studies’, with its associated protocols of enquiry, is recognised as highly questionable, then we need to find new ways of formulating an appropriate project (Waardenburg, 1978). This would go beyond any project that could be described simply as multidisciplinary, since even this approach presumes a stable object of enquiry (Barthes, 1986). For, whereas multidisciplinary approaches take a given theme or subject and then explore how each of several disciplines approach this differently, interdisciplinary approaches take a very different tack in that a new object of enquiry is created ‘that belongs to no one’ (Bal, 2003: 7) i.e., it is not owned or controlled by any one disciplinary field. Another way of putting this is to say that the object is constituted in and through the interplay of diverse social and symbolic forces that need to be approached through *interstanding* (Taylor, 1995) since there is no one specific *underlying* discipline to which appeal can be made (as is implied by understanding). This is a strategy that carries a certain risk in so far as it involves reconceiving disciplinary identities:

...in a relational way—defined not by what they (try to) exclude but by the particularity of their position within a complex net of inter-relations. A consciousness not of one’s identity as the result of difference from, but as the product of one’s specificity in terms of multiple relations to (Massey, 1999:6).

We argue that the underlying ethical imperative of hospitality to difference demands re-imagining the project in some such terms.

### Embodied interdisciplinarity

The body as a contested field of human experience is one illustration of the direction that a poststructuralist interdisciplinarity might take. Braidotti (1991, 1994b) argues that Deleuze's approach to the body is of considerable value to the project of feminist poststructuralism, in that the body is conceived rather as 'a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic, and the material social conditions' (Braidotti, 1994b:161) rather than being reduced to either biological or sociological categories. With reference to the work of Deleuze, she defines the concept of body as:

...the complex interplay of highly constructed social and symbolic forces. The body is not an essence, let alone a biological substance. It is a play of forces, a surface of intensities: pure simulacra without originals (Braidotti, 1994b:163).

Other feminist accounts have likewise focussed upon the need for an interdisciplinary revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity and for a critique of viewpoints that instantiate the knowing subject in universal, neutral, and hence gender-free terms (Rich, 1993). As Braidotti (1994b:161) has put it:

Rethinking the body as our primary situation is the starting point for the epistemological side of the politics of location which aims at grounding the discourse produced by female feminists in a network of local, i.e., very specific conditions (sex, race, class).

In a parallel move, Carrette (2000:6) challenges ways in which meaning has been taken to inhere in religious structures, when he suggests a fundamental relocation of meaning away from the appeal of transcendent categories towards a discourse focused more explicitly on the body as a contested field of human experience:

The alteration in traditional religious meaning is brought about by repositioning religion in the space of the body and the politics of

the subject. Religion, theology and spirituality are in consequence detached and dislocated from a transcendent order and become strategies which shape, control and dictate the patterns of human experience.

Interdisciplinarity in relation to the embodied location of human experience therefore disturbs the tendency to construct unproblematised accounts from disembodied locations.

### OARS and governable spaces

Foregrounding the embodied location of knowledge practices also problematises accounts of religious studies that ignore the spaces within which those knowledge practices are performed. This points to another of the major weaknesses of OARS since it instantiates a disengaged and non-located understanding of religion that does not consider the effects of actual practices within specific governable spaces. A genealogy of school spaces, for example, reveals that these are not at all neutral but 'striated' in a number of significant respects. Hunter (1994; 1996) has argued that schools are hybrid organisations that amalgamate, on the one hand, bureaucratic governance—the state's concern for the population and worldly welfare of its citizens—with, on the other, the subject-forming techniques that were appropriated from Christianity.

Schools—and in different ways universities (e.g. Blake et al., 1998; Readings, 1996; Strathern, 2000)—are thus governable spaces that involve both domination and subjectification. Drawing upon Deleuze's (1988) reading of Foucault, Rose (1996: 171) has characterised subjectification as:

...the effects of the composition and recomposition of forces, practices, and relations that strive or operate to render human beings into diverse subject forms, capable of taking themselves as the subjects of their own and others' practices upon them.

A key aspect in the production of governable spaces has been the development of forms of abstraction through which an individual's performance might be measured and compared with that of others (Poovey, 1995). From our analysis it is apparent that the nature of abstraction

and stabilisation achieved through the terms of OARS fits well within the bounded space available in schools. Knowledge practices that involve abstraction and stabilisation (Law and Mol, 2002) could then be—unproblematically—harnessed to the demands for an examinable subject in which essentialised categories might form a central feature. These become the basis for the construction and performance of accountable selves. By the same token, given that subjectivity is bracketed by this account, there is no challenge posed to the official promotion of forms of liberal individualism. The knowledge practices assumed within the official account of religious studies produce an autonomous liberal individual subject that encounters objects over against it to which judgement is given. In other words, the rational, autonomous subject assumed and produced by official accounts is preserved (Usher and Edwards, 1994). Neither the subject matter of religion nor its subject effects are allowed to challenge post-enlightenment assumptions that inform school spaces: these central tenets are protected by the protocols and knowledge practices developed. Thus for example, in the *Scottish 5-14 Religious and Moral Education Guidelines*, (SOED, 1992) the ‘personal search’ dimension, which might be expected to encourage young people to engage in an open-ended exploration, instead reinscribes the accepted range of conclusions by defining these in terms of rationally conceived and legitimated sets of beliefs. The questions are framed from the beginning, as are the expected outcomes, thereby producing closure and a certainty of outcome.

A gendered, postcolonial milieu requires new approaches to the study of religion within educational spaces. We argue the case for the construction of a discursive space that is sensitive to the politics of desire and location, that moves beyond essentialised categories and is open to the power of receptivity (Keller, 2002). This would critically change the knowledge practices associated with religious studies away from a rationalist hegemony, premised upon knowledge as possession, towards more open spaces of experimentation and encounter with difference. This, we argue, would be more in keeping with the deterritorialisation that characterised Smart’s approach and with the ethical problematic of hospitality to difference which his writings consistently addressed.

## 2. Addressing the new problematics

### Thinking differently

How, then, might it be possible to think differently? As a theoretical basis for rethinking a response to the ethical problematic of hospitality to difference, we have found engagement with the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (e.g. 1987, 1994) to be energising and fruitful. Suffused with irony and hope, it looks askance at all theories and philosophies that have everything or the summation of ultimate value as their target, or reduction to the same. Deleuze's philosophy of difference, as Bogue (2004: 109) has put this, sought instead to:

...wrest difference from its subordinate position as a deviation from the Same and to theorize it as a positive force from which the Same issues as a secondary effect.

Here, we unpack some of the implications of this provocation to move beyond approaching difference upon the prior construction of sameness, and consider some of the consequences of framing knowledge practices within religious studies differently.

In contrast to perspectives that privilege the static and bounded, Deleuze and Guattari articulate a dynamic view of becoming and interconnectedness where existences are a series of events with the continual possibility of transformation. "Everything" is characterised by heterogeneity and flux, by comings together and disconnectings' (Doel, 1996). According to Patton (2000:10) one of the distinctive aspects of Deleuze's philosophy of multiplicity is his privileging of the conjunction 'and' over the verb 'to be' in order 'to free the connective power of relationality from its subordination to attribution'. It is from these in-between spaces, created by the joining together of different things, that new becomings, events of beings, emerge.

The recognition of this, though disconcerting and disorienting in some ways, can also help us move with a new assurance and fluency. Here we explore how engagement with this in-between might be productive for knowledge practices in religious studies. We argue that Deleuze and Guattari provide conceptual resources for fashioning 'a field of possibilities that is not yet' (Lather, 1993:684) that enables the

exploration of different forms of sense-making. In contrast to perspectives that bracket off subjectivity and regard space as merely a neutral backdrop to our actions, Deleuze and Guattari provide a conceptual language that enables thinking implication and a criticality that extends to the terms of its own enunciation. This, in turn, affords readings of spatiality and embodied location in interdisciplinary ways. We argue that such a framing permits analysis of the ways in which diverse cultures are assembled, and how practices act back upon the subject to produce particular kinds of subjectivities, within particular locales.

### Arborescent and rhizomatic spaces

Deleuze and Guattari help to open our eyes to constructions that are, in Foucault's (1983: xiv) words, 'becoming oppression and stagnancy' characterising these as 'arborescent', tree-like and fixed structures which create hierarchical and restrictive spaces. Gregory (1994: x) describes this as:

The classical tree of knowledge—systematic, hierarchical, grounded—so that its cultivators can scrutinize its fruit, fuss over its pruning and worry about its felling.

The arborescent might be seen as characteristic of the attention paid to 'the universality of the said and the geometrical order of interactions' in schools (Edgoose, 2001:126). This focuses on 'timetables, class space, and hierarchies' and 'fails to notice that education interactions are literally an interface—a face—to face'. Striations can be seen as created by the state's policing of school space through regimes of 'quality control' such as inspection (Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998), and attempts to control the discourse of pedagogy through the apparently endless 'rolling out' of policy initiatives (Ball, 2003). Arborescent patterns of thought are oriented towards forms of abstraction and closure with binary thinking as characteristic (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:5). This favours accounts of religions and cultures that abstract from the messiness of contingency and change in order to produce accounts that are systematic, rational, and certain, (Toulmin, 1990; Hartley, 2000). These processes, however, tend not to produce anything new or creative (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002: vii). An example of an

arborescent structure is the examination which turns both people and knowledge into something calculable (Foucault, 1991:184ff.). This approach to knowledge as possession mirrors the approach to knowledge in schools (Davis, 1998) in which the already said is privileged over the—as yet—unthought.

Deleuze and Guattari characterise an alternative approach in terms of rhizomes, such as strawberry plants or couch grass. Having no discernible centre or hierarchy, they are instead formed through multiple interconnections which can head off in different directions. Rhizomic patterns enable endless proliferation of new forms of knowledge, movement and change. Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 25) describe the rhizome as having

... no beginning or end. It is always in the middle between things, interbeing, intermezzo...the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and...and...and'.

Just as a rhizome spreads underground, by emitting roots wherever it is able and in this way negotiating obstacles, so the rhizomic philosophy Deleuze and Guattari propose, negotiates obstructions in the way of socially coded modes of thought and behaviour and undertakes a form of 'nomadic travel' by subverting set conventions (Braidotti, 1994a:5). Such a perspective moves decisively beyond knowledge as possession (Bal, 2003) with its fixed and arborescent closures. Heidegger's notion of someone learning to swim is a more appropriate analogy (Deleuze, 1994: 165), locating learning and teaching in the midst of things rather than above or beyond them. This approach to complexity or difference refuses to do so on the basis of an *a priori*—arborescent—commitment to the production of sameness, whether this be through a form of rationality or an appeal to transcendental concepts (Deleuze, 1990).

A rhizomic approach may result in greater empowerment, with Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 261) pointing to the distinctiveness of all kinds of individualities with their ceaseless capacities to affect or be affected. This potentiality for change exists at both a micropolitical level—such as the day-to-day interactions between teachers and students—and at the macropolitical plane—such as policy communities—such that teachers and students have powers to both resist and challenge abstraction (Deleuze, 2004: 238). Day to day practice there-

fore matters and plays its part in bringing about changes and transformations since this is also where subjectivity is constituted and agency explored. How might we move from the one modality to the other?

### The politics of desire

Deleuze and Guattari articulate a politics of desire that enables the movement from arborescent to rhizomic—or from the striated to the nomadic—to be described. Goodchild (1996: 6) hazards a synthesis of the three elements that he argues constitute a core within their work: knowledge, power and desire. It is the complexity of these interconnecting modalities, Goodchild suggests, that gives some kind of answer to the question of how things change or how transformation is brought about. The elements of knowledge, power and desire are not separable modalities: they all act and are acted upon. But it is what drives these multiple interfacing that Deleuze and Guattari call desire. Desire features as an aspect of the social unconscious or as a plane of imminent relations that are shaped by the actual relations and conventions that exist in society (Goodchild, 1996: 4). In this context, desire is an arrangement whereby what wants, needs or interests we may be conscious of here and now—in the very meetings and actions of life—are determined. The import of a politics of desire is to begin to recognise the possibilities of transforming the arrangement at least partly in the process of these meetings and actions. Again, there is here an implicit sense of optimism that making changes is something not entirely beyond our influence.

The politics of desire aims to break down the dichotomy between desire and interest, so that people can begin to desire, think, and act in their own interests and become interested in their own desires (Goodchild, 1996: 6).

So this is a politics in which creative change within social contexts becomes possible. The intention here is not to produce an effect that simply reflects some predetermined ideology or map, but one in which multiple levels of channels, fields, flows, powers and checks can be mobilised by an arrangement of desire that can awaken new interests and investments—rather than closing them off in patterns that have



been formed for us already (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 216). So how is such change initiated?

### Encountering the nomadic war machine

What Deleuze and Guattari write is unsettling, or even shocking, because they propose an openness to new and often disturbing priorities. The model or image of the nomadic war machine is a case in point. It is a description of happenings that are precisely not governed by Eurocentric notions of reason or moral law or fixed at specific historical periods. They challenge the popular cliché that there is an evolutionary relationship between the state and war, that it generates war for its own conscious purposes. Referring back to Hobbes, they see war and the state as, in fact, in opposition, with forces towards war belonging to the social unconscious and acting against the crystallising of mechanisms or apparatus that go with social institutions like the state (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:357-361). Their developed notion of a nomadic war machine may thus be instantiated within cultural forms that could include educational, commercial and religious creations, which may very well not be normative but polymorphous and diffuse, existing in ‘all flows and currents that only secondarily allow themselves to be appropriated by the State’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:360). As Patton (2000:114) points out, ‘the fact that the war-machine is defined by its constitutive relation to smooth space implies a fundamental antipathy to the apparatus of capture and striated space’. In other words, a war machine might be regarded as a ‘machine of metamorphosis’ which does not simply repeat habitual patterns but instead affords the making of something that is quite different (Patton, 2000:110).

In regard to educational spaces, this might mean that we consider very different ways of constructing processes of learning as well as becoming willing to see hard won certainties bulldozed into the ground. But, at the same time, the work of Deleuze and Guattari is certainly not value neutral. Fascisms abound in many different contexts and may characterise the normal operation of many actions and practices of daily life—but they remain dangerous. Deleuze and Guattari express their horror at the suicidal impulse of Nazism and the destruc-

tion of millions of lives (1987: 231). And this itself raises issues. How are the two positions—radical openness and ethical engagement—to be reconciled?

What Deleuze and Guattari do provide is tools for analysing the invisible structures that determine or limit what we do, how we make sense, and who we might become (Lorraine, 1999). For example, in *Anti-Oedipus* they target the reductionist assumptions of classical Freudian psychoanalysis. But their style is a reflection of what they have to offer—and equally—what they do not offer. The analysis is distinctive and risky because the structures they describe are not separable, dissectible, or observable apart from ourselves in process of becoming something else, some other combination of elements, a part of some other structure. So what this represents for students of religious studies is not a world of innocent neutralities but a trip into the vortex within which outside becomes inside and all presuppositions are thrown into question. Irony and humour with its fundamental reference to displacement, is perhaps the most appropriate response to adopt in challenging essentialised categories and fixed concepts.

So Deleuze and Guattari offer an ontology that is attuned to difference (May 2005), in which practitioners are necessarily implicated, but also one that enables a radical questioning and a potential openness to the other. One way of summarising the import of this in relation to the ethical problematic above, is to regard the space within which knowledge practices in religious studies take place as a performative space in which a series of critical questionings at different moments in the process of making sense are posed. The diagram below illustrates the dynamics of an intervention that disturbs closure.



Its dynamic is an orientation configured in terms of a number of motifs; each is concerned with our ability or willingness to relate to difference. Each moment generates a series of questions, for example:

- Disturbing closure:
  - What are the closures in this situation? (What is left out of the account?)
  - What are the effects of this, i.e. who benefits and whose freedoms are curtailed?
  - How might closure be resisted?
  - What happens if closure is resisted?
- Privileging difference:
  - What kinds of differences might be privileged here?
  - What happens if you privilege differences e.g. of gender, race?
- Changing ethical practice:
  - What happens if you routinely allow the privileging of difference and the disturbing of closure?
  - What practices would change and how?
  - What is most affected?
  - What relationships might develop?
  - What opportunities are there here for ‘talk-back’?

## Different ways of exploring folds

Far from bracketing off questions of subjectivity, Deleuze’s approach is therefore concerned with the effects of encounter: the difference that participating in a particular fold with its knowledge practices makes. These differences produce becomings—that potentially enable learning that goes beyond mere repetition. This represents a considerable departure from the autonomous, bracketed-off subject that becomes calculable through possessing knowledge. This further suggests that new, multi-modal literacy practices are necessary (Kress, 2003) if the subject is to become reflexively aware of—and actively engaged in constructing—politically informed cartographies of desire. And this desire, as we have seen, is not constituted through lack, but is a positive, affirmative stance. As Schérer (2001: 468) has suggested:

Desire leads productively towards new associations, towards new symbioses with beings and things, towards different regimes. These passages towards the other are becomings...

## Conclusion

Whilst the ethical problematic of making space for difference is compelling, OARS as a response has become increasingly implausible in the light of developments within philosophy and postcolonial and feminist studies in recent years. This has rendered a rhetorics of neutrality and its associated knowledge practices inappropriate.

We have argued that the radical subtlety of Deleuze and Guattari's work might be implicated in a contemporary response to this ethical problematic that provides means for thinking difference and implication. Their project is disturbing, provoking questions that, whilst interesting, reframe existing approaches and challenge new ways of thinking and becoming. This derives from their ontology, which is attuned to difference rather than upon an *a priori* appeal to sameness, and as such involves a critique of traditional Western ways of defining normativity and truth. To this extent their writings provide a means of opening up performative spaces for the encounter and engagement with non-western cultural logics.

Deleuze's approach can be seen to foreground knowledge, power and desire, and this potentially has far-reaching implication for practices of religious studies in educational spaces. As well as provoking new and interesting questions, such an approach provides tools for analysing diverse assemblages and the different modes of subjectification—with the promise of new becomings within educational spaces.

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# **‘Scribes Trained for the Kingdom of Heaven’**

Reflections on Reading ‘The Bible for Politics’ in Community, Secondary and Higher Education Contexts in Scotland

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**I**n recent years the methods and praxis of education within the UK have been variously scrutinised, assessed and transformed. The teaching profession is now familiar with understanding its role not

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primarily as a mediator of knowledge, but rather as a facilitator of active student-centred learning. We are trusted with the responsibility to educate people for 'engagement with the real world' (Kennedy 2005:3) and instil a belief in them of their power to effect change within their society.

The far-reaching implications of this vision for interpreting the 'Bible *for* politics' have developed in my own interaction with three educational contexts (community, secondary and higher education) in Glasgow. The following discussion involves assorted reflections on these diverse experiences and their possible implications for the development of what I have termed 'a hermeneutics of presence' for 'reading the Bible *for* politics'.

The community education context I have explored is the Contextual Bible Study Group that has strong links through John Riches with the Divinity School at Glasgow University. The Contextual Bible Study Movement (CBS) was nurtured in the townships of South Africa during the apartheid era as a force for liberation. It was introduced to the West of Scotland in 1995 by a small ecumenical team (sponsored by the Scottish Bible Society) and adapted accordingly to address the specific needs of that context. The movement seeks to engage 'ordinary readers' with no specific training in biblical study in contemplative conversation with the text and values readers' experience as a stimulant for both interpretation and social praxis.

The *secondary* education context within which I worked was as a consultant and author for Learning and Teaching Scotland's support notes for Christianity (intermediate level). Here, selected biblical passages featured as introductions and cameos of each unit's theme. Christianity is a component of 'Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies', a programme which attempts, in part, to encourage reflection on societal relationships (including inter-religious and inter-ethnic) and as such shares ground with the citizenship agenda for Scottish schools. In compiling the notes, I realised that a critical balance needed to be sought between these two areas. The religious education syllabus tried to reflect the insider/believer's perspective on each religion and therefore showed that 'religious education is more than just the problem of pluralism'. Rather, as Jacqueline Watson reveals, it 'has a spiritual dimension which engages with the meaning and purpose of our lives' (Watson 2004: 268). Thus curriculum designers should be wary of a

citizenship agenda focused on religious tensions alone for this ‘may end by endorsing and reinforcing the popular view of religion as essentially about conflict’ (Watson 2004: 268).

The *higher* education context on which I will be reflecting is a project that is still ‘in process’; a module entitled ‘New Testament Community and Ethics’, which I am currently teaching at Glasgow University. Within that module I have adopted an ‘in-service’ learning paradigm, whereby students have to undertake various voluntary roles within society and reflect on structural and political elements of these in conjunction with biblical principles, themes, images and passages.

All three educational contexts have, in different ways, informed me about the utility of interpreting the Bible ‘with the world’ not just the academy.<sup>1</sup> Indeed I contend that these sorts of readings provide both inspiration and control for more academically mainstream enterprises. It is no coincidence that Lisa Cahill, in her 1990 article, ‘The New Testament and Ethics: Communities of Social Change’, informs us that ‘biblical scholars have become more explicitly aware of the social repercussions of [biblical faith] and also more interested in drawing social and moral analogies between the biblical world and our own’ (Cahill 1990: 384).

Scripture has, of course, always pointed forward to a transformation of those lives oppressed by social and political factors and offers a model of relationship and community marked by inclusion and love as opposed to exclusion and distrust. This vision is empowered by eschatology and is a powerful way to prevent the church ‘becoming fat, sleepy and abusive’ (Hays 2000:128) and to resist ‘ecclesial complacency and triumphalism’ (Hays 2000:127), for eschatology grounds the ‘politically subversive vocation of the church as an anticipation of God’s future’ (Hays 2000:127). It encourages the church to speak out

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Fowl and Gregory Jones in their book *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (1991) likewise recognised the importance of a ‘reading of the world’ alongside ‘a reading of the text’. In their words, ‘Scripture is best read in and through Christian communities. Such communities, however, find themselves within the political arrangements of wider societies. They need to understand these larger contexts and the ways in which they impinge on Christian communities if Christians’ readings of Scripture are to enable them to live faithfully.’ (Fowl and Jones 1991:44)

and never become complacent with the status quo, always certain in its mission to proclaim a creation restored.

If ‘Scribes Trained for the Kingdom of Heaven’ do indeed bring treasures old and new from their store, then reflections on the interpretation of the Bible within contemporary educational contexts that result in social or political deliberation should be seen as a jewel among those resources.

## I. Introducing the Three Educational Contexts: Limitations and Possibilities

It is worthwhile mentioning at the outset hermeneutical limitations and possibilities associated with reading the ‘Bible *for* Politics’ within the three educational contexts within this study.

Primarily, it is important to recognise the different roles played in each educational group. Facilitators in the CBS monitor time and summarise viewpoints, but do not direct ordinary readers’ reflections; beyond suggesting a passage to look at, facilitators for the most part are passive figures within the process. This is not the case for the secondary and higher education contexts in which I am involved.

As an author for Learning and Teaching Scotland, I had to create active learning opportunities that would encourage reflection and understanding among the school children and effect positive results within their attitudes and actions to each other and their surrounding communities. In this respect, I had a more ‘directing role’ to play within the whole endeavour. To a lesser extent, as a module leader of ‘New Testament Community and Ethics’ I laid down parameters of how exegesis ‘with the world’ should be conducted and documented, but the students themselves actively reflected on their experiences *vis-à-vis* the biblical text sometimes in quite unforeseen ways.

Another aspect of the study that must be considered is of course the very different membership of each grouping. The members of the contextual Bible study met together as Christians in parishes, community centres and even prisons. This contrasted with the participants of my honours module in the university who were drawn from a variety of faiths (mostly Christian) and some atheistic backgrounds. The

school context provided a different set of actors again; teachers remarked on the diversity of faith traditions, racial heritages and the general lack of biblical literacy encountered within their classrooms. With this diversity of agents in mind, how could I even begin to read the 'Bible *for* Politics' with some who do not number themselves among the Christian community of faith, nor share the belief that the Bible is in some sense an authoritative source for moral/political direction?

The equation of church and the world is not one of course that can be uncritically deciphered. Nor indeed can the Bible be read for politics in the same way in those communities comprised of Christians as those settings in which all participants do not share Christian beliefs or values. For, as Richard Bauckham notes,

Politics cannot do what the gospel and spirit can do, and politics cannot do in all societies what it can do in a society deeply influenced by Christian or other religious-ethical values. (Bauckham 1989:10)

This point cannot be overstressed given the diversity of participants' standpoints *vis-à-vis* Christian faith within the three contexts in which I worked. Whilst Christian community may indeed be called to be a beacon of light set apart from the world, it is also surely true that seeing Christianity's message as of sole relevance to the church also robs it of its potential power within the world's more secular or plural environments. Kirkpatrick uses the image of the union of two individuals in marriage to explore what he sees should be the ideal 'symbiotic' relation between church and world:

Just as two persons who marry do not lose their unique and particular identities in that vow of union . . . so church and world can retain their particular identities even when they join together, each performing its distinctive work, in furthering the advent of universal community, the Kingdom of God, in and for the world. One may do it by fostering interpersonal communion and the other by developing institutions of social justice, but both contribute to the work of God in bringing about God's kingdom...*Symbios* means literally 'life together'...neither loses its unique identity but neither, ideally, claims to be self-sufficient or to draw its full meaning solely from

itself. (Kirkpatrick 2001:112; 133)

As such, principles based within the Bible can stimulate reflection on situations in the world from a variety of Christian and non-Christian standpoints. David Horrell, for example, has recently spoken about Paul's ethics providing pointers for what he terms 'the communitarianization of liberalism' (Horrell 2005:50) whereby 'the resources of the Christian tradition are used in the development of new forms of societal ethics' (Horrell 2005:52). Horrell even avers that this perspective:

might suggest some kind of post-Christian project in which the resources of the Pauline (and more broadly Christian) tradition made a contribution to the formation of stories with which human solidarity, and difference, might be sustained'. (Horrell 2005:50)

Even those working from within the Christian tradition are used to navigating the culturally remote worlds we find in scripture: slavery, purity laws, household codes and sacrifices are just some of the concepts that are encountered in these foreign texts. Yet we must also recognise that cultural remoteness alone is not something that should negate a project that tries to 'read' or 'inspire' our situation with scripture. Extreme cultural relativism means that we can learn nothing of relevance from any context other than our own. Similarly, those outside a Christian community can also surely bear witness to the stimulation of texts from other countries, times, environments and traditions for resources to 'think with' in their own lives. In Gorrings's words,

As Terry Eagleton says of Shakespeare, in many ways this reactionary old patriarch is still ahead of us, and this remains true for reactionary old patriarchs like Isaiah [Jesus] and Paul. (Gorrings 1998:265)

In part, all religious traditions must be anti-relativistic, in the sense that all believe that we have something to learn from the ancestors, related to us not only by tradition and history, but also humanity. This was particularly brought home to me working on the 'World Religions Syllabus' for Learning and Teaching Scotland, where each tradition is studied from an insider's perspective, but also can be seen to hold gems for reflection for others outside that tradition. A truly communicative



vision of life would allow sacred texts to inspire a wide range of readers in different relationships to that text. As Meeks pertinently observed, ‘texts don’t have an ethic, only people do’ (Meeks 1993:4). Texts cannot ‘live’ until someone reads and is stimulated in some way by them.

Reading scripture democratically and participatively is at the heart of all the educational arenas of this study and, as such, they deserve our contemplation. For, as Chris Rowland so eloquently states:

God’s word is to be found in the dialectic between Scripture and the continuing story to be discerned in the contemporary world. (Rowland, 2000:17)

## 2. ‘Individualism v. Community’ and ‘Social Exclusion v. Inclusion’

One of the most heartening outcomes of the research was that all three educational contexts exhibited sensitivity to individualism’s threat to ideals of community through their interaction with the biblical text. They also explored themes of exclusion, and saw that positive solutions to this lay in developing personal relationships with others.

Bauckham has characterised the industrialised West’s individualistic pursuit of self-gratification and power as a ‘Crisis of Freedom’ (2002), the fall-out being a resistance to authority and notions of relational interdependence. He also recognises that this crisis can be addressed by rehabilitating the vision of the Bible that shapes identity in relationship with God and others. He writes:

Freedom is not threatened by, but formed and nurtured by dependence, belonging, relationship, community and—importantly and most controversially—authority...only in a context of values and practices of life in which human life is related to God can such freedom be adequately sustained. (Bauckham 2002:3)

Enlivened by the Spirit, the early church set about constructing communities, whose participants attempted, despite diversity, to stand in

strong unity with one another and acknowledge their profound collective identity as ecclesia, the body of Christ and children of the father in heaven. In a world where models of inter-dependence are ever harder to sustain, reflecting on community images undoubtedly has a part to play in shaping contemporary visions and hope (notwithstanding the caveat that reflections are based on a minority community in the Roman Empire, so different from our global, contemporary perspective).

If the Bible creates images of community that can challenge the contemporary fascination with individual self-gratification, it can also provide food for thought in relation to another scourge that marks our society—exclusion. It became clear to me throughout this study that this is not a phenomenon with purely social symptoms, but one that also manifests itself in emotional and intellectual forms. The Government Unit set up to explore 'Social Exclusion' in December 1997 provides the following definition:

Social exclusion is a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals from areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown. It means being cut off from things that most of us take for granted: a job, qualifications, a home and a safe environment. (Social Exclusion Unit Pack, 1997 cited in Cooper 2001:77)

Stephen Winter has recently investigated the theme of social exclusion and notes that frequently government reports on the theme conceive of it as a problem to be solved. For instance, one recent recommendation states we must, 'develop integrated and sustainable approaches to the problems of the worst housing estates, including crime, drugs, unemployment, community breakdown and bad schools' (report cited in Winter 2001:66). Here, problems of community breakdown are blamed on impersonal forces, whether political or social, with human agents taken out of the picture—and effectively hidden. Yet, as Winter argues, it is crucial for such debates to be personalised, for, in his words, 'healing and the creation of inclusive societies requires a process of reconciliation' (Winter 2001:67) and reconciliation always involves relationships and the development and protection of bonds existing between persons.

Drawing on the Jewish philosopher Levinas' critical ideas regarding the reduction of the 'other' to sameness, Winter argues that we should:

refuse to allow a definition of social exclusion in terms of it being either their problem or the consequence of some impersonal force. The other, the socially excluded, summons us to total responsibility. (Winter 2001:68)

The New Testament, of course, provides powerful images of inclusion and social responsibility based on face-to-face interaction. Jesus conducted a 'ministry of presence' whereby personal relationships were the *modus operandi* of the Kingdom he founded. Through human touch, especially table fellowship and compassion, he sought to abolish exclusion and promote solidarity with others. It is this particular perspective that has coined my subtitle 'reading the Bible *for* politics' in educational contexts as opposed to 'reading the Bible politically', an enterprise which requires professional training and can, in theory, be done in complete isolation. Reading for something involves personal interaction with concrete changes of perspectives envisaged. In this sense, it is premised on what I term 'a hermeneutics of presence', which works in relationships and acknowledges the complex network of threads with which we are connected one to another.

### 3. Reading the Bible in Community: The Contextual Bible Study Movement

The contextual Bible study movement writes with its finger on the ground in 'base', 'ground-level' groups of untrained, ordinary readers. In many areas it shares a common identity with liberation readings (including an explicit emphasis on praxis as the outcome of exegesis) but integrates important elements that minimise some of the shortcomings of 'reading from the perspective of the poor', namely the objectification of the marginalised as a group, itself a form of social exclusion.<sup>2</sup> Holman, in his work on the Easterhouse estate in Glasgow, for

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<sup>2</sup> For example Itumeleng Mosala, in his book *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black*

example, warns that intellectual reflection of this sort in many respects dehumanises those it takes as subjects and views them as passive elements to be acted upon, rather than agents capable of change: 'specimens to be examined and displayed not as human beings with the rights and capacities to participate in the public debate' (Holman cited in Graham 2000:93).

Gerald West, working in the University of Natal, South Africa, made monumental steps forward in this regard. He wished, as one of his provocatively entitled essays reveals, to let the 'dumb speak' (1995). He and other colleagues founded 'The Institute for the Study of the Bible & Worker Ministry Project', which set out to redress this imbalance and held as its goal the reading and study of the Bible amongst communities on the borders of society. One of the freshest principles the project contributed was to recognise that often sessions that opened with preaching and teaching stunted and silenced the people who felt too ill-equipped or ignorant to contribute anything of importance. Thus, rather than beginning from the history 'behind the text' (which requires trained knowledge) then moving to a reading of the literary presentation of the text and finally to the contemporary day, here the paradigm was reversed. 'Ordinary' reader responses based on 'community consciousness' were primary. Then came critical consciousness questions, which involved literary interaction with the text (not requiring specialist knowledge) and, finally, the historical situation where the facilitator could provide more substantive contributions. The sessions follow the same procedure and notably, akin to the liberation paradigm, have some form of change of attitude or praxis as their self-expressed outcome.

This movement has now set up an ecumenical cell to work in areas of Scotland. The religious sectarianism (which expresses itself more often in football team allegiance than religious discourse) that marks life in parts of Glasgow has contributed to remarkable exchanges in this programme. In the CBS, the text itself is made the unifying force, when denominational allegiance is perceived to divide participants. This is surely a living response to Paul's advice to the Corinthians to be united in their diversity as the body of Christ. It is

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*Theology in South Africa* (1989) chastised Luke's Gospel for addressing the poor as 'subject', mere bit parts in the realisation of moral virtue by the rich.

also in itself empowering, forming a face-to-face relationship with the text, by those who felt they had nothing of worth or were not qualified to dialogue with it directly before.

John Riches reports on two CBS groups, one parish based and another among students at Glasgow University, on the parable of the ten virgins. He writes,

Both groups read this parable as Scotland prepared for the G8 summit. Both groups referred to the Make Poverty History Campaign...The urgency of the parable is a call to action, and there are signs of new hope and belief that we can make a difference today, if not now, when? (Riches, 2005:25)

Alison Peden documents her experience of CBS within Cornton Vale Women's Prison in Stirling. Her findings are pretty 'arresting' in one way and another! First of all were the strong bonds of trust formed within the group; indeed new members had to be accepted by others before formal entry was permitted. No notes were taken at the sessions because inmates are suspicious of such documentation. The sessions were therefore viewed as an open arena, a safe space, in which they could express their innermost thoughts without any threat of comeback.

Many of the women commented on the emotions of Jesus within the Garden of Gethsemane at his arrest. One reflected on her own arrest as 'emotionless' due to her being 'high on drugs'. She felt emotions about the event were only starting to emerge now. Others reflected on Luke's infancy narratives, and the plight of Mary and Elizabeth both bearing sons that were to eventually leave their mothers. The prisoners directly translated these narratives into their own experiences of their children 'leaving' them, whether that was through them being taken into care, running away or other means. They also talked critically about God's use of wombs. Peden writes, 'Many of these women have had their bodies used by others...they were not welcoming of a text which seemed to reduce women to only functional significance' (Peden 2005:17).

As a general observation of CBS groups, to begin with many participants talk about their responses to the text in third person terms; although probing deeper many personalise the stories. The prisoners, however, personalised the text from the outset. They saw that it could

give 'language to their experience' (Peden 2005:18). The text was given profound correlation with their 'embodiment' and as such provided avenues to explore 'ways in which their lives may be transformed' (Peden 2005:18).

One of the most powerful images, drawn from one observation of an 'ordinary reader', that I have come across was on the resurrection narratives.<sup>3</sup> One woman had been a victim of domestic violence for a number of years and had felt that the Church's response had been at the time 'you have made your bed, lie on it'. She had since left the relationship but now realised that, for years, she was suffocated by her life, she couldn't scream and she couldn't run out. She saw herself as dead and placed herself within the story in the tomb. In her words, she was crying out 'who will roll my stone away?'<sup>4</sup>

Though these various readers' readiness to align text and experience may seem pre-critical or casual, at the same time it is profoundly moving and motivating, constituting a championing of community, a reflection on exclusion, and powerful readings of the Bible for social and political development.

## 4. Reading the Bible in Scottish Secondary Education: Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies

My involvement in writing Learning and Teaching Scotland's *Support Notes for Christianity* was, of course, more active in regard to how biblical texts should be read 'for politics', especially issues of community and 'other-regard'. This is on account of the fact that 'Religious,

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Lesley Orr for relating this story to me. It should be noted that this did not actually arise within a CBS group, but nonetheless can be aligned with this project in its reading and consideration of scripture among those affected by domestic violence.

<sup>4</sup> She gave voice to a powerful theological assertion without ever reading Alan Lewis' book *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (2001) which also views countless people in our times existing within tomb-like spaces, physically and spiritually 'buried' under ruthless and violent political regimes, mental illness or social discrimination and exclusion.

Moral and Philosophical Studies' within Scotland is conceived to provide occasions to consider and nurture values and attitudes in the context of relationships with others in community, and seeks to overcome social exclusion based on bullying, racism and sectarianism. In this respect, it shares some connections with a citizenship agenda.

It is worth noting that the Scottish agenda for citizenship education differs from English and Welsh provisions as categorised in 1998 in the Crick Report (see Blee and McClosky 2003). In Scotland, citizenship is not a discrete subject area but rather one that is seen to be relevant to a number of subject areas, not least religious and moral studies, and can be practically embodied in school and community initiatives. Learning and Teaching Scotland, in their 2002 paper on the theme, asked educators to provide avenues for children to be involved in decision making and participate in their wider contexts by volunteering in the community. They highlight the following as priorities for education in citizenship in Scotland:

- Opportunities for individuals and voluntary groups to bring about social and environmental change and the values on which such endeavours are based.
- People's material and spiritual needs and wants and the implications of these for issues such as environmental sustainability and social justice.
- The causes of conflict and positive approaches to resolving it.
- The barriers to full opportunity to exercise citizenship arising from socio-economic circumstances, prejudice and discrimination (*Education for Citizenship in Scotland: A Paper for Discussion and Development*, 2002:12).

Blee and McClosky reveal that there has been a lot of controversy surrounding the definition of citizenship. Some focus more on national identity, but, as the Learning and Teaching Scotland report on the theme reveals, it should also be focused on global identities (2003). The Crick report itself has been criticised for its ambiguous introduc-

tion to the concept of citizenship that on one view seems to be sanctioning creative and independent thinking for a globalised society, and on another seems to protect and control a monolithic unity. In Lawson's words,

On the one hand, the government is concerned with issues of legitimacy and social order and is concerned to strengthen the status quo; on the other hand, citizenship education is seen as a means of subverting present social arrangements. (Lawson 2001 cited in Watson 2004:265)

More critical as regards our current theme, though, is the fact that intellectual, emotional and spiritual identities are often overlooked in citizenship schemes. This is one area where 'Religious Studies' has an enormous amount to contribute.

It is relatively early days, and reflection on the ways in which this agenda impacts religious education is only in embryonic form. Watson in her recent article 'Educating for Citizenship—The Emerging Relationship Between Religious Education and Citizenship Education' (2004) reflects on the links between the two, based on a recent study conducted by the University of East Anglia. Among viewpoints considered were:

citizenship education's concept of citizenship lacked the motivational force needed to give it integrity. Religious education was the answer to citizenship education because it employs open enquiry and debate, is sensitive to controversial issues, and particularly because it is rooted in beliefs which motivate people to action. (Watson 2004:263).

The study also felt that religious education was able to offer what amounts to a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' of the citizenship concept: in Watson's words,

religious education, by looking at a wide variety of views, was able to question all assumptions . . . and religious education's historical link with religious indoctrination meant that religious education teachers were sensitive to the risk of political indoctrination, while citizenship education was not. (Watson 2004:263)



Stepping away from this debate to the more particular nature of how the support notes I wrote contributed to consideration of community and social inclusion, we must note the following. The World Religion syllabus was based around three major units, 'The Human Condition'; 'The Goals of Life' and 'The Means to Achieve These Goals' within each religion studied. For the Christianity notes, each unit was prefaced by specially selected biblical text/s that were intended to act as dialogue partners with the rest of the unit. The Human Condition section asked 'from what do I need to be saved?' and opened with Genesis 1. This text encouraged the children to see the human condition not only marked by sin and death, but also by exploring ideas of stewardship made them see humanity's responsibility *vis-à-vis* the created order and conceive of sin not only on a personal level but also a structural and political level.

'The Goals of Life' section was focussed on the life and ethical example of Jesus. Key themes were relationship with God and 'neighbour'. Predictably, texts chosen for this section were the 'Parable of the Good Samaritan'; 'The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus'; the 'Parable of the Sheep and Goats'; and the following judgement discourse which shows how Jesus is to be encountered in the prisoner, the hungry, the naked...the asylum seeker, the drug addict, the alcoholic downstairs etc. Learning and Teaching Scotland made clear that they wanted children to probe more deeply into ideas of discrimination and prejudice and their own role in propagating such evils by exploring name calling, etc. Various outside speakers involved in initiatives countering sectarianism, for example, Nil by Mouth and Sense over Sectarianism, also had important parts to play in student activities.

'The Means to Achieve These Goals' section concentrated on the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus as a means to salvation, also the Christian community as founding the Kingdom of God on earth, and participation in sacraments. The unit was prefaced by Hebrews 2:14-18, itself a text which shows the likeness between Jesus and humanity:

for this reason he had to be made like his brother in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

Also, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, and interestingly 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, in which Paul uses the image of a body politic to show interdependence between individuals:

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were given the one Spirit to drink.

Research and/or visits to Christian inspired charities, Glasgow City Mission, Scottish Churches Housing Association (ecumenical homeless charity) etc. led to a student debate on 'This House Believes that Christian Faith is Nothing Without Social Action' (Lawrence 2004:96). Some schools also incorporated play-acting of biblical stories (often re-conceived in contemporary terms), which could then be performed in hospitals and nursing homes. In line with the Crick report, however, these activities were not to remain as mere 'voluntary work', rather teachers had to provide opportunities to reflect on the role that illness and healthcare has to play in shaping our society and the plight of the elderly as regards loneliness and so on.

The practical reading of the Bible for politics, within this syllabus, concentrated on the functional effect of scripture. This was a praxis-based exegesis where reading of the Bible was shown to encourage reflection on personal relationships within the classrooms, homes and wider community.

## 5. Reading the Bible in Higher Education: In-Service Learning in Biblical Studies Modules

One of the 'learning outcomes' of my module on 'New Testament Community and Ethics' at Glasgow University is to recognise that to truly understand Jesus' mission one must enter the sorts of contexts and meet the sorts of people amongst whom he spent the majority of his time shaping and enacting his kingdom vision . These were not primarily the professors or priests but rather the infected and infirm, the failures and the fallen, the broken and the broke.

It is for this reason that I have adopted the use of an in-service

learning paradigm for this module. It was inspired by Alicia Batten's recent article 'Studying the Historical Jesus through Service' (2005). The projects are to be submitted after Christmas—and I eagerly await the results. I know one student is currently working in an AIDS clinic as a befriender and is videoing a Bible study meeting on World AIDS Day among the patients (both Christian and non-Christian) for the class to see. Others are compiling journals of their work outside the class. For now though I rely on insights from results of Batten's original project.

Batten firmly believes that 'bias has heuristic value' (2005:108) and encouraged her students, through service experiences, to confront these biases and document any changes of perspectives that had occurred as a result of their involvement. Students went out into contexts as diverse as soup kitchens, shelters, hospices and residential homes for the mentally or physically impaired, assigned with a five-fold task. First, they had to 'record what they observed at the site, including the physical surroundings, the interactions taking place, the smell and sounds' (2005:110) in as impartial terms as they could manage. Secondly, they were to confront their own prejudices, 'what pre-suppositions did they have? What were their actions? Why did they feel uncomfortable?' (2005:110). Thirdly, students were asked to consider the immediate situations they found themselves in, what problems were people facing here, 'cultural, social, economic, physical, and/or linguistic'? (2005:110) Fourthly, students had to link the particular problems of the individuals they encountered to structural/social causes concerning race, gender, disability, class and sexual orientation. Fifthly, material obtained from the service experience had to be juxtaposed and read alongside material from the 'Historical Jesus' module. Batten writes,

here the students could write down biblical texts that came to mind, or write about what types of chronic injustices in first century Palestine (for example, exploitative patronage, onerous taxation) were comparable to the injustices they witness today. (2005:110)

One student working in an AIDS hospice recognised the social isolation that this disease evoked and compared it with those ostracised in

the first century on account of demon possession or leprosy, 'they suffer not only from poor health, but also emotional deprivation and discrimination' (2005:110). Another offering language lessons in a mixed community felt the fellowship enjoyed within the group had mustered 'hope' among the participants, something she saw as endemic to the mission of Jesus.

Interestingly, some students felt that those amongst whom they worked did not appreciate their efforts. However within this criticism lay another important lesson to be learned. As Batten reveals, citing a student journal,

To truly serve, one must reach out even when the response is uncertain because as Jesus said, 'if you love those who love you what credit is that to you?' And then, the heart of service is radical and beautiful; it shows humanity at its best. (Batten 2005:110)

It is worthwhile noting that the whole project was built around Benjamin Barber's definition of service as 'something we owe ourselves or to that part of ourselves that is embedded in civic community' (cited in Batten 2005:109). This is an important definition to adopt and has certain affinities with some of the self-expressed aims of the Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies syllabus on which I worked. It also provides impetus for Winter's call for understanding social exclusion as a problem in which we are all personally involved, not something that happens as a result of impersonal social forces. It underlines the two-way nature of social engagement and affirms one's 'social responsibility to work with other people with whom one shares community' (Batten 2005:109). Service in this respect can be contrasted with 'a culture of charity' which 'often only reinforces the charitable person's sense of worthiness, for he or she is providing for the dependant person who, in light of an independence obsessed culture is ultimately deemed a failure' (Batten 2005:109).

Reflection on the social or structural causes of the particular plights observed nudged students from a 'charitable giving' mindset and the concomitant risk that it holds for masking 'our part' and 'role' in social injustice and marginalisation of others. As Batten reveals,

Students grasped the fact that when they attempted to go to the root of why many depend on food banks, or why some have no

place but a hospice to go for care, or others are living on the street, they had to ask difficult questions regarding tax systems, health care organisation, lack of public infrastructures, the power of racial and gender stereotypes and so forth. (Batten 2005:112)

Perhaps, as the in-service learning paradigm teaches, in order to avoid a certain ‘domestication’ of the text, we must re-capture and expose ourselves to its ‘alien’ nature once more. One student on my module in Glasgow commented on how her experience of working in a refuge for prostitutes under the Kingston Bridge had completely upturned her vision of particular stories surrounding such women in scripture. The student talked about her in-service learning experience ‘de-sanitising’ the biblical pictures she had in her mind’s eye. In her student journal she cited the following excerpt from a poem by Kathy Galloway entitled ‘Outside Holiness’ to express this change of perspective:

I expect that the prostitutes Jesus mixed with  
looked a lot like Audrey Hepburn, beautiful and  
fragile and fallen,  
and nothing like the fifteen year-olds on crack cocaine  
down Anderston way,  
who’ll do anything you like (including risk AIDS)  
for a tenner. (Galloway 1996:103-104)

## 6.A Hermeneutics of Presence: Scribes Trained for the Kingdom of God

In his 2000 article, ‘The Engraver, the Chandler and the Trade Unionist: Reflections on the Grassroots Reading of Scripture’, Rowland tells the story of a colleague at Oxford asking him the deceptively simple question of whether his attitude to scripture was one focused on ‘inspection or reception?’ (Rowland 2000:26). Rowland understands the question to be; does the text constitute a problem to be solved? Can someone trained in the requisite language and historical context make the text ‘less intractable, less wild, more acceptable and comprehensible to modern sensibilities?’ (Rowland 2000:27). Of course, this sort of specialised reading does play an important part

within the professional exegete's job description, however it is also true that different relationships to the text, such as those explored in the three educational contexts of this paper, can yield surprising, even devastating results, and can often encourage the scholar to reappropriate, in Rowland's words, 'an attitude of humility rather than superiority before the text' (Rowland 2000:28). A text should be allowed to speak in our worlds 'so that, if you like, it may read us' (Durber 2002:70).

Throughout my journey into these three educational contexts, I have been reminded again and again of Paulo Freire's project of 'conscientization' where he sought to give tools to the people 'to conscientize them so that they could act within society—for its—and their—betterment' (Oakley 2004:448).<sup>5</sup> Freire's ideas, though formulated in Latin America, have resonance still in the democratic West, especially as regards community and social inclusion. In Freire's words,

by sticking to social action that may help certain individuals cope with their situation, but not to challenge the system that perpetuates that situation, then we are merely attempting to 'soften the power of the oppressor . . . [which] almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity.' (Freire cited in Oakley 2004:448)

Of course, reading the Bible for politics within diverse educational settings cannot be the whole story. It is important to reclaim a place for the 'ordinary voice' in biblical exegesis, but the professional guild should not all be put out of jobs as a result. One can still evaluate between 'better' or 'worse' interpretations—knowledge of historical contexts can provide a control and test for the extreme relativism of 'any reading goes'. This is crucial, otherwise reading 'the Bible for politics', or indeed anything, would become a purely random pursuit. This is not, however, to reduce the importance and value of the interaction that has taken place within the education initiatives I have surveyed. These contexts serve to make real and alive the links between

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<sup>5</sup> In his 1985 book *The Politics of Education*, Freire described the situation as follows: 'Education must be an instrument of transforming action...this...does not happen only in the consciousness of people, but presupposes a radical change of structures, in which process consciousness will itself be transformed.' (Freire cited in Oakley 2004:450)

Bible and world and give the professional guild a sense of perspective on our own readings, and the modesty to acknowledge the profound insights that can come from the ‘mouths of [untrained] babes’. It is worth reminding ourselves from time to time that it is to such as these that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs.

The three educational contexts in which I worked in different ways adopted a powerful vision of a ‘hermeneutics of presence’ where a premium was put on face-to-face interaction with the world and the Bible. Within Christian-based groupings such as the CBS, personal links with the text were frequently made, indeed scripture verbalised aspects of the participants’ identity. In mixed faith/secular groupings addressed in the secondary and higher education contexts, a slightly different dynamic was at play. For both the school children and the university students, the Bible itself became a stimulating source to ‘think with’ on issues related to the maintenance of community and social inclusion. Indeed, encouraging students to draw contextual links between the Bible and social life within my module on ‘New Testament Community and Ethics’ is itself an appropriate educational aim, not only for Christians but for anyone reading and responding to this sacred text. Such results do not require or assume a Christian belief *per se*. For biblical scholarship, the project of reading in the educational contexts surveyed here cautions against an isolationist interpretative stance. Reading the Bible for politics involves some sort of interaction with the sphere outside the church, the arena in which political change and development occurs. As Kirkpatrick states:

[Christian] Community and society need each other. Without the resources of persons shaped by community societies would be nothing more than impersonal machines for the balancing of political and economic power. Without the resources of society, communities could not survive nor could they act responsibly towards persons beyond their ‘boundaries’. (Kirkpatrick 2001:168–169)

To ‘embody’ a ‘hermeneutics of presence’ and truly read the Bible for political change and development (whether that be related to the rehabilitation of community, exclusion, citizenship or whatever) we must engage in people’s lives in all their social and religious diversity. For only there can transformation concretely be effected and God’s power realised in an expectant, though still not yet fully redeemed, world.

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# Instilling Virtue:

Weaving the One Thread of Confucius'

*Analects*

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**G**etting students enthusiastically engaged with ethics is a difficult and demanding task, especially when they view it as impractical and disconnected from their lives. In this essay, I will argue that this problem can be overcome by applying Confucian 'wisdom'—by adapting one's pedagogical strategy to fit one's knowledge of the particular audience one must address. Specifically, I will argue that we can use our students' concern for their own authenticity and—using the Confucian *Analects*—show them how achieving authenticity requires an altruistic focus. Thus, I will argue that we can

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use our students' distinctively egoistic intuitions, and redirect them, with the help of Confucius' text, towards the cultivation of other-regarding virtue.

## I. Instilling *Chung*

In the scholarly literature on Confucius there is much discussion about what is known as the unifying 'one thread' of the *Analects*. The aphorism containing the 'one thread' reads:

The Master said, "Ts'an! There is one single thread binding my way together." Tseng Tzu assented. After the Master had gone out, the disciples asked, "What did he mean?" Tseng Tzu said, "The Master's way consists in *chung* and *shu*. That is all."<sup>1</sup>

It is generally agreed that the 'one thread' emphasises the need for an individual to 'do one's best' (or *chung*) at cultivating a life informed by 'reciprocity' (or *shu*). We should expect, then, that the exemplary Confucian individual who embodies the 'one thread' (one who is *jen*) will possess a deeply motivated commitment to being the kind of person who cares about and for others. This being a worthy goal for any person to pursue, the central question is—as teachers of ethics, how do we instill the 'one thread' into students?

To begin answering this question, Confucius rightfully insists that students must have a strong sense of desire (*chung*) to 'give of themselves fully to the task at hand'<sup>2</sup> as a precondition for moral instruction. The Master suggests:

I never enlighten anyone who has not been driven to distraction by trying to understand a difficulty or who has not got into a frenzy trying to put his ideas into words. When I have pointed out one corner of a square to anyone and he does not come back with the

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<sup>1</sup> Lau, D.C., (translator) *The Analects*. (London: Penguin Classics, 1979). Book IV. 15. Translated by D.C. Lau, (London: Penguin Books 1979). All subsequent quotes from the *Analects* are taken from the D.C. Lau translation.

<sup>2</sup> This interpretation of *chung* is from Hall, David and Ames, Roger, *Thinking Through Confucius*. (New York: SUNY Press 1987). p. 285.

other three, I will not point it out to him a second time.<sup>3</sup>

A reading of this passage and others similar to it in the *Analects* reveals an emphasis on effort; just as some try to solve a problem and come back with three (proposed) corners, others, not driven by a desire for self-improvement (or knowledge), never look for any corners at all. Confucius' reason for requiring *chung* is evident—rejecting a view of the ethical life that would require a person to simply conform to a set of rules, the *Analects* portrays moral development as requiring intense and continual introspective analysis. Such self-analysis, Confucius suggests, centres around the difficult task of reflecting on, questioning and assessing the moral worthiness of one's 'ends', these being the goals, purposes, plans, and projects that one intentionally directs oneself to engage in (for the remainder of this paper I will refer to the totality of an agent's ends as her cognitive identity).

Getting students to critically engage with their cognitive identities from a moral standpoint is no easy task, and unfortunately, students are not initially open to it. One of the reasons is that they view the ethical theories we teach them as inapplicable to their lived realities, so by a student's lights, such theories fail to provide motivating reasons to engage in the kind of self-analysis Confucius requires. One reason for this, I suspect, is that most college students are psychological and/or ethical egoists,<sup>4</sup> a stance that leads them to view the strongly anti-egoistic measuring stick used by most ethical theories to assess ends as too academic, too impersonal, and too disconnected from the world in which they take themselves to live. In part, the consumerist culture that students inhabit has taught them to continually think 'what's in it for me?'—a stance towards the world they (rightly) see ethical theories as criticising.

That said, if Confucius is right that moral development requires *chung*, and if *chung* requires having self-directed motivation to engage critically with one's cognitive identity, then, as teachers, our first goal

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<sup>3</sup> *Analects*, VII. 8.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this issue, see Putnam, Daniel, 'Virtue Theory and the Self: Thoughts on Addressing Ethical Egoism in Our Students', *Teaching Philosophy*, Vol. 21, No. 2, (June 1998); Paden, Roger, 'The Natural History of Student Relativism', *Journal of Thought*, Vol. 29, No. 2 and Shoemaker, Robert, 'Cave Angst', *Teaching Philosophy*, Vol 1. No. 3, Spring 1976.

must be to provide motivating reasons to facilitate its development. One way to identify motivating reasons is to appeal to the *Analects*, which tells us that successful ethical training on the part of the teacher requires 'wisdom,' or 'knowing your fellow man'.<sup>5</sup> What Confucius means by this is clear to the reader throughout the *Analects*, as Confucius uses knowledge of his students' particular strengths, weaknesses, psychological idiosyncrasies and interests to adjust his pedagogy in different contexts in order to achieve his lesson goals with maximum efficiency.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, if we are to use wisdom to get students personally invested in the project of analysing their ends, I suggest that we adapt our pedagogy to the fact that students display an intense, but understandable (at their age) preoccupation with ruminating about their own identities (a phenomenon disparagingly called navel-gazing). Although this self-analysis is not often moral in character, it *is* often heavily rooted in a desire by students to assure that the contents of their identities reflect, as a product, the workings of an authentic, self-determining subject. No student wants to discover, as a result of such navel-gazing introspection, that they are (in their words) 'a tool' (a follower, or conformist).

These observations reveal to us that students are already busy, although perhaps in a superficial sense, participating in the Confucian project of analysing their own cognitive identities. This suggests to us that there exists a standard that students already use (one that motivates them) to assess themselves. Thus, instead of trying to initially develop *chung* by asking students to get motivated to assess their ends in terms of whether they pass the muster of duty (the categorical imperative), or of happiness maximisation (the principle of utility), we can have them ask whether their ends, individually or as a whole, express what I will

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<sup>5</sup> See *Analects*, XII, 22.

<sup>6</sup> See *Analects*, XI, 22. The Confucian point is that one bends one's lessons in ways that fit the needs of particular students. In this quote, Confucius gives Tzu-Lu and Jan Yu different answers to the same question ('should I always put into practice what I have learned?') in order to help each of them arrive at the same goal. Since Confucius realises that the right answer lies in the middle of 'always' and 'never', he realizes that since Tzu-lu is impetuous, he needs to be told 'no', and since Jan Yu is overly deferential, he needs to be told 'yes'. Without this knowledge of his students' dispositional histories, Confucius would be unable to counsel them in an effective or useful manner.

call their ideal identity, or the subset of their cognitive ends that comprise who the student really wants to be. The main idea is to get students to engage with and further investigate the notion that acting on cognitive ends not reflective of their ideal self is a sure sign of failing to be true to oneself, or of non-authenticity,<sup>7</sup> and so to recognize that a commitment to authenticity requires being motivated (*chung*) to assure that one's cognitive ends do not diverge from who one wants to be.<sup>8</sup>

Linking cognitive identity analysis with a desire for authenticity is important, not only because it motivates students to self-analyse, but because a Confucian will also demand that a fundamental component of developing moral selfhood involves the project of unifying one's cognitive and ideal selves, or of cultivating the virtue of *integrity*.<sup>9</sup> Thus, adapting and using 'wisdom' at this point already succeeds at involving students in the Confucian project, as the attaining of integrity reflects one important aspect of Confucian moral being. For the remainder of this section, let us look more closely at the requirement of integrity, to see why—beyond its intuitive appeal—it is important to a

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<sup>7</sup> As an example, a desire to smoke (an end in one's cognitive identity) may not find expression in one's ideal identity (one may not identify with being a smoker). Of course, here I am thinking of Harry Frankfurt's position on free will from his 'Freedom of the Will —the Concept of a Person,' *Journal of Philosophy*, LXVIII, (1971) pp. 5–20. The positions are not identical, as Confucius' sense of authenticity is not entirely procedural in nature. In Confucius' case, only the substantive ends reflective of *jen* would qualify, such that only by pruning one's first-order desires so that one's first and second-order desires (in this case for *jen*) are consistent could one achieve authenticity.

<sup>8</sup> How the 'end product' of a successful 'unification' of one's cognitive and ideal selves should look will depend on one's views about whether there are ends that are non-normative in character. If one believes that one can pursue an end that is neutral to one's authentic self, say, 'intending to walk across a room to get a glass of water', then the goal will be to have one's cognitive identity reflect one's ideal self when the cognitive ends are not neutral. If, however, one follows Confucius in thinking that all actions have some normative content or impact, then the goal will be to completely unify the cognitive self as a whole with the ideal self, so that they are one and the same, with no divergence at all.

<sup>9</sup> In fact, Hall and Ames identify *chung* as not simply meaning 'to do one's best' but moreover to commit oneself to doing one's best 'as an authentic self'. Hall and Ames, in suggesting this possible translation, also note that an element of *chung* does appear to mean 'integrity'. Hall, David and Ames, Roger, *Thinking Through Confucius*. (New York: SUNY Press 1985).

Confucian that we cultivate it. This will reveal why it is important to get students interested in critically interacting with their own identities in this way.

To explain why integrity is important to virtue ethicists (for the cultivation of virtue, or of *jen*) or why it should be important to students (for the pursuit of authenticity), it helps to introduce students to a psychological insight often stressed by virtue theorists: namely, that repeatedly attempting to satisfy a certain type of cognitive end always has future consequences for the agent. Specifically, these 'consequences' refer to the development of the habits, traits, dispositions, and beliefs that are required to reliably succeed at that type of end, all of which influence the agent's subsequent ways of interacting with the world. Taken together, these 'consequences' result in the formation of what David Wong has called one's *practical* identity.<sup>10</sup> According to Wong, whereas one's cognitive (and ideal) identity forms the basis for how one intentionally directs oneself towards the world, one's practical identity forms the basis for how one unintentionally sees (interprets) and reacts to the world, both behaviourally and emotionally.

To take an example, a person with a practical identity indicative of courage does not merely possess the desire to do a courageous thing or ideally want to be the kind of person who is courageous (both of which are intentional), but is moreover the kind of person who automatically sees (say) a person being mugged as an instance of injustice. This way of seeing is simultaneously associated with having just the right feelings of sympathy for the victim, anger with the perpetrator, and a desire to act on those emotions in ways appropriate to courage and to the situation; namely, to rescue the person from danger (all of which can be seen as more dispositional or habitual than intentional).<sup>11</sup> Now, of course, one can have the former (intentions) without the latter (dispositions and habits), or have an end such as wanting to save the person

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<sup>10</sup> Wong, David. 'On Flourishing and Finding One's Identity in Community', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, XIII, (1998), pp. 324–350.

<sup>11</sup> Rosalind Hursthouse makes this important point clear, suggesting that '...possessing the virtue of charity (or benevolence) [will mean] being very prone to feeling these emotions on suitable occasions...[and] being very prone not only to feeling but to acting from the emotions of sympathy, compassion, and love, prompted by the desires associated with them.' See her *On Virtue Ethics*, (New York: Oxford University Press 1999), pp. 100.



and actually perform such an act without having the practical identity indicative of courage. However, for a virtue ethicist such as Confucius, such a person would not be courageous, since such a description requires that both one's dispositions and one's intentional states be directed at the world in just the right (co-ordinated) way.<sup>12</sup>

Confucius stresses the importance of having the right practical identity (or 'character'), if one wants to be *jen*, often in the *Analects*. Early on in the book, he says:

It is rare for a man whose character is such that he is good as a son and obedient as a young man to have the inclination to transgress against his superiors...The gentleman devotes his efforts to the roots, for once the roots are established the Way will grow wherefrom. Being good as a son and obedient as a young man is, perhaps, the root of a man's character.<sup>13</sup>

Here we see Confucius emphasising a point that Wong advances—that the way in which a person lives (the ends one tends to pursue) turns out to be largely a function of the composition of one's previously developed roots or 'habits'. So strong is the relationship between the two that Confucius notes the extreme unlikelihood of a person acting (taking on an end) in a way inconsistent with his practical identity or character. In his example, he suggests that an obedient son later on in life will rarely start a rebellion, a fact that presumably follows from the fact that the obedient and the rebellious will not only tend to see the same situation differently, by picking out different salient aspects as important, but moreover because they will emotionally respond differently to those aspects and so are impelled by their characters to reliably interact with the world in contrasting ways.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In her discussion of the difference between Aristotelian continence and virtue, Hursthouse points to the necessity of (for virtue) Aristotle's 'state requirement', namely, that the '...fully virtuous are better disposed in relation to their emotions than the self-controlled'. Further in *On Virtue Ethics*, she claims that a necessary condition for 'acting morally' is 'predictability', see pp. 107 and 134.

<sup>13</sup> *Analects*, I. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Confucius reminds us at *Analects*, IV. 2, '...The benevolent man is attracted to benevolence because he feels at home in it.' I would submit that part of what Confucius means here is that people with *jen* or benevolent practical identities are disposed to seeing and being emotionally directed at the world in a *jen* way. As

Stressing this connection, and noting the extreme impact that a person's practical identity has over the future choices that person will make, Mencius highlights the importance of cultivating integrity by arguing that one must be very mindful of the cognitive ends that one pursues on a daily basis. His point is this: if one's chosen ends are not reflective of the content of one's ideal self (with *jen*, or with a desire for authenticity), pursuit of those ends will eventually lead to the development of a practical identity inconsistent with—and eventually undermining—the successful pursuit of who one really wants to be. Warning us to pay close attention to the connection between an end and the practical identity it cultivates, Mencius argues:

How is it that the arrow-maker is less *jen* than the armour-maker? The arrow maker is worried about people not getting hurt, while the armour-maker is worried if people do get hurt. The situation is the same with the healer and the coffin maker. Therefore, you should be careful about choosing your occupation.<sup>15</sup>

Other than noting that we need to be mindful about the future psychological consequences of our present choices, what is interesting about Mencius' advice here—and this is what I think is crucial to point out to students—is that he implies that we can be deceived about the kind of practical identity that will result from choosing certain ends. As such, he notes that although we might think that a certain end (here, a career in armour making) is either congruent with or (at worst) neutral to a certain ideal aim we possess (in this case, *jen*), in reality it is incompatible with it (evidently, Mencius appears to think, because it is not aimed at pro-actively preventing harm) and so it undermines the future pursuit of *jen* by 'hard-wiring' us to be disposed towards the world in a non-*jen* way.

At this point it should be clear why it is important to motivate students to develop a *chung* that is directed towards integrity (unification of one's cognitive and ideal selves), as it results in a consistency

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such, and like Aristotle's distinction between continence and virtue, people who have the right practical identities in this example do not have to fight against contrary internal desires or emotions. Being *jen* is, in a way, simply natural to such people (they are 'at home' in it).

<sup>15</sup> Lau, D.C. (translator) *The Mencius*. (London: Penguin Classics 1970). section 2A7

between one's practical and ideal selves, and thus creates the ground for one to be reliably sensitive to the world in the ways that one ideally wants. Thus, if we are to instill the 'one thread', or Confucian moral being, students must start by learning to value and pursue the project of closely examining and pruning their cognitive ends to maintain integrity with who they want to be. Applying Confucian wisdom, we can excite students about the project by showing them that being authentic will subsequently require a commitment to integrity. Moreover, once this point is made clear, we can pique students' curiosities by suggesting, in light of Mencius' warning, that they may well already be pursuing ends or life goals whose pursuit can set the stage for the undermining of that professed goal for authenticity. To investigate this possibility further, however, I suggest to students that we will need to expand our understanding of Confucian authenticity to see what substantive ends (if any) it directs us to pursue. Since the *Analects* has a great deal to say on this matter, students are—for self-interested reasons—primed to engage with the text in the hopes of discovering whether they are presently, in their own lives, cultivating or undermining authenticity.

## 2. Interpreting *Jen* and *Min* as Authenticity and Non-Authenticity

The connection between the interests of students to be authentic individuals and the project of the *Analects* is not difficult to forge. In the original Chinese, the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity can be drawn between those who are *min*, a term associated with the 'masses' or 'the common', people understood to be 'troubled', 'confused', 'stupid', and 'willing to submit'<sup>16</sup> and those who are *jen*, the primary meaning being 'human' and further understood as 'individual' (or authentic) and 'caring'.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Hall and Ames, in *Thinking Through Confucius*, pp. 140-141.

<sup>17</sup> Hall and Ames explicitly contrast *jen* and *min* as opposites, suggesting that the *min* are characterised by being an 'indeterminate mass' of people, one 'without character or structure' and the *jen* are described as singular individuals who are 'particular' in nature (see *Thinking Through Confucius*, p. 139). In correspondence, Henry Rosemont has pointed out to me that in drawing such a distinction we need to be clear which conception of *jen* is being contrasted with *min*. Rosemont is refer-

Looking to understand what the authenticity aspect of *jen* conceptually requires, it helps to note that Confucius treats authenticity structurally as a virtue, suggesting that it lies as a mean between two extremes or vices of non-authenticity (*min*), a point that highlights Confucius' suggestion that in the moral life 'there is little to choose between overshooting the mark and falling short.'<sup>18</sup> This structural treatment allows us to approach the concept of *jen* as 'authenticity' by analysing first the two opposing vices or states of non-authentic *min*. Of these, Confucius states:

If one learns from others but does not think, one will be bewildered. If, on the other hand, one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be in peril.<sup>19</sup>

To understand the non-authentic *min*-vices of 'bewilderment' and 'peril' we must keep in mind two interdependent core Confucian beliefs, since each vice represents a way of endorsing one belief without the other and so disfiguring it. The first belief stresses the importance of learning. Specifically, Confucius believes that ritual traditions governing the norms of human interaction (in the *Analects* these are known as the *li*) embody a collective wisdom about human life that has

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ring to the distinction between the two different Chinese graphs both understood as '*jen*', one of which translates as 'benevolence' and the other of which translates as 'authoritative'. Rosemont suggests that it is the latter sense, not the former, that would be more properly placed in this contrast. I agree with Rosemont, although for the purposes of this paper I have collapsed this distinction and treated all uses of *jen* in the text as the same. My reasoning is primarily due to the pedagogical function of the paper, but I also believe that failing to draw the distinction when contrasting *jen* with *min* is not particularly harmful. My reasoning is as follows. The usage of the term *jen* in the sense of 'authoritative' is meant to refer to a person who stands as a true exemplar of right living. Being 'authoritative', however, supervenes on the existence of *jen* as 'benevolence', which refers more accurately to an inner disposition or way of being motivated towards other people in the world. Simply put, a person acquires authoritativeness by being benevolent. If the true contrast with *min* is with 'authoritative', then, this can only be understood as meaning that *min* types fail to acquire or exemplify the inner state of benevolence. As such, if authenticity is a 'state' (of being authoritative) it can only be understood as the kind of state that entails being authentically disposed towards the world (benevolence).

<sup>18</sup> *Analects*, XI, 16, and VI, 29.

<sup>19</sup> *Analects*, II, 15.

been slowly gleaned over the ages; as such, he stresses that living rightly or authentically requires that we embrace the fact that an essential component of 'who we are' is communal (involving a connection with not only members of one's present community but also with one's ancestors) and so embedded in ritual tradition. Thus, achieving *jen* or authenticity requires a way of being immersed in the *li* in just the right way.<sup>20</sup>

The second belief stresses the importance of *thinking*. Here, Confucius argues that lived human experience is embodied and so irreducibly particular, this meaning that no common, reductive, or codified way of understanding the world can be applied to a situation from a third-person point of view in order to completely exhaust its human significance or meaning.<sup>21</sup> As such, whereas the *li* functions to give the individual general action guidance in a specific situation, or provides the individual with a valuable compass with which she can begin to understand the moral significance of a particular situation, only the individual, by critically, creatively, and imaginatively engaging with the *li* ('thinking') can produce an individualistic response that does justice to the way the specific situation appears to the experiencing agent. Thus, thinking stresses the inherently individual, active, participatory, and subjective aspect of human existence.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> On the subject of the rites and their relationship to being an authentic person, Steven Wilson writes, '[without the rites] one cannot express anything human, much less anything as complexly human as one's unique innermost aspirations, without recourse to them'. See Wilson's 'Conformity, Individuality, and the Nature of Virtue: a Classic Confucian Contribution to Contemporary Ethical Reflection', in *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays*, ed. Bryan Van Norden (New York: Oxford University Press 2002), p. 95. Further, Tu Wei-Ming writes that 'By implication, the centrality of learning must also be interpreted as a process of training the self to be responsive to the world and culture at large. Thus, one studies poetry as a means to acquire 'language' as a necessary means of communication in the civilized world and ritual in order to internalize the 'form of life' characteristic of one's community.' p. 68.

<sup>21</sup> I take this requirement to be reflected by the virtue ethical belief that ethical behaviour cannot be reduced to rules. In addition, moral wisdom or phronesis is required. See Hursthouse, pp. 39 and 42.

<sup>22</sup> For more on the relationship between *jen* and *li*, see Shun, Kwong-Loi, 'Ren and Li in the *Analects*' in Bryan Van Norden (Ed) *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 53-73.

According to these explanations of the two key Confucian beliefs, understanding *jen* as 'thinking and learning' can now be understood as a specific way of immersing oneself in the *li* such that it not only shapes one's identity, but so that the immersion reflects an innovative and creative adaptation of the *li* that reflects the unique contribution of one's own particular and individual experience. Authentic living, then, is a portrait of an individual who is self-defining within community.

As I have suggested, the two poles of non-authentic *min* are represented by ways of taking one, 'thinking' or 'learning', without the other as one's guide to living. Exaggerating the *min*-vice of 'peril' is marked by 'thinking without learning'. This vice stresses an attempt to define oneself in isolation from one's community and one's inherited traditions (the *li*), to strive for a kind of isolated individualism that sees identity or selfhood as fundamentally 'atomic' and self-contained. Confucius thinks of this extreme as 'perilous' (and non-authentic) for two reasons. First, since he believes that a part of 'who one is' is communal, separating oneself from the *li* and from interaction with the community forces one into a perpetual sense of 'alienation' from one's self and one's nature.<sup>23</sup> Thus, as we will see in the last section, Confucian authenticity has a necessarily relational aspect not typically seen in Western philosophy (an exception to this might be feminist writing on autonomy).<sup>24</sup> Second, since Confucius thinks truths about the 'right' way to live are encapsulated in the *li*, isolation means dangerously removing oneself from an invaluable source of knowledge about how to live.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> On this point, Tu Wei-Ming writes that, '...the multiplicity of paths in realizing the pursuit of the Way necessitates a continuous process of symbolic exchange through the sharing of communally cherished values without selves'. He further notes that the 'manifestation of the authentic self is impossible except in matrices of human converse'. See Wei-Ming, Tu, *Confucian Thought: Self as Creative Transformation* (New York: SUNY Press 1984), p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> For more on feminist relational autonomy, see MacKensie, Catriona and Stoljar, Natalie. (Eds) *Relational Autonomy*. (New York: Oxford University Press 2000).

<sup>25</sup> The classic aphorism in the *Analects* on this issue is at XVII, 8. There, Confucius says, 'To love benevolence (*jen*) without loving learning is liable to lead to foolishness. To love cleverness without loving learning is liable to lead to deviation from the right path. To love trustworthiness in word without loving learning is liable to

The vice associated with ‘bewilderment’ stems from ‘learning without thinking,’ Confucius’ description of the typical conformist. Here, instead of critically and imaginatively participating in the *li* (in a way that dignifies the subjective and participatory aspect of human life), the ‘bewildered’ strive to form a thoughtless and passive identity that exactly mirrors pre-existing *li*.<sup>26</sup> Since this path seeks to erase the essentially individual and subjective element of what makes human existence meaningful and significant, it also traffics in non-authenticity.

Working through this aphorism (and others like it) the teacher is given a general conceptual landscape with which to discuss authenticity. With it, the teacher can now ask students if, on Confucian grounds, they feel that their cognitive ends are unified with (and their practical identities harmonious with) being *jen* and being authentic, or with one or both of the two ways of being *min*. Since self-determination is such an important goal for students, they obviously recoil at the thought of being *min* in the fashion that Confucius describes (especially the state of bewilderment). For certain, my students do see *min* in others, and often in class are more than happy to provide anonymous examples of friends and family members who, in their opinion, fail to question, investigate, and/or understand tradition, society, or the normative standards of their peer groups (all things considered, the *li* of their lives). Speaking of the other pole of *min*, most students also seem to know at least one ‘rebel’ who thinks of himself as entirely independent and sep-

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lead to harmful behavior...’ Here Confucius reminds us that a desire, say, for courage without an understanding of when and in what situations and in what way we are directed to act in such ways we are liable to, for example, fight wrongly to defend tyrants. Thus, without recourse to the ‘collective’ identities of one’s ancestors, (the *li*), we are left without a way of understanding what ‘the right or true’ path is, and without this, we cannot ‘find our place’ within the world (authenticity).

<sup>26</sup> This is a controversial definition of conformity that I obviously cannot argue for in detail in this paper. I acknowledge, however, the existence of contrary views here; Kwong-Lui Shun suggests that some adhere to the ‘definitional’ interpretation of the relationship between *jen* and *li* which sees *jen* behaviour as seeking to acquire exact conformity with the *Zhoi li*, the traditions of an earlier past generation that Confucius has great respect for. I disagree with this interpretation, preferring Kwong-Lui Shun’s belief that while *jen* requires a way of acting in accord with the *li*, *jen* can also be used to adjust or correct the *li*, and so *jen* is not defined by a given set of rules and codes.

arate from his environment, someone who 'does not need others' and who seems to struggle daily at the project of assuring that the meaning of his/her behaviour cannot be traced back in any way to the noxious influence of a larger cultural or traditional framework.

During discussion of these issues with students it becomes apparent that they agree with Confucius' view—none of them think authenticity requires conformity and few, if any, think that authentic human living is consistent with not being influenced in any way by others or by tradition. An easy way for students to understand this is to think of it in terms of their parents. Whereas, on the one hand, students do recognise—and embrace—the fact that 'who they are' is (and should be) deeply influenced by the normative structures introduced by their parents, they also understand that they will need to appropriate those structures in a creative sense if they are to breathe a sense of life into their parents' teachings, something that requires that they exist as individuals.

But the question is—are my students authentic individuals? They surely want to be, and they rarely admit to harbouring actual intentions to be non-authentic. Keeping in mind Mencius' warning about unknowingly undermining what one claims to value, how can we ascertain if our identities are unified and harmonious with our goal for self-determination? To examine this question, I propose to students that we search the *Analects* further to try to ascertain what a Confucian believes the motivational component of *min*, or non-authenticity, is. From there, students can then analyse their own ends not explicitly in terms of outright desires and aims for non-authenticity, but rather in terms of whether those ends seem to exhibit the psychology of *min*-motivational structures. This goal leads us to our next task—a textual investigation of *min* psychology.

## Identifying *Min*—The Psychology of Vice

Pursuing this issue textually, we find that Confucius often ascribes the motivational differences between *jen* and *min* to typologies he calls the 'gentleman' and the 'small man'. The difference between the two is, he suggests, that 'the gentleman understands what is moral. The small



man understands what is profitable'.<sup>27</sup> In short, the suggestion is that the difference between 'virtuous' (authentic) motivation and 'vicious' (non-authentic) motivation is that vicious motivation is always driven by a desire for profit (small man) whereas virtuous motivation is never profit seeking, but rather altruistic in character (the gentleman).

One way to understand this distinction is obvious to students. Whereas one person saves the life of another because there will be a likely monetary return for doing so (and so one's motivation is clearly profit seeking and vicious), another does so because she sympathises with the suffering of the person in question (and so it is virtuous). How, though, can we adapt Confucius' points here to students' general concerns about learning how to authentically engage in self-definition and likewise how to avoid ends inconsistent with that goal? One aphorism that is helpful on this question has Confucius saying:

Guide them by edicts, keep them in line with punishments and the common people will stay out of trouble but will have no sense of shame. Guide them by virtue, keep them in line with the rites, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves.<sup>28</sup>

There are two interrelated points here. The first is Confucius' observation that a person's behaviour can be motivated by external forces or by internal forces.<sup>29</sup> Since non-authenticity is often understood as a state that results from being motivated by what is outside 'who one is' (since

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<sup>27</sup> *Analects*, IV. 16.

<sup>28</sup> *Analects*, II. 3.

<sup>29</sup> This distinction, and the way in which it is used to differentiate virtuous and vicious motivations, reminds one of the example of 'playing chess' that Alastair MacIntyre uses in his *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1984). There, MacIntyre draws the analogy between virtue and the way one plays chess when one is in pursuit of 'internal goods'. He suggests that although children begin to play chess only by external motivation—namely, because they are promised a reward if they play or if they win, after a while the child (if they become a real chess player) will be motivated simply by a desire to acquire the 'internal goods' of the game (to become more skilful, knowledgeable, etc.) and in so doing will no longer need external motivation to engage with the game. Similarly, although all virtue ethicists think that children must be morally educated in the beginning with punishment and reward, the goal is that a state can be achieved when the person is eventually motivated by the 'internal goods' of the good life

one's ends in such a case do not express a motivating force exemplifying one's ideal self), we can be sure that it, like vice, will always stem from external motivation and virtue and authenticity will be associated with internal motivation. The second point expands on this, suggesting that external motivation—generally understood—always reduces in some way to being motivated to endorse an end because it is a means to achieving a reward or escaping a punishment.

Described in this general way, Confucius' description of *min*-motivation makes the description of the behaviour of a non-authentic *min* person sound like a Skinnerian's description of the movement of a rat in an operant chamber. Essentially, Confucius leaves us with a portrait of the non-authentic *min* that sees them as hedonistic herd animals that will move this way or that way only when they have been sufficiently trained to do so through the pain of the cattle-prod (or perhaps, through the punishments assigned to breaking legal codes), or through the anticipation of reward. In fact, Confucius goes so far as to suggest that the *min* are incapable of intelligible movement in the absence of external motivation, claiming that '...when punishments do not fit the crimes, the common people will not know where to put hand and foot'.<sup>30</sup> Given that the non-authentic *min* 'move' only on the basis of punishment and reward, Confucius suggests that they 'can be made to follow a path, but not to understand it',<sup>31</sup> again highlighting the absence of internal motivation.

Given this basic characterisation of *min*-psychology, as a group we can now apply these points to a few cases of 'ends' or behaviours presented in the *Analects* to see if they are *min* in character. Out of the many passages that students and I reflect on in the *Analects*, I will focus here on a student favourite, one that suggests that 'the gentleman agrees with others without being an echo. The small man echoes without being in agreement'.<sup>32</sup> On the surface, the aphorism is easy enough for students to understand. 'Echoing' invites images of disembodied

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(and thus will meet the necessary condition for virtue), say, a desire to be more courageous, or to better exemplify integrity, and so the person will no longer need external stimuli to be motivated by this pursuit.

<sup>30</sup> *Analects*, XIII. 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Analects*, VIII, 6.

<sup>32</sup> *Analects*, II, 23.

voices being carried through a canyon, each repeat more hollow and disembodied than the last. Taken in this way, the metaphor of the ‘echo’ suggests a voice removed from its human (for Confucius—authentic) component and as such, empty and without significance. Students quickly see ‘echoing’ as conformist behaviour, and identify it as a case of ‘bewilderment’. They recognise that such a person does not agree with the wisdom of the crowd as a result of individual assessment (and so it is an instance of learning without thinking) but rather ‘echoes’ as a conditioned response to the phonetic speech acts of a crowd (which serve collectively in this case as external stimulus). On the other hand, agreeing (as an end) without echoing suggests that one is not mirroring the collective speech act of the crowd, but agreeing because one is ‘internally’ motivated to do so as the result of independent critical and imaginative assessment (thus thinking and learning). As a result, in this case ‘agreeing’ accidentally coheres with what others have said.

How does ‘echoing’ embody the motivational structure of *min* we have just discerned? Students quickly connect the dots here. From the Confucian perspective, an echoer’s words are motivated by fear of being ostracised, shunned, and by worry about losing the benefits associated with acceptance into a peer group. Seeing the analogy with situations in their own lives, students know personally exactly what Confucius means. Too many times, peer pressure forces them to say ‘yes’, out of fear, to goals or to normative standards that a larger group has sanctioned. Whether such a reaction is motivated by a desire to avoid pain or by a desire to acquire the rewards of acceptance, students see quickly that in such cases, saying ‘yes’ is motivated by a hedonistic desire for (social) profit (and as such is externally motivated).

Clearly, authenticity calls upon us to critically assess and come to an individual decision about who to be and what to do. In a world of diverse attitudes and norms, students recognise and identify with Confucius’ suggestion that a commitment to integrity and authenticity in such cases will leave one liked by some and disliked by others. In an amusing aphorism, the *Analects* states:

Tzu-kung asked, ‘All in the village like him. What do you think of that?’ The Master said, ‘That is not enough’. ‘All in the village dislike him. What do you think of that?’ The Master said, ‘That is not enough either’. ‘Those in the village who are good like him, those

who are bad dislike him'. The Master said, 'That would be better'.<sup>33</sup>

Obviously, this introduces a real degree of difficulty in unifying one's cognitive ends (should I echo? Not echo?) and one's ideal self (desiring authenticity), since integrity (which says 'do not echo') calls upon one to cause oneself pain as a result of being disliked by some 'in the village'. This is something a superficial hedonist of the *min* will not countenance. This being the case, students begin to recognise a central Confucian point; namely, that the cognitive end of integrity (a necessary condition for authenticity) cannot be consistent with the cognitive end of superficial hedonism (seen here in echoing behaviour). Moreover, since hedonism will dispose the agent to echo the crowd, the practical identity of hedonism must dispose the agent to the world in a fundamentally different and incompatible way than *jen*.

Although students do see Confucius' point, and even begin to recognise that they themselves (don't we all?) fall prey to *min*-type ends of this kind, most resist the conclusion, wondering just how far one should take Confucius' injunction to prune the self. Typically, students will suggest in class that at times it is 'just not worth it' to oppose the crowd. If one's peers make a passing racist joke or a homophobic comment, neither of which one agrees with, is it worth the hassle to object and draw attention to it? Confucius clearly thinks it is:

The Master said, 'Cunning words, an ingratiating face and utter servility, these things Tso-ch'iu Ming found shameful. I, too, find them shameful. To be friendly towards someone while concealing one's hostility, this Tso-ch'iu Ming found shameful. I too, find it shameful'.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Analects*, XIII. 24. The two poles of *min* are clearly represented here. 'Bewilderment' seeks to 'positively' conform by adapting the exact content of those around one. 'Peril' also seeks to conform, but in a negative sense by adapting the reverse of the content of those around one. As a result, the bewildered seek to be loved by all and the perilous seek to be hated by all. In the end, both poles are motivated by the same thing—being directed towards achieving the kinds of reactions from others that makes the person feel good about him/herself.

<sup>34</sup> *Analects*, V, 25. The Chinese graph here is *xin*, which Rosemont and Ames translate as 'trustworthy', and which describes the need for one's words and behaviour to be consistent. See Rosemont, Henry and Ames, Roger, *The Analects of Confucius, A Philosophical Translation*, (New York: Ballantine Publishing 1998) p. 58.

When students present such objections to Confucius' 'hardball' approach (almost every time!), it creates an opportunity to reinforce the last point about practical identity by 'bringing the point home' to students and their lives. Essentially, I suggest to students that a Confucian will ask: If we find ourselves framing situations in just this way, thinking 'is it worth it to be oneself in situation X?' or 'is it worth it to exemplify integrity in this situation?'—then aren't we stating a kind of conditional commitment to authenticity (and integrity), one that has binding force on us only up until it causes a certain level of displeasure? If so, then from the Confucian standpoint we must stand back and honestly ask ourselves: what really is the conceptual lens through which we see the world? Clearing away obvious levels of self-deception, the answer is obvious—talking in this way suggests that we 'see' the world and assess it hedonistically, or in terms of *min*, a way of seeing that points strongly to the fact that we are already engaging, and have engaged in the past, with ends inconsistent with authenticity (since practical identities for X require the past pursuit of cognitive ends aiming for X). So, as the evidence shows, the process of undermining our stated goals of authenticity has already begun.

Recognising that we are assessing large-scale questions such as 'is it worth it to be true to myself?' in terms of a *min* motivational structure should—and often does—raise a large 'red flag' for students. Should students perhaps rethink their alleged commitment to 'being true to themselves'? The more difficult question that Confucius wants them to ask themselves is this one—are they really just herd animals? Such a discussion does cause all of my students to at least take pause and reconsider what integrity, the foundation of 'being authentic,' seems to require of them and how valuable it is (or perhaps isn't) to them. It also forces them to look at themselves honestly, without self-deception, to see who they really are and to compare this to who they claim they want to be. What students begin to notice is that when the *min* engage in inauthentic behaviour they are actually showing themselves to be internally weak, as *min* motivation reveals a kind of person who is internally insecure as a psychological type, one who needs to win (false) security through popularity (via echo). This Confucian insight always wins a great deal of approval from students; namely, that vice and non-authenticity seem to reveal weakness, whereas virtue and

authenticity seem to be signs of inner strength.<sup>35</sup>

By this point, the *Analects* helps students recognise that their quest for authenticity will require that they be more cautious, to think through the 'why?' of an end before participating in it, to know what motivates it and as such to know what practical identity will eventually develop from it. In this way, they learn to value the development of a real sense of care about the composition of their own identities. That said, it is not my aim to leave students on a negative note here, or to make them feel that since they in all probability do exhibit *min*-behaviour themselves, they are already like the *min* and so are lost. Instead, in discussion I try to focus on the fact that beginning to ask these honest questions (developing *chung* in the process) is the first stage towards developing the right kinds of habits. The reason is obvious—self-analysis is painful and difficult to engage in and so we can be sure that the *min* will not participate in it when it gets too difficult or uncomfortable. The fact that they are still engaged with the project shows that they are learning to undermine whatever aspects of *min*-practical identity they might presently embody. Moreover, because what we find may be unsettling to us, a commitment to such introspective activity requires courage,<sup>36</sup> further undermining nascent *min* dispositions and facilitating an emergent practical identity that is consistent with *jen* or authenticity. So, in beginning to walk this path, one begins to develop now the right ends—self-reflection, self-criticism, a desire for integrity—each of which will, if repeated, develop the development of a skill

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<sup>35</sup> It is an interesting question how well Confucius' stance here—and the very distinction between *min* and *jen* types—would fit into what Michael Slote, in his *Morals From Motives* (New York: Oxford University Press 2001), calls a 'cool agent based' approach to virtue ethics. Specifically, Slote says that 'cool agent basing' sees the aretaic value of a motive as grounded in whether or not it is an expression of inner strength on the part of the agent. Thus, one might be reminded here of Nietzsche, who does not seem to criticise the action of compassion, but rather attacks the Christian motivation behind it, which he sees as fundamentally rooted in psychological weakness. On the other hand, Nietzsche praises and lauds compassionate acts that are expressions of what he sees as an abundance of inner strength.

<sup>36</sup> As Michael Slote reminds us, '...it takes courage to face some of one's own deepest fears and desires, and to the extent wisdom as a life good requires facing one's inner demons the important connection between wisdom and courage is further underscored'. *Morals from Motives*, (Oxford University Press: New York 2001), p. 159.

set of virtues consistent with and supportive of authenticity and which will undermine hedonism. If such a commitment can be maintained, eventually the student will begin to see the world in terms of *jen*. Or, as Confucius himself remarks, ‘is *jen* really far away? No sooner do I desire it than it is here’.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. Instilling Shu

Up to this point I have discussed a way to succeed in getting students motivated to engage in moral evaluation through the project of pruning their own identities in order to achieve their self-professed desire to be authentic individuals. I argued that analysing the text of the *Analects* provides a support for the connection between student desire for authenticity and *jen*, the Confucian moral aim. I then suggested that we can also use the text to uncover what Confucius takes to be the motivation of non-authenticity (or *min*) – hedonism. Armed with this knowledge, students can now analyse the motivations behind their own ends to see if they are unknowingly pursuing the kinds of goals that undermine authenticity. Lastly, I suggested that we can use this discussion to make clear to students that the kinds of virtues required to attain authenticity, such as integrity and courage, require that one strives to prune hedonistic ends from one’s identity in order to build up the right kinds of dispositions, or the right kind of practical identity, namely one that supports authenticity by allowing the agent to see the world in terms of *jen*.

Still, if our aim was to find a way to instill the Confucian ‘one thread’ into students, one large piece of the puzzle is missing. Since, as we saw early in the last section, being *jen* requires that a person’s ideal self exemplify care or benevolence, ‘authenticity’ for a Confucian must have an altruistic or other-regarding dimension, otherwise known as *shu*.

Tzu-kung asked, ‘Is there a single word which can be a guide to conduct throughout life?’ The Master said, ‘It is perhaps the word, ‘*shu*.’ Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.’<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Analects*, VII. 30.

<sup>38</sup> *Analects*, XV, 24.

In the Confucian system, *shu* means 'reciprocity,' and as an ethical principle it functions as what we call the 'golden rule'. Taken in the context of the 'one thread', *shu* demands of us that we identify and remove from our cognitive repertoire of ends those that are inconsistent with what we would not want others to do to us, which in the present discussion will mean pruning any end that seeks to degrade another person's ability to successfully pursue authenticity. This, however, immediately raises the question: Is it even possible to disrupt another person's ability to successfully pursue authenticity (understood in this context as pruning one's ends to make them consistent with who one ideally wants to be)?

Discussing this issue with students in the classroom, I have found that they overwhelmingly seem to believe that the answer is 'no'. Digging deeper into their reasoning, I have found that students often seem to agree with one another that the skills or abilities required to successfully pursue authenticity (critical reasoning might be one such skill) are innate, and also that the expression of those skills or abilities are internal to the person in question. According to most students, to say that such skills are innate is to say that all persons have these abilities or skills simply by virtue of being human. To say that the exercise of those innate skills is internal is just to say that successfully using them is solely a matter of mental willing.

Putting the two points together, students cannot see how the successful achievement of authenticity can be interfered with by others. As far as they see it, it is one thing to say that an innate ability to move one's arm can be impeded by others because the successful exercise of that innate skill depends on the absence of certain external factors, such as another person who physically holds my arm motionless. But how, they think, can another person prevent me from using innate mental abilities? Since students cannot imagine how this could happen, they consequently view failures to attain authenticity—such as our previous example of 'echoing' the crowd—as mere 'failures to will' on the part of the person in question. Since students almost always object overwhelmingly in this way (wanting to see all moral failures as entirely the personal responsibility of the person), the insistence on the centrality of *shu* to the pursuit of authenticity perplexes them, as it appears to them to be devoid of content.

In class I try to challenge this view by pointing out that



Confucius strongly believes that whether or not a person is capable of authenticity depends greatly on the (at least historical) presence of certain external conditions (such as the presence of certain types of quality nurturing relationships) in that person's life (this mirrors the Confucian/Aristotelian focus on the dependence of virtue upon the right moral education of children). To introduce this, I begin by framing the class discussion with the Confucian belief that failing to achieve authenticity can occur for two main reasons, one of which mirrors their own intuitions about holding the non-authentic person personally responsible and one of which points to the possibility of holding other people personally responsible and accountable for those failures (and so this does not mirror their intuitions).

The first way in which one can fail to achieve authenticity is evident, as we have already dealt with it in some detail in section 2. Specifically, and right in line with students' intuitions, Confucius often suggests that whether a person successfully pursues authenticity will often be a function of how hard that person devotes effort (*chung*) to the task. Many times, Confucius argues, we fail at the project of *jen* because, being guided by hedonism (and thus by *min*), we give in to the desire to end the pain that comes with struggle and find ourselves falling into patterns of sloth and laziness, even when such behaviours are highly destructive to the kinds of introspection and self-correction *jen* (or authenticity) requires. In this particular aphorism, Confucius upbraids a student for his self-deceptive rationalisations concerning his failures:

Jan Ch'iu said, 'It is not that I am not pleased with your Way, but rather that my strength gives out.' The Master said, 'A man whose strength gives out collapses along the course. In your case, you set the limits beforehand.'<sup>39</sup>

Like the students who asked 'is it really worth it to exemplify integrity in this difficult situation?' there is no doubt that Confucius is clearly arguing that Jan Ch'iu has placed a conditional value on the cultivation of personal excellence. Consequently, his own way of viewing and valuing the world (his practical identity, here obviously the result of

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<sup>39</sup> *Analects*, VI, 12.

past bad choices) is to blame for his failures, not 'inability'. Not surprisingly, Confucius can be just as hard on himself.

It is these things that cause me concern: failure to cultivate virtue, failure to go more deeply into what I have learned, inability, when I am told what is right, to move to where it is, and inability to reform myself when I have defects.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, it is possible that Confucius—the perennial self-critic—is here suggesting that he, like Jan Ch'iu, at times simply lacks the effort or commitment to be *jen*. I would like to suggest, however, that the correct way of understanding the meaning of this passage is actually ambiguous. Another way to interpret it has Confucius worried that in certain contexts and situations in the future he might literally lack the ability (at some level of difficulty, not in total) to 'go more deeply into what he has learned' or to 'move to the right' or to 'reform himself when he has a defect'. This second way of interpreting failures to successfully attain authenticity (or *jen*) does not cohere with students' intuitions that such failures are always explainable in terms of the agent simply 'failing to will' (as was the case with Jan Ch'iu). If we can provide a reading of this passage (and others) that has Confucius suggesting that some failures to achieve *jen* (or authenticity) can be at least partially traced back to the failures of others, then we will have provided the grounds to show students that *shu* (treating others in certain ways) is integrally connected to *chung*, or to the pursuit of authenticity.

Coming at this passage by looking first at other closely related ones, I first ask students to explain what Confucius is saying when he critically states that 'Yen Hui is of little help to me in my pursuit of knowledge and understanding. He agrees with almost everything I say'.<sup>41</sup> The first thing that we discuss is that in the *Analects*, Confucius is generally uninterested in critiquing people on matters not related to the pursuit of *jen*. As such, it makes sense to read his critique as pointing to a perceived failure to be *jen* on Hui's part. How? By the time we reach this issue my students are very familiar with the sad (due to his

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<sup>40</sup> *Analects*, VII, 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Analects*, XI, 4.

early death and the textual descriptions of Confucius' grief), yet inspiring character of Yen Hui, Confucius' favorite and (according to him) most accomplished student. Being well acquainted with him, my students are aware that although Confucius thinks of Yen Hui as closer to *jen* than anyone else,<sup>42</sup> Hui's character flaw is that he is overly deferential. By suggesting that Hui 'agrees with everything I say', Confucius alludes directly to this flaw, reminding students of the phenomenon of 'echoing' we earlier analysed.

With this in mind, one way students read the criticism of Hui's deference is to argue that Hui is too close to the vice of 'bewilderment' and thus does not work hard enough to establish his own individuality, in this instance by critically assessing what Confucius teaches. This interpretation also makes sense of Confucius' attention in the aphorism to the fact that Hui's failure specifically results in a deficiency of 'knowledge and understanding', as these concepts often refer in the *Analects* to fusing one's subjective perspective with communal ritual (thinking and learning), in order to see the true significance and meaning of experienced situations.

Although this would be a legitimate criticism of Hui's deferential character—one that Confucius has surely levelled at him in other places—I emphasise to students that this is actually not the specific criticism Confucius makes in the passage. Rather, Confucius specifically links his critique of Hui to the fact that he has failed to help Confucius to develop his own 'understanding and knowledge'. If my interpretation so far is plausible, then what Confucius is saying is that Hui, in being overly deferential, not only does harm to his own pursuit of authenticity but moreover hinders (in this case) Confucius' ability to become authentic by failing to help him to learn how to fuse his subjective perspective with communal ritual. If this is right, then Confucius seems to be pointing to a way that a person can fail to be *jen* (himself, in this example) in a way that does not fully reduce to a failure to exert effort or will on the part of the agent. Specifically, under such an interpretation, a person can fail to be *jen* (at least at times)

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<sup>42</sup> Yen Hui, according to Confucius, has the 'record' for consistent uninterrupted exemplification of *jen*. He says, 'in his heart for three months at a time Hui does not lapse from benevolence. The others attain benevolence in fits and starts'. *Analects*, VI. 7.

because of the failure of others to help him or her learn how to do so, or to learn how to achieve 'knowledge and understanding'.

It is with this reading of Confucius' critique of Hui in mind that I suggest we read Confucius' earlier suggestion that he is worried that in certain contexts and situations he simply will fail to 'cultivate virtue', 'move to the right', or 'reform himself when he has defects'. What Confucius is stating there, I would suggest, is that pursuing *jen* has an individual (and effort driven) component and a communal (developmental) component. In fact, given Confucius' constant reference to what we can call the relational nature of selfhood, it would actually seem out of place for the pursuit of authenticity to not be at least partially dependent upon relational or communal contexts. Thus, regardless of the presence of individual effort, if others around Confucius fail to be *shu* towards him, he will ultimately fail in his efforts to be authentic. With this in mind, since a person who desires authenticity would not want others to fail to be *shu* towards him, Confucius' discussion of *jen* (and thus, by extension, *shu*) builds in an obviously pro-active stance towards the development of authenticity in others. As Confucius says;

A benevolent man helps others to take their stand in so far as he himself wishes to take his stand, and gets others there in so far as he himself wishes to get there. The method to take as analogy what is near at hand can be called the method of benevolence.<sup>43</sup>

While I think this makes a good *prima facie* case to students that Confucius does think we can, in fact, affect another person's ability for authenticity through our own actions, students are still not clear why this is the case. Unfortunately, this essay is not the proper place to enter into an in-depth discussion of this important issue.<sup>44</sup> However, in closing, we should say a few brief things about this question.

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<sup>43</sup> *Analects*, VI. 30.

<sup>44</sup> There is a large literature, especially in feminist scholarship, on this question. For further reference on the relational context dependency of authenticity skills, see Diana Meyers' *Self, Society and Personal Choice* (New York: Oxford University Press 1984), pp. 76–98; Marilyn Freidman's *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, (New York: Oxford University Press 2003), pp. 81–98; Catrina MacKensie's 'Imagining Oneself Otherwise' in *Relational Autonomy*, ed. MacKensie and Skolar (New York: Oxford University Press 2000).

In class, I suggest to students that although the mental skills required to successfully pursue authenticity are innate, they are innate in the sense that language skills are innate, which just means that learning to actualise those innate propensities in the right way will require just the right relational contexts. So when students suggest that authenticity skills are innate and internally exercised, they miss the fact that although a skill can be internally exercised it is not necessarily the case that the development of that skill is wholly internal in nature and not dependent on others. Just as learning a language well requires being raised in a certain (helpful) community of competent language speakers, developing a competency with authenticity skills requires the presence of those around me who will help me to cultivate and correctly use them myself.

As an example, in class I focus on just one of what I take to be the many skills required for pursuing authenticity—introspective critical analysis.<sup>45</sup> I take this to be a central skill—and students agree—because without it the agent cannot participate in meaningfully critiquing and assessing his or her own ends, or perhaps those prescribed by cultural norms and traditions in order to ‘find one’s own path’ (through thinking and learning). As a result, our question now becomes: Does the possession of a well developed competence for critical reasoning reduce to a matter of simply ‘willing’ it to come into existence? Although it is partially true (one must desire to get better and try to do so, and so Confucius and my students rightly emphasise the need to take personal responsibility for at least a portion of one’s failures to be a good practitioner of critical reason), it seems odd to say that competence building with respect to this skill is simply a matter of internal effort.

There are two elements of critical reasoning that I think reveal this: first, the fact that people need to be taught how to correctly use reasoning skills. On an amusing note, this particular point is especially salient to the students I have in my required philosophy courses (such as ethics). It is a salient point to them because they know first hand that they often suggest to me that although they try to engage in the kind of critical reasoning that philosophical thinking demands, they just don’t

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<sup>45</sup> I am thinking here of the work of Diana Meyers’ discussion of what she calls ‘autonomy’ or ‘agentic’ skills in her *Self, Society and Personal Choice*, pp. 76-98.

seem to be very good at it. When pressed for the origin of their failure, they often will point (correctly, I think) to the fact that their ability to critically think was never really cultivated in the past, either in high school, or even in what is required of them in their everyday lives.

They are right—we need others around us, others who function as teachers (these can be parents, friends, actual instructors) who help to ‘walk us through’ particular instances of critical reasoning to show us that this or that purported exercise of the skill is good or bad (and why). In fact, I think it is very easy to read a vast majority of the *Analects*—which mostly describes Confucius’ pedagogical interactions with his students—as a chronicle of his attempts to teach his students how to cultivate, develop, and become more comfortable with these sorts of innate, but mostly untapped, abilities.<sup>46</sup>

As a result, the *Analects* drives home a central point—without others around us who do not simply model the correct use of such skills, but who moreover interact with us to help us find the right ways to use them, our admittedly innate authenticity skills will not develop to a degree to which we can claim competency in their use. Thus, returning to Hui’s overly deferential stance towards Confucius’ teachings, I suggest to students that Confucius is worried that Hui is not functioning as a person who will help him (or others) to recognise errors or self-deceptions when they occur in his own reasoning. Unhinging his own critical abilities from their relational dependence, slowly over time Confucius will lose the ability to help himself become *jen*, a failure that will eventually spill over into an inability on his part to help other people on their own individual paths.

If this very brief sketch of the necessary dependence of authenticity skills on nurturing relational contexts is right, then the directive of *shu* will not be empty. Since we will not desire that others degrade

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<sup>46</sup> In her discussion of the necessary conditions of full moral being, Marilyn Friedman notes that some agents fail in their critical abilities due to severe lack of confidence in themselves as autonomous reasoning agents. In such situations, we typically find that such agents are unwilling to trust the results of their own analyses (which could be correct) and so will seek to defer the analysis of her ends to another agent(s) or, in what reduces to an overuse of the relational context in which critical reasoning emerges, the agent might exceedingly defer the judgment of the worthiness of her own analyses to other agents. See Friedman’s ‘Moral Integrity and the Deferential Wife’, *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 47 (1985), pp.141-150.

our ability for authenticity, we cannot, by *shu*, endorse cognitive ends that result in degrading another's ability to pursue that human good. Moreover, passages in the *Analects* demonstrate to us a need to not merely avoid a negative stance towards developing others, but rather point to the need to take a positive proactive stance towards helping them 'make their stand' as individuals. Thus, being authentic will require, as Confucius often notes, striving to be an exemplar for others,<sup>47</sup> and to embrace the role of teacher (when it is needed) in one's relationships. For a Confucian, *shu* sometimes requires 'tough love' with others (when they are misguided) and with ourselves—to be self-critical of our own attempts to sabotage another's pursuit of authenticity because we feel, perhaps, threatened by what that pursuit might produce. Tough love is not a position foreign to the *Analects*. Recognising that it is written that *jen* requires one to 'Love your fellow man', we are also told that: 'the Master said, 'Can you love anyone without making him work hard? Can you do your best for anyone without educating him?'' Therefore, embodying the 'one thread' entails that one strives to develop a greater sensitivity towards care, for the health of one's own identity and for the health of the identities of those around one.

## Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that one can successfully involve students in seeing and cultivating altruistic natures by first adapting one's pedagogical strategy to acknowledge what interests students, namely their own authenticity, and then using the Confucian *Analects* to show that a full unfolding of what it means to be authentic as a person entails that it has a caring, other-directed dimension. Thus, if successful, students can be involved in the task of ethics by appealing to their distinctively Western egoism and redirecting it subtly towards the cultivation of other-regarding virtue.

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<sup>47</sup> Confucius' insistence on such issues is clear. At II, 1 he suggests that 'the rule of virtue can be compared to the Pole Star which does command the homage of the multitude of stars without leaving its place' and at XII, 19 he explains the function of exemplification, suggesting that '...the virtue of the gentleman is like the wind, the virtue of the small man is like grass. Let the wind blow over the grass and it is sure to bend.'





# Some Perplexities of Teaching Philosophy Online

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In 'Taking Philosophical Dialogue Online' (2003), I put forward a rather optimistic view of the possibilities of using online discussion as a way of developing or enhancing students' higher order cognitive skills and argumentational skills. Adopting a strategy from Lakatos, I suggested that 'this may be a period during which the hypothesis that computer-mediated communication leads to [...] learning benefits, is protected from disconfirming evidence, since there is good reason to think that ultimately it will be well-supported' (*Discourse* Vol.3 No.1, 2003 p.130). Despite conflicting evidence, it seemed that the medium should work if used 'properly', and I made a few suggestions as to what 'properly' meant.

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There were three main grounds for this optimism:

- Thought and expression: Online discussion occurs in an oral-written ‘blend’, pedagogically falling somewhere between the seminar and the essay. It could provide the benefits of writing, without the inhibiting factor of academic style.
- Social: The communal, shared nature of online discussion is a forum for the inter-personal aspects of learning.
- The nature of argument: Arguments are other-directed and, as such, are social as much as cognitive.

These three grounds together should add up to adequate preliminary support for the view that putting forward, defending and challenging arguments in an inter-subjective forum which allows for informal but written articulation of thought should be beneficial for the development of argumentation skills.

Since then, I have designed and written two online philosophy courses, one for the Alliance for Lifelong Learning, a history of ideas course on human nature, and the other, an introductory philosophy course for the Oxford University Department for Continuing Education, and my experience with the medium is now much more extensive, both as a teacher and researcher. In particular, the course titled ‘Introduction to Philosophy’ was designed to put into practice some of the principles of ‘Taking Philosophy Online’ (*Discourse* Vol.3, No.1, 2003), including a number of student-led discussion activities as recommended in that article. As a researcher, I have been interested in online discourse as a medium for social interaction, as well as in the more pedagogical question, evaluating whether it is indeed a good medium for developing argumentational skills; as a teacher of philosophy, I am interested in evaluating how well it works as a tool for teaching philosophy and philosophical skills.

The ‘Introduction to Philosophy’ course is a continuing education course aimed mainly at adults. Although assessed, these courses are undertaken largely for pleasure and curiosity. In comparison to teaching philosophy to adults in traditional face-to-face contexts, it

seemed—albeit on an impressionistic level—to be a quantum improvement with respect to the quality of the interaction, and the levels of student-student and student-tutor engagement. Not only did I, as the tutor, believe that students' skills improved over the duration of the course, but the students seemed to share this view, as reported in post-course surveys and questionnaires. On the whole, students said that they had enjoyed themselves enormously and that they felt that they had learned much, in particular that they had learned 'to argue'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the course has been successful in that it continues to attract students, who go on to do further courses, and in that its basic design has been used in other philosophy courses. However, there were also some students who were not quite as persuaded by the efficacy of online discussion for their own learning, and one student in particular expressed his personal reaction to it in a way which I think may capture the frustration of many philosophers using the medium:

During my career [...] I became skilled at participating in chaired meetings where body language played a part and the answer to a question was gradually moulded into an acceptable form through a recognisable thread of discussion. Consequently, what I find I have great difficulty in coping with is an unmediated discussion where ideas are tossed around in a seemingly near-retention fashion. It seems like building a dry-stone wall where, no sooner have you found the best stone to fill a hole than someone either takes that stone away or chips bits off so that it no longer fits the hole.<sup>2</sup>

The discussion was supposed to be a structured and moderated one, in line with the suggestions for online discussions made in 'Taking Philosophical Dialogue Online' (*Discourse* Vol.3, No.1, 2003) ; clearly, however, the order and (more-or-less) coherence that this form of discussion is supposed to bring was not experienced by this student, and, I suspect, many others. Indeed, as I started to analyse the discussion subsequently, I could not find the order and coherence that I had believed to be there, as the tutor of the course.

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<sup>1</sup> As I am not reporting on the evaluation of the course as such in this paper, details of numbers etc., and other aspects of the analysis of post-course surveys and questionnaires will be omitted.

<sup>2</sup> Email correspondence, used with permission.

This article is not meant as a systematic evaluation of the extent to which online discussions were indeed pedagogically effective, and if so, whether they were more effective than face-to-face courses for similar groups of students. Instead, I am interested in a more basic set of questions into how to carry out the research which will allow an answer to such questions as the following:

- Is CSCL (computer-supported collaborative learning) ‘good’ for teaching philosophy?
- Is it ‘good’ for teaching argument and critical reasoning?
- Does learning occur in computer-supported collaboration, and, if so, how?
- Are there more and less effective ways of supporting collaboration, and, if so, what are they?
- What is the nature of computer-supported collaboration, discussion, and discourse?
- What bearing does the answer to the previous question have on whether CSCL can support teaching or developing argument skills?
- What methodologies or approaches or frameworks or methods should we use to answer these questions?

These are for the most part questions that need an empirical research approach. However, perhaps the most surprising discovery of my experience of online discourse for teaching philosophy has been the extent to which philosophy is involved in framing and guiding the empirical research of the discourse.

## Some initial perplexities of research

The very first perplexity of researching online philosophy, the one which gives rise to all the others, is that there is no way of distancing

oneself from the technology in order to answer these questions. Just as it is not easily available to us to stand outside of literacy in order to answer the question of whether writing and reading has affected the way we think, so—in at least some not insignificant senses—we’re getting to the position where we cannot stand outside of the new technologies to answer the question of what effect they’re having. Of course, there are still some senses in which we can do just that: to the extent that we know what non-online-technological learning is, we can gauge whether it has been affected by being ‘supported’ or ‘enhanced’ by online technologies. That means holding fixed the non-online-technological conception of learning while testing to see what difference technology has made. However, it is that very conception of learning that the technologies may be putting under pressure. This is not an idle speculation: distributed cognition, critical and interpretational practices geared to hypertext and the World Wide Web, and slippages occurring in notions and expectations of knowledge and information are, at the very least, testing traditional conceptions of what it is to learn anything, including philosophy.

There is another way in which research on the new technologies cannot distance itself from the new technologies, and that is in the tools used to carry out the research. For example, teaching in the medium of online discussions also means that there is an automatically generated ‘transcript’ which can be subjected to any number of different analytical techniques, quantitative and qualitative, very often supported by technologies. This will be a whole new area of research: how do the technologies that we have for counting, searching, segmenting, annotating, commenting, organising, saving, encoding, decoding etc. affect the kind of research that is done on material that is itself technologically couched?<sup>3</sup>

The situation is that we are trying to understand the nature of online discussion; our research into online discussion accesses the discussion online, and can operate upon the online discussion in much the same way as can participation in online discussion with respect to the manipulation, ordering and sequencing of items in the discussion; and it can do much more—subjecting it to concordancing, data-mining,

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<sup>3</sup> A comparison with the way in which instruments impact on science will be worthwhile. For example, Hacking (1983).

coding, etc. (for example, Wegerif & Mercer 1999).

Where is neutrality and objectivity when the means for doing research do not come apart from the thing researched? These are old questions for philosophy of social science, so perhaps we are, after all, on the familiar terrain of known uncertainties that bedevil enquiry. This problematic can be distinguished into issues relating to (1) the fact that the ‘object’ of research has a view; and (2) the fact that researchers are not distinct from that which they research. In technological research on technological genres of discourse there is a third fact, (3) the research itself—its agenda, its topics, questions and procedures—is (at least partly) driven by the technology. We may say that this is a not unencountered problem or set of issues (and again a comparison with Hacking’s discussion of the use of instruments in science would be of interest), but, then again, it is unclear whether it is indeed the same old issues re-emerging, or whether, faced with this newly emerging research scenario, we cannot help but try to probe it with some old but now inappropriate questions. At this early stage, answering these questions is like trying to get a grip on jelly with jelly.

## Teaching philosophical **argument** online

Online discussions are a ‘blend’ of the oral-aural and the written. This is particularly marked in asynchronous discussions, which are supposed to allow for reflection before contributing (before participating, before writing, before uttering), and the type of turn-taking which borrows more from the exchange of letters or emails than does synchronous discussion (or ‘chat’, the very name of which shows its modelling on speech). I have already mentioned how I had thought that this should be an advantage as a discursive strategy in getting students to learn how to ‘do’ philosophy: not quite the seminar, but not quite the essay either. Noting however, the tendency of online discussion to be chaotic, trivial or to simply die out, I stressed the importance of structuring discussions, and of moderating and guiding them. The following is an example of the way in which the discussions were structured.

## Activity 2.2 (required)

This is a group activity in the form of a student-led discussion. For this activity you'll work with your tutor group: Hume, Berkeley or Locke (you'll have received an email to tell you which group you're in). Your tutor will nominate a leader.

For this activity you should consider the questions:

(a) How many stages of doubt are there in the First Meditation? As a guideline, you can use your answer to the question on p. 13 (2) of Guttenplan et al.

(b) What does Descartes call into doubt at each stage?

Here are the candidates:

- (i) sensory deception
- (ii) dreaming
- (iii) God-or-fate
- (iv) evil demon

*Procedure for this activity:*

Because this is a group activity, which you will all be moving through together, you need to work together to a timetable. The overall deadline for the activity is [deleted]. However I have suggested deadlines for each stage—though I would urge you to try to respond as promptly as possible in order to make the leader's task easier.

The discussion leader will post to the discussion board his or her answer to these questions, and try to convince other students that he / she is right. (Suggested deadline)

All other students in the group will challenge the discussion leader's answer. (Suggested deadline)

The discussion leader responds to challenges; to which others in the group will reply by saying that they either are or are not persuaded (giving reasons). (Suggested deadline)

And this is an example of guidelines given to students with regards to the discussion leader's role:

- This is a student-led discussion; the leader will be nominated by the tutor.
- Leaders will initiate discussion by putting forward what they think are the most important questions to arise from Strawson's article.

- The other group members will agree or disagree that these are the most important questions, and give their reasons.
- In guiding the discussion, leaders can include any combination of the following in their response:
  - pointing out points of agreement and disagreement between others in the group
  - suggesting that one student in the group respond to a particular challenge or point made by another
  - taking up a challenge themselves and directing the discussion towards the most fruitful points
- Try to make some contribution to this discussion at least every second day, so that the discussion is kept going quite briskly. The main discussion should be completed by the evening of [deadline]. Remember that each member of the group is responsible for making the discussion interesting and lively: and the *sine qua non* of this is turning up regularly!

Over and above the discussion leader, the tutor also keeps track of the discussion, and intervenes when necessary—for example, when students are way off course, or are at a dead end.

What I had underestimated was the extent to which such measures cannot—and ought not to?—obliterate the fact that the medium of this discussion/‘conversation’ is hypertext. That is, it is a series of linked discursive turns; but this is misleading. It is a web of linked discursive turns.<sup>4</sup> If there is anything of which hypertext is the enemy it is of linearity.

Asynchronous online discussions are many-to-many conversations in the medium of hypertext. Time lends some directionality—and

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<sup>4</sup> Other terms could be used instead of ‘discursive turn’, such as contributions, utterances or lexias. Which term is used marks a slightly different research approach and conception. A lexia, for example, is a reading unit, the borders of which can be arbitrary and are set by reader/user not necessarily according to the overall ‘purpose’ or intention. Utterance uses the model of spoken language. Discourse is language as used, where usage defines and determines its meaning and interpretation; it is neither necessarily spoken or written.



one can open and close discussions or parts thereof at set stages so that students move through stages together. However, students do not follow the same rhythms, and even in a more-or-less controlled environment, it is unclear whether access occurs in the same order as the responses and replies were made. Exponentially, when dealing with a large number of contributions, this leads to a very complicated picture.

It is this feature of online discussion that, it seems to me, gave rise to the feeling of the student quoted above, that it is not just that someone can take apart your argument by criticising it or recasting its terms, but that one's own argument and indeed the wider discussion in which it is embedded, can change and shift according to the shifting network of discursive turns, depending on what is linked to what, in which order.<sup>5</sup>

Of course there are many ways of building linearity into hypertext, for example, making the links unidirectional, but then i) why use hypertext? and ii) if the links were unidirectional, it could not be used to generate discussion on the technical level. The tree structures that are often used in the discussion board interfaces to show the relation of first turn and response or reply in a thread are often not followed either by the way in which participants access the discussion (what they click on), or indeed in the content of the messages.<sup>6</sup> There is also quite a difference between looking away from a person and not listening to them in a face-to-face context and not reading their whole discursive turn when one first clicks on their message. In online discussion, the trace of the discussion is there, one can go back, juxtapose it with other entries and contributions, print it out, read it over morning coffee, or find oneself not able to face it and setting it down (all actions that students reported on doing as the discussions progressed).

These are all problems of trying to reconstruct the order, sequence and organisation of the discussion as it was experienced by participants in the discussion. In fact, at this point, we may wonder if

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<sup>5</sup> Technically, the means exist to reconstruct the paths taken by participants in a discussion in accessing and replying to other turns; however 'clicking paths' are not a reliable guide to what people actually do once they've followed a link.

<sup>6</sup> It must also be mentioned that the discussion facility in the Bodington VLE in which these particular discussions occurred is not optimal for extensive and complex discussions; a fact which did not help.

there is ‘a’ discussion at all, whether there are many, or none in the traditional sense thereof. In the next section, the repercussions of this problem on attempts to evaluate argumentational moves are outlined.

## Analysing discourse for argument from the cognitive point of view

Tutors and teachers and designers of courses have their own conception of what counts as argument prior to the discussion—what they (more or less) explicitly have in mind as they teach and guide and facilitate and moderate, and what they are counting on as they interpret, either for their interventions, or for research. In the case of philosophy tutors, they are likely to have quite a well-developed and articulate view of this. For my own purposes, I used the following rough and ready set of distinctions for trying to see what kind of argumentational moves students made:

- premise/reason/support:
  - in a deductive argument
  - in an inductive argument
  - in a moral argument
- conclusion/claim:
  - in a deductive argument
  - in an inductive argument
  - in a moral/value argument
- general principle
- definition:
  - descriptive
  - logical
  - by denotation
  - value-laden
- counter-example:
  - by logical possibility
  - by empirical example
- analogy
- pointing out standard fallacy:
  - loaded language
  - ad populum
  - ad hominem
  - ad misericordiam
  - argument by labelling
  - illegitimate appeal to authority
  - hasty generalisation
  - slippery slope
  - begging the question
  - straw man
  - red herring
  - equivocation

These will be very familiar to a philosophy audience, but are certainly not in the general literature on critical reasoning in technologically

enhanced learning. Thus even though there is a great deal of research expounding the benefits of using online discussions as a way of improving reasoning, it is often not done with a sufficiently finely tuned conception of argument to suit the purposes of philosophy, often simply relying on categories such as ‘question’, ‘challenge’, ‘claim’, ‘assert’, and not being sufficiently sensitive to the parts of argument, nor to their structure (for example, Buckingham-Shum & Hammond (1994), Jeong (2005), Jermann & Dillenbourg (1999), Veerman, A. L., Andriessen, J. E. B., & Kanselaar, G. (2000) and (2002)).

Students are not given these categories of argument beforehand in this particular course. They are asked only to abide by the principle of charity and to avoid the fallacy of constructing strawmen. As the discussion unfolds, they are given more guidance in analysing and evaluating their arguments and examining what alternative strategies they could use. Thus they were not following an already worked out set of argumentational principles, but working on their own hunches and expectations of what argument is. Pedagogically, I use this technique as a way of teasing out intuitions and expectations and then broaching them in discussion. For the research, it meant that I could not analyse the discourse according to explicit understandings of categories of argument that the students already had.

Even with a more-or-less clear picture of what I counted as philosophical argument, and of the kinds of moves which I would like to see beginning philosophers learn to make, the analysis of the discourse generated by the discussions, in order to answer the question of whether these were ‘good’, ‘effective’ strategies for teaching some aspects of philosophy, presented challenges directly related to its nature as hypertext, and the ways in which this renders our interpretive strategies unreliable. The hypertextual nature of the discussions made it difficult to know how students progressed through the discussions (what they linked to what, in what order). It was also difficult to know how to hook their argumentational moves up to the rest of the discussion, and for this reason, it is difficult to start to analyse their ‘moves’ (e.g. into premise and conclusion or sub-conclusion, joint or independent premises, etc.).

However, there were also problems of analysis stemming from the conception that I had of argument to start off with. How much would I be prepared to allow the medium to question this conception?

Under pressure from hypertext, it is claimed that different forms of argument will emerge, of which the structure will not be captured by the standard textbook argument structures. In particular, hypertext shatters linearity. Whereas not all philosophical arguments are linear in their presentation, the idea that an argument essentially consists in some statements supporting others—a unidirectional relation—is not one that it is easy to forgo. For example, in ‘Socrates in the Labyrinth’, (1994) David Kolb reminds us that ‘linear’ philosophy (that is, philosophy on the printed page) does far more interesting things than linear argument and has always done so (cyclic arguments, spiralling arguments, etc.). But even if straightforward linearity is not the way in which philosophical argument always gets done, there remains an argumentative ‘line’ which connects claims to one another. Would hypertextual philosophy (not simply philosophy presented in the familiar linked form, but philosophy in the web-like structure typical of hypertext, where there is no ‘beginning’, ‘middle’ or ‘end’, no directionality) still be philosophy? Since what counts as philosophy changes over time—and with the media that we use—this is unanswerable (could oral philosophy foresee written philosophy?). Kolb suggests that perhaps ‘to be called philosophy the writing maintain something of the Socratic watchfulness over itself and the abstract or conceptual structures [philosophy] employs, and that it be responsible in the claims that it makes’ (339). This is as modest a view of traditional philosophy as it is possible to retain, but it is important to note that it does retain the idea that what is to be watched over are the relations of support among reasons and claims, with which we are familiar, even if our interpretive capacities will be stretched somewhat in trying to grasp what they hold between.

The question of what form philosophy may take in a future hypertextual incarnation, and which discursive genre will embody it, is very closely connected to the question of what the form and rhetoric of argument will be, since, although philosophy is not exhausted by argument, it certainly is a central part of how modern Western philosophy understands itself. There are important questions to ask about cultural conceptions of philosophy, but here I wish to focus on the question of how the medium affects the way in which philosophical argument is carried out, interpreted and evaluated. The most important point is that of directionality, and how much pressure can be put on that

before we are dealing with a different form of discourse. An alternative notion of argument that may become stronger on the internet is one which we find in classical rhetoric, as well as a meaning of argument which is retained in European languages such as French and Italian: that is, argument as *topos*, or topic and everything which falls under its rubric, however it is related. This notion of argument approximates a Quinean web of belief more closely than an Aristotelian syllogism, in that there is no particular relation holding between beliefs, and nothing holds necessarily, everything is up for revision. Notwithstanding this, Quinean webs of belief do allow for relations of unidirectional support among claims, even though these are revisable (albeit changes are generally not as fast as may be expected in hypertextual philosophy). In this sense, this conception of argument may give us an alternative model of argument which is better suited to the form of argument to be found in online discussion.

Speculating on questions like this takes us very far from the relatively modest aim of teaching philosophy online to interested adult learners, or to complement course offerings in traditional face-to-face teaching of philosophy. Philosophical argument in an online discussion is not hypertext strictly speaking, since it ought to be governed by the principles of discussion, and the principles of philosophical argument that are being taught. In the 'Introduction to Philosophy' course, students were exposed to texts by, among others, Descartes, Schopenhauer, Strawson, Locke, Berkeley and Hume, alongside their online discussions. They were being exposed to traditional exemplars of philosophical argument at the same time as trying to 'do' philosophy themselves. They were also given guidance as to how to go about engaging and interacting with the philosophical arguments in these texts, how to reflect on them, be critical of them and so on. It was made clear to them that their own doing of philosophy needed to be modelled on these exemplars; that in a way, they were in an apprentice role, learning by emulating masters of a craft. The problem came in as they tried to do so in the form of online discussion which, no matter what students thought they were doing, can be accessed as hypertext—that is, in no particular order. This has a definite effect on their (and my) interpretation of the structure of arguments, of what served as a reason or as a conclusion, on what was the substance of the claim, and on whether the claims as interpreted are those proposed by their 'authors'.

It has the effect of fragmenting the context of ‘discursive turns’, first of all by disengaging them from their writer/utterer and secondly by disengaging them from the turn/s to which they are a response. Incidentally, it is of little use to remind participants in discussion not to dislocate contributions from their contexts in this way, as one cannot be sure that they do not anyway, especially as the medium so easily lends itself to such dislocations that it is more natural to do so than not to.

I am not claiming that the nature of argument is indeed changing—especially not that it is changing to an unrecognisable form which would evidently be self-defeating. I am suggesting that teaching philosophy online requires watchfulness over how the hypertext medium works to exert pressure on the form and rhetoric of argument which we as philosophy teachers may simply take for granted. Whether we choose to watch it emerge to see what happens, or whether we choose to play a more interventionist role to propagate the conception of argument which we think students *ought* to adopt, depends on other pedagogical choices and the broader context and purposes of such discussions, but tutors do need to be aware of the tricks that the medium can play on their carefully worked out strategies.

## Social and interpretive aspects of argument

It is a commonplace that the style of arguing which is associated with Western philosophy, in particular the Anglo-American variety, tends to be adversarial. This is a social dimension of argument. Of course, argument need not be adversarial in the worst sense thereof, and in the best cases, the kind of adversity to which it is subjected, in the form of robust criticism, should only make it stronger. The testing of an argument in analytical philosophy is closely modelled on the testing of a theory in philosophy of science (Popperian and other), with the to-ing and fro-ing of counter-arguments, challenge, opposition and defences doing the work of stringent testing. However, many philosophers have interrogated this form of philosophy, and it certainly is not a universal feature of philosophy (Moulton, 1983/1990 but see also Taliaferro & Chance, 1991). This, too, was an aspect of argument discussed in ‘Taking Philosophical Dialogue Online’, and seen as a further reason for using online discussion as a way of teaching philosophical

argument, as it would encourage students to see themselves as participating in a collaborative effort of putting forward and testing arguments.

Online discussion is a space where ‘adversarial’ can quickly degenerate into the worst sense of the term. It is not sufficient simply to caution anyone who might want to give this a try to take care and to take measures against misunderstandings and ‘flaming’. Runs of the ‘Introduction to Philosophy’ course subsequent to the pilot course included explicit guidelines to philosophical dialogue as well as netiquette, with links to helpful sites, including Monty Python’s argument clinic as an example of a way not to do it.

Online philosophical discussion brings to the fore just how problematic this conception of argument is, and this is not just because of the lack of physical presence and body language which attenuates potential aggression or the appearance thereof. In the more dispersed mode of argument which is characteristic of online discussion as described above, an adversarial style of argument loses its point. Argument takes on a different social as well as cognitive character.

Even more important is the fact that online discussion tends to bring to the fore all that on which argument must rely if it is to proceed in an intelligible and interactive mode of real engagement, let alone in an adversarial mode in the best sense thereof. It makes much more evident, or allows us to reflect on, the conditions of possibility of that sort of engagement. It is useful to bear in mind Davidson’s point that disagreement must rely on ‘massive agreement’<sup>7</sup> as a pragmatic point for the way in which worthwhile disagreements occur, of the type that really advance an argument or line of thinking, as well as a philosophical one about the nature of meaning. The very fragility of assumed agreement in online discussion reveals this. In particular, there must be agreement in terms of the context that students are drawing upon to provide an interpretive frame for their own and others’ discursive turns.

For example, as the discussions in the ‘Introduction to Philosophy’ course unfolded, it was clear that students had very different conceptions of the genre of discourse they were involved in during the course of the discussion, some of them using principles drawn from conversation, others from writing (letter-writing or

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<sup>7</sup> ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, Davidson (1984)

emailing), others used a more journalistic style, somewhat like the editorial comment, and others instead used the style of scholarly writing (including footnotes and references in one case). They also used different interpretive strategies in line with these different genres of discourse.<sup>8</sup> It is not just that online discussion does away with physical co-presence, but that this tends to increase the probability that people no longer express themselves in the same discourse, and no longer use the same set of principles to interpret each other. This is compounded by the fact already mentioned that hypertext tends to disengage discursive turns from their authors, such that participants in the discussion may no longer be reading for each others' intentions. That this leads to misunderstanding, with the attendant ill-feeling or missed opportunity for a good discussion, is unsurprising.

Whether one's co-participants in a discussion 'intend' an argument, or anything approximating an argument, depends heavily on the context. But context is precisely what is most problematic in online discussions (particularly when they are entirely online and students do not meet face-to-face at all). This became very clear in the analysis of the discussion in order to see whether students were in fact engaging with one another's arguments in making their own argumentational moves. Before seeing whether this had occurred, and, if so, how successfully they had engaged, the question of what each discursive turn meant for the participants had to be answered. However, it was difficult to tell because I had no way of knowing i) how they had constructed their context, or ii) what context they had assumed. i) is important because what something means depends on what else it is linked to—this is the context that emerges as the discussion progresses; ii) is the context that participants bring to discussions and of which they are not normally completely aware, and which overlaps substantially with what hermeneutic philosophers call the 'lifeworld'<sup>9</sup> including, in the case of adult learners especially, their own professional fields or other

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<sup>8</sup> This course was taught entirely at a distance; students were distributed across the globe, and also came from very different backgrounds. Thus, these kinds of differences were to be expected to a greater degree than in blended learning contexts, where students are co-present at least some of the time.

<sup>9</sup> See Carusi & De Laat (2005) for an elaboration of the notion of the lifeworld as a way of understanding the context in which discursive turns have meaning and can be analysed and interpreted.



disciplinary allegiances.<sup>10</sup> There are thus three different aspects of context: (a) the place in which discussion happens (the discussion board, its place within the overall course—analogous to the role of the seminar room or lecture hall within the institution), (b) the medium in which it happens (the technological arrangement of turns and its implications), and (c) the lifeworld upon which participants draw in order to formulate their turns, and in order to interpret those of others. All three of these aspects of context play a role in determining the meaning of the discursive turns that make up the discussion. However, the third encompasses the other two, as students make sense of the activity they are participating in, of the discussion board and the order and arrangement of discourse in large part from the basis of their own set of expectations and their social, cultural and epistemological world. Analysing the argument proceeds by a reconstruction of these three aspects of context and their interplay.

The combination of the effects of hypertext and of lifeworlds means that it is not by analysing the discussion alone that one can answer questions regarding how turns were intended or interpreted, whether participants succeeded in engaging with the arguments of others, whether they were even talking about the same topic, and which, if any, argumentational move they were making. Analysis must be supplemented by surveys and interviews to at least try to get a sense of what students believed themselves to be doing while participating in the discussion. However, beyond that, it is probably impossible to reconstruct the meaning of each turn in an online discussion for each of its participants to a point where we can reach any firm conclusions regarding how effective it is for developing argumentational skills in a traditional conception of argument. We will need to rely on more oblique and indirect ways to gauge this—looking at how it affects students' performance in other activities which are easier to evaluate.

Thus, doing the research to test the validity of my earlier suggestions for teaching philosophy online left me with a far more complex picture than I thought would be the case. The complexity is mainly due to the fact that there is neither a way of extricating the philosophy from the evaluation of the teaching method, nor from the research, and nor

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<sup>10</sup> See Steinkuehler (2002), who uses Toulmin's notion of field dependence in the context of an analysis of online argument.

indeed, from the medium. Echoing the sentiments of my student, it seemed that between the design of the online teaching strategy and the testing to see whether it worked, the shape of the hole it was meant to fit changed. And it keeps on changing. Of course, it never was a timeless and static shape, and doing the research—and indeed teaching in this way—has only brought it out more clearly. The most interesting aspect of teaching philosophy online is perhaps just that: the reflection and awareness that it brings about concerning what we do when we teach philosophy in any medium.

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