Truth and happiness in achieving the flourishing of society

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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September 2023

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the role of Religious Education (RE) in achieving the flourishing of society. It claims that the approach that has the greatest potential for the flourishing of society in the face of the tension arising between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society, can be considered the most appropriate existing path to do this. I have found that Critical Religious Education which prioritises addressing the question of truth is the most promising available account for supporting society to flourish. In addition to centralising truth, this thesis argues centralising the notion of happiness in relation to what humans ultimately aim to achieve supports RE to achieve the flourishing of society. Thus, the most appropriate path to achieving the flourishing of society is found to be centralising truth and happiness.

In this context, the notion of religious literacy has been found useful in that it enhances the contribution of RE to the flourishing of society by centralising truth and happiness. This is because religious literacy implies the feasibility of what is being studied in RE.

Moreover, because considering together the current situation about religious literacy and this tension in schools and the things we say about how these issues should be approached can reinforce change towards a better approach to these elements, this thesis includes a survey study investigating RE teachers' perspectives of the term religious literacy and the tension between contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society.

The findings show that teachers' understanding of religious literacy is limited. They also indicate that teachers are in favour of engagement with truth claims of faiths. Overall, I argue that understanding of religious literacy in schools should be enhanced by teachers' desire to engage with the question of truth, and with centralising the notion of happiness.

Dedication

To my family

Acknowledgements

There are several people to whom I owe my gratitude. At the forefront of these are undoubtedly my supervisors. Thank you, Dr. Casey Strine and Dr. Joshua Forstenzer. Your wisdom, guidance, and encouragement have been of great value in my PhD journey.

I am also very grateful to Prof. Andrew Wright and Dr. Kevin O'Grady. I have exchanged some very fruitful emails both with Prof. Wright and Dr. O'Grady. I also had the opportunity to have some online meetings with Prof. Wright and some face-to-face meetings with Dr. O'Grady. I have greatly benefited from the wisdom of these two scholars.

Thanks to my fellow PhD friends, Cath Kennedy, Joe Tryner, Rory Hanna, Kathleen Commons, Hallam Roffey, Beth Bhargava, Freddy Potts, and Mark Jones. I have learned a lot from them. Finally, I would like to thank the Turkish Ministry of National Education for their financial support of this study.

Contents

The framing of the thesis

If every piece of research can be categorised based around the purposes they pursue, the purpose of this one is, primarily and explicitly, grounded in the flourishing of society. This thesis argues that handling the tension between contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society in the best possible way can be regarded as one of the most important ways, if not the most, that RE can genuinely contribute to the flourishing of society.

Allow me to explain this in more detail before shedding light on how we can find the best possible way of handling this tension. In explaining the origin and central aim of this thesis (these two can be considered closely bound up), it is appropriate to give an opinion about the underlying purpose of any academic work in different fields. While the aim of a thesis written in the field of history can be to examine a certain past period from an economic point of view, for example, the aim of a study in the field of physics could be to look at the motion of the moon in its orientation to the sun. However, these goals are still not sufficient to bring out what essentially research is for, and therefore begin another main question: why should we know about this particular time in the past and about the rotation of the moon relative to the sun? Various answers can be given to this question, and I think Aristotle, considered one of the most influential philosophers, may have provided the most accurate explanations. At the beginning of his book *Metaphysics* Aristotle contends, 'All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight.'[1] Following Aristotle, one can reasonably state, the fundamental reason for doing research is to *know* since our nature necessitates it. In this respect, knowing and truth can be regarded as intrinsically valuable. Aristotle also argues that the flourishing of society is that at which we aim.[2] Another ground reason for doing research can be deemed as human flourishing. Indeed, a look at the recorded history of subjects such as philosophy, education, and RE spells out the aspiration for the flourishing of society as a main stimulus in the works of many scholars. For instance, mentioning the difficulty of thinking about the aims of education as one can confront intractable problems of ethics, Richard Pring once argued, education should be seen as a moral practice, as developing 'moral seriousness'.[3] Patricia Hannam, in the RE world, says education itself should be put forward in RE, by which she means a child-centred approach that takes 'lived experience' or more specifically what it means to live a religious life seriously: in achieving the flourishing of society, RE should be a place of appearance of a child in their uniqueness in relation to the uniqueness of others.[4] Approaches at the expense of educational considerations tend to become agenda themselves and therefore are found to be problematic for society. In this context, she distrusts the promotion of tolerance as an agenda itself for the subject.[5] What Hannam misses to concede, and which is the point that I would like to highlight here, is that both Hannam and the promotion of tolerance ultimately regard human flourishing as an essential purpose of the subject. The aim of this thesis is grounded in that ultimate purpose, in the flourishing of society.

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[1] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W.D. Ross (Stilwell, 2006), p. 3.
[2] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. Harris Rackham (Cambridge, 1926).
[3] Richard Pring, *Philosophy of Education: Aims, Theory, Common sense and Research* (Paperback edn, London, 2005), pp. 4, 23.
[4] Patricia Hannam, 'What Should Religious Education Seek to Achieve in the Public Sphere?', in Gert Biesta and Patricia Hannam (eds), *Religion and Education: The Forgotten Dimensions of Religious Education?* (Leiden, 2021).
[5] Patricia Hannam, 'Religious education syllabus development and the need for education theory', *Journal of Religious Education* 69.3 (2021), p. 344. What Hannam wants us to see is that RE can be enhanced to contribute to the flourishing of society when children are positioned as the subject of RE, rather than tolerance becoming an agenda in itself.

From a realist standpoint, reality is the ultimate authority in determining what is true. Or, in Aristotle's words: 'to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true.'[6] Aiming to present most worldviews, be they religious or non-religious, as having conflicting truth claims against each other would be more disputable than stating that many main belief systems studied in RE, such as Christianity, Islam, and secular Humanism, have rival claims to reality. As William A. Christian in the case of religions sensibly concedes, different religions have conflicting truth claims, and therefore to present them 'as not in competition with each other would be to falsify the self-understanding of most adherents of the main religions and to misrepresent the logic of the different belief systems.'[7] Paramount is the importance of identifying that there is an inevitable epistemic tension deriving from the existence of contested truth claims of various worldviews to reality; and a tension, perhaps to a limited extent potential, between such conflicting truth claims on the one hand and the need to promote the flourishing of society on the other hand. There is this need insofar as it is desirable to live a flourishing life. There are various reasons for this potential tension, these include, but are not limited to, the need and demand, in light of the horizons of worldviews to reality, to hold fast to some beliefs so as to have a meaningful and flourishing life, running up against uncertainty, which emphasises the need for a decision-making process involving this tension in the context of the questions like which worldview can lead to a better society if adopted; and differences can generate division and conflict between people. As Philip Barnes states, there appears to be a 'human propensity to regard one's own interests, choices and commitments…as superior to others, and this in turn may lead to negative attitudes and behaviours towards those with different interests and commitments.'[8] The former is the cause of the latter, and therefore these two tensions are central in RE. For this reason, multifaith RE, by its very characteristic, is a subject in which this epistemic tension is central.

When something is in the state that it should be, it may signify many inherent fruits. In the RE world, Brian Gates points this out as follows: high-quality RE has much to contribute to the flourishing of individuals, whereas its absence or poor-quality teaching of the subject is likely to be genuinely debilitating.[9] With handling this tension can come advantages and disadvantages, gains and losses; and therefore, the way this tension is managed has a very central place in establishing the quality of RE. The main reason has to do with approaching a central element in something correctly and ultimately aiming to achieve the best result. Thus, high-quality RE is the one in which this tension is handled in the best available way. Handling this tension in the best available way is important for society not only in terms of providing a method concerning how to do things but also the horizons and opportunities that may come with how to do things, even though it is difficult to imply a distinction between these two. If the spiritual development of children influences them to be personally developed and responsible citizens, then coping with this tension in the right way can open the way for the spiritual development of pupils, and this, in turn, can yield a better society.

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[6] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, p. 44.

[7] This is quoted in L. Philip Barnes and Andrew Wright, 'Romanticism, representations of religion and critical religious education', *British Journal of Religious Education* 28.1 (2006), p. 72. See also, William A. Christian, *Doctrines of Religious Communities: A Philosophical Study* (New Haven, 1987).

[8] L. Philip Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity: developing a new model of religious education* (London, 2014), pp. 26-27.

[9] Brian Gates, 'How far do Programmes for RE relate to the Social and Psychological Development of Pupils?: Development through Religious Education', in Lynne Broadbent and Alan Brown (eds), *Issues in Religious Education* (London, 2002), p. 104.

The main stimulus of this thesis is the belief that it can enhance RE in contributing to the flourishing of society. It is a scholarly endeavour to change RE for the better. In this context, to reiterate, the central contention of this thesis is concerned with the flourishing of society in relation to this tension in the sense that handling this tension in the best possible way is regarded as perhaps the most important way that RE can genuinely contribute to the flourishing of society.

Now we can turn to the process of finding the best possible way of handling this tension so that RE may have the greatest potential to achieve the flourishing of society. Wanda Alberts has noted, individual approaches to integrative RE – by which she means a classroom situation where students from various faith backgrounds learn together about different religions and non-religious worldviews – differ significantly in terms of the aims and contents of the subject, for instance.[10] Scholars like Giles Freathy et al., often think 'there is no neutral vantage point from which to explore religions.'[11] Accordingly, the subject of RE can be imagined within the framework of various approaches. A vision of RE in which truth claims of faiths take the central place and the nature of reality is attempted to be understood is, with respect to its potency in leading to the flourishing of society, expected to be different than the vision of a RE aloof from the question of truth as thorough and sufficient, and in which, for example, understanding of diversity within and between faiths is the central contention. In this respect, the thesis considers different existing accounts, discussing which one offers the most convincing path in handling this tension, thereby having greater potential for the flourishing of society. Pursuing the best possible way of handling this tension, therefore, proceeds through taking up already existing accounts. It is worth noting that engaging with already existing approaches does not mean an ideal account that can ever be offered is somewhere out there. Maybe a more promising approach is yet to be proffered. Already existing accounts are engaged because they are the only available profound approaches from which one account can be shown as more ideal. Thomas Torrance's statement, 'in any branch of knowledge we begin within the knowledge relation where we actually are,' illustrates this point well.[12]

After determining the most promising available account to employ in schools, the thesis then argues, centralising the notion of happiness together with this best approach is likely to aid RE in contributing to the flourishing of society in the face of this tension. Happiness should feature in relation to what humans ultimately strive for. This way of conceiving happiness is informed by Aristotle's account of human happiness as the final end at what human beings aimed.[13]

In the course of arguing that RE can have really great potential to contribute to the flourishing of society beyond other approaches when the account being found as the best available answer to handling this tension is centralised together with the notion of happiness, this thesis also aims to contribute to a taxonomy of truth criteria of that best approach. Because the truth criteria advocated in that best available account are important but not given enough attention, they need further consideration. As such, the thesis aims to contribute to approaching this tension in the best available way whereby to enhance the flourishing of society by aiming to elevate a taxonomy of truth criteria of the approach which is found to be the most convincing account of handling this tension in the best way. Consequently, centralising the notion of happiness together with a more enhanced approach will have greater potential to lead to the

[10] Wanda Alberts, 'The academic study of religions and integrative religious education in Europe', *British Journal of Religious Education* 32.3 (2010), pp. 276-277.
[11] Giles Freathy, et al., *RE-Searchers* (Exeter, 2015), p. 6.
[12] Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science*, (London, 1969), p. 2.
[13] Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, (Oxford, 1993).

flourishing of society. The main argument of this part is to state, although the notion of happiness is not argued as a truth criterion, when the truth indicators given in that best approach are associated with the idea of happiness it can help us make more sense of the truthfulness of different beliefs.

While we argue that centralising the best approach together with the notion of happiness has great potential to contribute to the flourishing of society in the face of this tension, this thesis finds the notion of religious literacy fruitful. The connection of the idea of religious literacy to the centrality of the thesis lies in its implication of the feasibility of what is being studied in RE. Using such a notion is, therefore, helpful in the sense that the contribution of RE to the flourishing of society can become more viable by centralising the most promising account and the notion of happiness. In this context, it is argued, the idea of religious literacy should be thought of as the product of the study of religion on its own merits.

These arguments can be regarded as the theoretical part of the thesis. There is also a survey study having two questionnaires that explore RE teachers' perspectives on the notion of religious literacy, and their responses about the tension between contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society (social cohesion). The theoretical and empirical parts are integrated. To this, we now turn.

I would like to start with the latter referring to the tension between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society (social cohesion). First, it has been argued, handling this tension in the best possible way can be regarded as one of the most important ways, if not the most, that RE can genuinely contribute to the flourishing of society. Other points such as pursuing the most promising account and centralising the notion of happiness are connected to this issue: these points are regarded as the best answers to this tension in terms of human flourishing. Thus, this tension is a central theme in the thesis. Secondly, what we aim with this thesis is to change RE for the better.

Now, when it is argued that this tension is an important issue and RE should be at its highest potential in contributing to the flourishing of society, then empirical work about this tension becomes important because when the current situation about this tension in schools is considered together with the theoretical part of the thesis, it is likely to be a more encouraging factor for change for the better on this issue.

This can be explained more clearly by imagining not conducting any empirical study about this subject. For example, drawing on the theoretical argument, we could argue, the approach having the greatest potential to achieve the flourishing of society in the face of this tension should pervade schools. The lack of direct research about this topic in schools could lead to readings like teachers in practice may already follow such an approach, and therefore, it might be seen as not necessary to pay much attention to this advice.

But a thesis that reveals the existing situation about this tension, demonstrating that there is a different trajectory instead of the best approach being followed in the field for example, can reinforce change in terms of presenting this and proposing something else instead.

With respect to religious literacy, the thesis argues that the notion of religious literacy should be thought of as the product of the study of religion in its own right. Similar to the reason for researching this tension, considering the theoretical discussion on religious literacy together with the current situation arising among teachers is likely to reinforce change for the better.

Thus, for example, the argument that religious literacy is to be thought of as the product of the study of faiths on their own merits, predicated on the premises of the best available existing approach and the notion of happiness can be embraced more rigorously when we also draw on the current situation in schools.

Explanation of key terms

Arguments given so far constitute the connected parts of the present thesis. Now, before concluding this section, it is important to elucidate how some of the phrases are being used in the thesis as the flourishing of society, happiness, religious literacy, and social cohesion so that the reader can have a benchmark against which to assess the claims in the thesis.

Regarding the flourishing of society, I first wish to highlight, the emphasis on the notion of society does not cast individuals into the shadows. Individuals constitute society, even though social norms can pre-exist in any one group of individuals. What is referred to by the flourishing of society includes the flourishing of individuals in their personal lives as well as society. Second, I would like to point out that attempting to clarify what the entire notion of the flourishing of society might mean, specifically in terms of its contents, is beyond this thesis. This seems to be a complex matter, as flourishing can concern various areas from our spiritual development and economic situation to our physical appearance and interactions with nature. That said, providing a certain definition is avoided because the notion of flourishing can contain various things, and therefore to do so would confine it to this certain definition, which means limiting our understanding from the beginning. Not attempting to clarify what the entire concept of flourishing might mean and not providing a certain definition of it should not prevent us from emphasising the flourishing of society as that at which we aim. These arguments suggest we comprehend flourishing as something that can contain various aspects of and things in life. Different contents can be perceived throughout the thesis. To elucidate this, we can think of an approach asserting the religious landscape of England is diverse, and in order to navigate our lives well in this diverse environment, the diversity within and between faiths should be of great importance in RE. We can also think of the argument of this present thesis that centralising the notion of happiness as what we ultimately aim to achieve can enhance RE to contribute to the flourishing of society. We can understand the flourishing of society as that at which that account and this present thesis aim. We can further understand the flourishing of society, in that account, tends to contain a coexistence in harmony and peace in connection with diversity; while it relates to the notion of happiness in the present thesis, for instance. However, this, we should note, does not imply that different definitions cannot be superior to each other, nor that different approaches will have the same potential for the flourishing of society.

I also want to highlight, even if different fields and concepts are in interaction with each other, for example, knowing and having a flourishing life can be seen as interrelated (developing knowledge can be regarded as serving the flourishing of society), the notion of the flourishing of society can be more distinctly noticeable when emphasis is placed on itself. In this respect, *knowing*, for example, may not tell us about a flourishing life, while the saying that people who reach a certain level of knowledge can feel satisfied in their lives indicates the flourishing of their lives. With these emphases, the intention is to offer readers more insight into the recognition of the notion of flourishing without delving into any specific definition of it.

As for the notion of happiness, it is important to underline that Aristotle's account of why happiness (*eudaimonia*) is sought is the primary concern of this thesis. The notion of happiness

is in this thesis used in relation to what we ultimately aim to achieve. It is argued, when individuals become conscious of happiness as what we ultimately strive for, human life can be more clearly directed towards this end. At this moment I should make the point that similar to the reasons for flourishing I refrain from specifying or describing the entire notion of happiness, but certain things can be perceived in the course of the thesis such as the argument that centralising happiness as the final end has potential to enhance RE in achieving a flourishing happy society.

Explaining how the connection between the notions of flourishing and happiness is established in this thesis is of great importance with respect to consistency. On the one hand, we have statements like there is a tension between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society, and the flourishing of society is that at which we aim, on the other, we regard happiness as the final end. At this point, because happiness is deemed as what we ultimately aim to attain, questions like whether it would not be more accurate to use the notion of happiness instead of flourishing can be asked. We could, for example, point out that there is a tension between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote human happiness. In this thesis, flourishing is taken as evoking more of a process, and thus, considering it as something that can yield happiness is found more meaningful while using happiness as referring to what human beings ultimately strive for that can also come with having a flourishing life is deemed more apposite.[14] That is, while happiness is something that is loved for itself and expresses the final good, flourishing refers to something that is loved for itself but is also for the sake of happiness; flourishing is subordinated to happiness. The argument that the process of living a flourishing life comes with living a meaningful life can lead to happiness seems to be convincing. One important thing this suggests is we can think of flourishing as to a great extent not separate from being happy. Indeed, it is in this sense it was found meaningful to include both the notion of happiness and flourishing together in this thesis, as the final end and the things that can be loved for their own sake but are also for the sake of happiness are closely bound up. In this context, although in this thesis notions such as the flourishing of society have been often used in relation to this tension for example, they should be understood as also alluding to happiness. Flourishing is used throughout the thesis, while happiness is more in the argument concerning what we ultimately strive for. The main reason for this is that while the notion of flourishing meets what we want to express regarding issues like the tension between contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society; using happiness as the final good is likely to draw more attention to such an argument in terms of becoming effective.

The term religious literacy has become widespread in the literature. However, it is a contested notion. This thesis argues that we can keep using this notion because it implies the feasibility of what is being studied in RE, but it should be thought of as the product of the study of religion in its own right because religious literacy is a notion whose meaning is tied up with the underlying account of how to study faiths.

The notion of social cohesion is used in the empirical study of this tension. The reason for using social cohesion in this empirical work can be explained by starting to highlight that this tension

[14] Many scholars also interpret the notion of eudaimonia, the final end, as happiness. See, for example, *ibid*.; Joar Vittersø, 'The Most Important Idea in the World: An Introduction', in Joar Vittersø (ed.), *Handbook of Eudaimonic Well-Being* (Tromsø, 2016); and Daniel C. Russell, 'Virtue ethics, happiness, and the good life', in Daniel C. Russell (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to virtue ethics* (Cambridge, 2013).

is a central issue in this thesis and concerns the contested truth claims of faiths. Engaging with contested truth claims of faiths suggests engagement with the question of truth. Moreover, engaging with conflicting claims of faiths to truth can be avoided, lest it produce conflict. In this sense, since this tension relates to the question of truth it can either be approached by embracing the question of truth or an alternative way that avoids this. This thesis focuses on whether teachers engage with contested truth claims of faiths or aim to steer away from them because they may undermine social cohesion. This is in learning how this tension is being approached in schools. In this context, the primary logic behind using the notion of social cohesion is that it provides a good context in terms of learning about what we have expressed, as it can be considered in two different senses. The first meaning of social cohesion can denote issues like instrumental reasons. In this sense, it is often taken as different than the study of faiths in their own rights which can concern issues like pursuing truth. Social cohesion, however, does not necessarily mean a merely instrumentalized RE. The study of faiths on their own merits can lead to a cohesive society, for example. In such a context, social cohesion can be thought of as a part of a flourishing society. Thus, considering the issue that teachers may opt for an agenda like social cohesion understood in the first sense rather than engaging with claims of faiths to truth in the face of this tension, using the notion of social cohesion is found useful as it can inform us about how teachers approach this tension with the option of leaning greatly towards the instrumental side.

Finally, some brief methodological considerations are important to state. When the main aim of this thesis is accepted as defending the notion that centralising happiness together with the approach being found as the most powerful available account in handling this tension in RE and religious literacy can lead the subject to contribute to the flourishing of society beyond other approaches, the next question that raises is concerned with how to go about it. We should, however, think of this in terms of the methodology of the general process of this thesis rather than the methodological considerations of the empirical study as this is given in detail in the fourth chapter.

The thesis's investigation relies on a philosophical approach, involving an engagement and evaluation of ideas and positions, while also considering a historical context.[15] It aims to enrich the horizons of thought. In this light, the thesis is primarily based on an ongoing conversation with key scholars in the RE world. In doing this, I engage primarily with scholars in the UK context, but at the same time to an extent with scholars, specifically in the context of religious literacy, outside the UK context. There are parts where I draw on the insights of a range of scholars such as Aristotle outside the RE world. I am, however, not doing this in a fully systematic way: drawing on these insights is not developed into a whole systematic philosophy to underpin the thesis. In this respect, I do not assert that I construct a foundational philosophy. I engage with Aristotle, for example, not because, to an extent, to establish an Aristotelian thesis, but largely because of what Aristotle has said about some issues such as happiness.

Chapter outline

This thesis has eight chapters. The first chapter revolves around three main points. The first one is to present different accounts in the history of British RE concerning how they approach this tension. This is particularly important in discussing which way offers the most convincing account of handling this tension regarding the flourishing of society. This also, as a second

[15] On the philosophical approach see, Anneke Schmidt, 'Discovering Views of the Divine: An Interreligious, Transcendence-Orientated Approach to Theological Content in Religious Education', PhD thesis (University of Exeter, 2019), p. 67. See also, Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic* (London, 1999), p. 1.

function, constitutes a literature review for analysing the empirical data about this tension. The last point of this chapter is to show that in the history of British RE, from early main tendencies to contemporary approaches, imagining the flourishing of society in relation to the notion of happiness as what humans ultimately aim to achieve is not evident.

The second chapter sets out various religious literacy accounts in the literature. Similarly, it does not only constitute a literature review for analysing the empirical data of what teachers understand the term religious literacy to mean but also the source enabling us to discuss which way offers the most convincing account of coping with this tension with respect to the flourishing of society. It further aims to show that also within the context of religious literacy imagining the flourishing of society in relation to the notion of happiness is not evident. Moreover, this chapter sheds light on the relationship between religious literacy and RE. It is argued religious literacy should be thought of as the product of the study of religion on its own merits.

The third chapter is concerned with the subject from which the best available approach to handling this tension can be identified. On this basis, readers are also introduced to a discussion of why some approaches are irrefutably problematic in handling this tension.

The fourth chapter also starts with a literature review, concentrating on *empirical* studies. The second part of the chapter is devoted to the methodological framework of the survey study. The fifth chapter presents the findings and ends with a discussion of them.

The sixth chapter first takes up different promising approaches and discusses which one is the most convincing path in handling this tension, thereby having greater potential for the flourishing of society. It secondly argues that the best existing approach should go hand in hand with the notion of happiness. The seventh chapter is devoted to enhancing the potential of RE for contributing to the flourishing of society, by aiming, in relation to the notion of happiness, to elevate an element (truth criteria) of the approach that is considered the most appropriate account for handling this tension. The final chapter consists of concluding remarks, contributions to knowledge, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 1

How the tension between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society has been approached in British RE: A historical reading

A) Introduction

This thesis is grounded in the flourishing of society in relation to the tension between conflicting accounts of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society. When it is claimed that RE can perhaps have the greatest potential in achieving the flourishing of society, provided that this tension is handled in the best possible available way, one of the next most logical questions to ask is which existing approach offers the best possible way, which requires a comparison of various accounts. This chapter dwells on this tension, looking into how existing accounts in British RE have approached the issue. This is also important to lay the ground for the analysis of the empirical study on this tension. These analyses are accompanied by the argument that in the history of British RE, from early tendencies to contemporary approaches, imagining the flourishing of society in relation to the notion of happiness as what humans ultimately aim to achieve is not evident. Revealing this absence is an important point from which a positive recommendation can be offered.

That comprehending the potential of different accounts first presupposes knowing their arguments, the first two chapters mostly bring out the ways different accounts offer rather than subjecting them to critical scrutiny.

Finally, a note on the structure of the chapter can be illuminating. This chapter is arranged in three historically connecting sections. The first part engages with the tendencies in the early history of the subject, while the second section throws light on some of the first important non-confessional approaches. Next, three key contemporary accounts are analysed. In addition to this, in order to understand these approaches better with relation to the centrality of this thesis, the chapter concludes with a conceptualisation of them.

B) The time period between 1870-1960s

To understand the subject, British RE and its history can be classified in various ways. The 1870 Education Act (the Foster Act) is the logical starting point because it is an important early decisive historical marker: the subject in relation to State involvement in this domain in the UK has been an important stable part of education since the 19th century, and many references to RE are made to the 1870 Elementary Education Act.[16] From this date until towards the end of 1960s, two dominant ways for the flourishing of society in the face of the conflicting truth claims of faiths have been placing a great emphasis on similarities and confessionalism.

[16] L. Philip Barnes, 'Religious education for free and equal citizens', *British Journal of Religious Education* 44.1 (2020), p. 4. Daniel Moulin-Stożek, Jason Metcalfe, and Francisco Moller, *Religious Education Teachers and Character: Personal Beliefs and Professional Approaches* (Birmingham, 2019), p. 5. Julia Ipgrave and Ursula McKenna, *Diverse experiences and common vision: English students' perspectives on religion and religious education* (Warwick, 2008). John Hull, *Studies in religion and education* (Sussex, 1984), p. 27. Schools Council, *Schools Council Working Paper 36: Religious Education in Secondary Schools*, (London, 1971), p. 7. Nigel Fancourt, 'The meaning of religious education in English legislation from 1800 to 2020', *British Journal of Religious Education* 44.4 (2022). Patricia Hannam, *Religious Education and the Public Sphere*, (London, 2019), p. 12. Ayse Demirel Ucan and Serkan Ucan, 'A Critical Review of the Compulsory Schooling Reform in England and its Lasting Implications for Today', *Education Reform Journal* 4.1 (2019), p. 16. See also, National Secular Society, *Religious Education* (2013). religious-education-briefing-paper.pdf (secularism.org.uk) [accessed 02 February 2022].

The Church of England is the established Church of this country and asserted a superior position, and the sole role and control in education in the early 19th century; however, a leading authority of the 19th century, James Murphy stated, such privileges and claims were questioned as the political power of other religious bodies such as Roman Catholic and nonconformist increased.[17] Along with religious denominations, there was also a small but growing number of non-believers.[18] Drawing on the measures of the 1870 Act, Barnes noted, this exemplifies an early challenge of religious diversity in society.[19] The Elementary Education Act of 1870 considered RE, which was then known as Religious Instruction (RI), as non-compulsory but if provided it should be non-denominational for Board schools (state-sponsored): religious catechism of any particular denomination was avoided, seeing the Bible as a unifier around which Christians might coalesce.[20] Moreover, although RI was accepted as confessional, parents were given the right to withdraw their children if they wished (Conscience Clause).

After the Elementary Education Act, perhaps the next major event was the 1944 Education Act (the Butler Act).[21] In this Act RE was accepted as a compulsory subject required by law.[22] As the result of the Second World War, and the influences of Nazism, Fascism, and Communism, and against the worldviews of the secular stances the desire to shape Great Britain morally through the religious tradition of this country which had shaped Britain for more than one millennium was a core important reason opening the door to special recognition of RE.[23]

Through this Act, for the non-religious county schools, a similar belief that the Bible was a common unifier, or Christianity was a general category embracing differences between the conflicting truth claims of different denominations was displayed: the study of Christianity rotated around the matters about which the participating sides could agree.[24] In this sense, RE

[17] James Murphy, *The Education Act 1870: Text and Commentary* (Devon, 1972), p. 12. See also, Stephen Parker, Sophie Allen, and Rob Freathy, 'The Church of England and the 1870 Elementary Education Act', *British Journal of Religious Education* 68.5 (2020).
[18] Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity*, p. 54.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 55.
[20] See, for example, Liam Gearon, *MasterClass in Religious Education: transforming teaching and learning* (London, 2013), p. 50. Jason Metcalfe and Daniel Moulin-Stożek, 'Religious education teachers' perspectives on character education', *British Journal of Religious Education* 43.3 (2021), p. 350. L. Philip Barnes, 'Ninian Smart and the Phenomenological Approach to Religious Education', *Religion* 30.4 (2000), p. 316. Andrew Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism: knowledge, reality and religious literacy* (London, 2016), p. 176. Parker, Allen, and Freathy, 'The Church of England and the 1870 Elementary Education Act'. See also, Wanda Alberts, *Integrative Religious Education in Europe: A Study-of-Religions Approach* (Berlin, 2007).
[21] For a similar view, see The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, *Living with Difference: Community, diversity and the common good* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 30. Moulin-Stożek, Metcalfe, and Moller 'Religious Education Teachers and Character', p. 5. Great Britain, *Education Act 1944* (7 & 8 Geo.6 CH.31). Leslie J. Francis, Gemma Penny, and Ursula Mckenna, 'Does RE work and contribute to the common good in England?', in Elisabeth Arweck (ed.), *Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity* (London, 2017), p. 153.
[22] See, for example, Michael Grimmitt, *What can I do in R.E.?: A consideration of the place of religion in the twentieth-century curriculum with suggestions for practical work in schools* (Essex, 1973), p. 1. John White, 'Should religious education be a compulsory school subject?', *British Journal of Religious Education* 26.2 (2004), p. 152.
[23] Rob Freathy, 'The Triumph of Religious Education for Citizenship in English Schools, 1935–1949', *History of Education* 37.2 (2008). White, 'Should religious education be a compulsory subject'. Andrew Wright, 'The justification of compulsory religious education: a response to Professor White', *British Journal of Religious Education* 26.2 (2004). See also, Trevor Cooling, 'The Stapleford Project: Theology as the Basis for Religious Education', in Michael Grimmitt (Ed.), *Pedagogies of Religious Education: Case Studies in the Research and Development of Good Pedagogic Practice in RE* (Essex, 2000), p. 154. Hannam, *Religious Education*. Katherina Beatrice Christopher, 'RE as liberal education: a proposal for a Critical Religious Education', PhD thesis (Institute of Education, UCL, 2020). Celine Francoise Yvette Benoit, 'An exploration of pupils' and teachers' discursive constructions of religion(s): the case of Alexander Parkes Primary School', PhD thesis (Aston University, 2020).
[24] See, for example, Hull, *Studies in Religion and Education*, p. 46. The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, *Living With Difference*, p. 31. Stephen Pett and Trevor Cooling, 'Understanding Christianity: exploring a hermeneutical pedagogy for teaching Christianity', *British Journal of Religious Education* 40.3 (2018), p. 257. See also, Michael Grimmitt, 'Contributing to social and community cohesion: Just another stage in the metamorphosis of RE? An Extended End Piece', in

or RI was to be determined by a locally agreed syllabus, 'drawn up by a local Agreed Syllabus Conference consisting of four panels representing the Church of England, other religious denominations, the local authority and teachers' organisations.'[25]

We should underline that alongside seeing the Bible as a unifier between different belief systems, Christianity was taught as the true religion. This type of RE is known as the confessional approach, which is mainly characterised to mean 'teaching which was intended to produce, or which assumed as the norm, a particular view of life…and whose whole purpose was to increase or produce commitment on the part of the child.'[26]

RE is stated to be contextual. Terence Copley, for example, argues that the subject is intertwined with the whole process of the education system and the culture, traditions, and lifestyle of the society in which it operates.[27] The climate of the 1960s, it is commonly accepted, was different to that of the 1870 and 1944. Stating that there was no pleasure in proclaiming the death of Christian Britain, according to Callum Brown secularization played an important role in the formation of the religious landscape of contemporary Britain, and the 1960s played a specific role in this change.[28] Brown explains this refers to a discourse change. The way people, in general, constructed their identity, defining the 'self' using the terminology and moral codes of religion gave way to an understanding in which the 'self' was rapidly shaped around the non-religious codes. As Liam Gearon puts it, 'Brown argues that the real effect of secularization was in moral attitudes and behaviour.'[29] Secularization has had an important role in the transformation of RE.[30] It is in this sense that Barnes wrote about how RE in the 1960s took a different form.[31] In his book published in 1960 William R. Niblett depicted the situation well, pointing out, today there was a conflict of purposes and values in the minds of adults and children, in earlier times being committed to traditional values was not a trend even if one was very intelligent or self-conscious; but now being committed to something was a matter of great suspicion.[32] Along with secularization, pluralization, especially through the migration of people of various faith and ethnic backgrounds, was an important reason in moving away from

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Michael Grimmitt (ed.), *Religious Education and Social and Community Cohesion: An exploration of challenges and* opportunities (Great Wakering, 2010), p. 263.

[25] Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism,* p. 176.

[26] Terence Copley, *Teaching Religion: Sixty Years of Religious education in England and Wales* (New updated edn, Exeter, 2008), p. 101. Michael Hand, *Is religious education possible?: A philosophical investigation* (London, 2006), p. 1. See also, Jenny Berglund, Yafa Shanneik, and Brian Bocking, 'Introduction' in Jenny Berglund, Yafa Shanneik, and Brian Bocking (eds), *Religious Education in a Global-Local World* (Switzerland, 2016), p. 2. Daniel Moulin-Stożek and Jason Metcalfe, 'Mapping the moral assumptions of multi-faith religious education', *British Journal of Religious Education* 42.3 (2020), p. 253.

[27] Copley, *Teaching Religion*, p. 2. Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism,* p. 17.

[28] Callum G. Brown, *The death of Christian Britain: Understanding secularisation, 1800-2000* (2nd edn, London, 2009), pp. 1-2.

[29] Liam Gearon, *On Holy Ground: The Theory and Practice of Religious Education* (London, 2014), p. 82.

[30] Robert Jackson, *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality: Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy*, (London, 2004), p. 5.

[31] Barnes, 'Ninian Smart and the Phenomenological Approach', p. 316. See also, Lynn Revell, 'Religious education in England', *Numen* 55. 2-3 (2008), p. 221.

[32] William R. Niblett, *Christian Education in a Secular Society* (Oxford, 1960), p. 7. It was further observed that children articulated that they were tired of the confessional form and the studies of the Bible were found childish and irrelevant. (Harold Loukes, *Teenage Religion* (London, 1961), p. 150). Loukes mentioned similar things in 1969: students wanted to be given a voice in RE and to be included in the lesson, rather than be told to simply accept as true the things shared with them from the Bible. (Harold Loukes, 'I Religious Education in England', *Symposium* 64.1 (1969), p. 7.) Moreover, Loukes in *New Ground in Christian Education* endorsed that RE should be relevant to children's own lifeworld experiences, or, in David Aldridge's words, 'to the realities and concerns of their [students] own lives.' (Harold Loukes, *New Ground in Christian Education* (London, 1965). David Aldridge*, A hermeneutics of religious education* (London, 2015), p. 39.) See also, Edwin Cox, *Changing Aims in Religious Education* (London, 1966). Cox explained that RE could not find a rationale for promoting a Christian moral understanding and instilling religion as a national faith: a RE that told people what to believe was no longer accepted.

confessionalism in British RE.[33] Specifically, in the 1950s and 1960s, Britain witnessed significant waves of migration.[34] Various religious communities such as Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs became more visible in many British cities.[35] Although the teaching of other world religions was endorsed and undertaken previously (though to an extent from a Christian point of view), there was significant support to teach the faiths of those people around this time.[36]

Despite these important upheavals, the subject did not greatly abandon its Christianising intentions explicitly and remained mostly confessional in the 1960s. As Michael Grimmitt puts it, the syllabuses produced in the 1960s were confessional 'in both outlook and approach.'[37] In the same vein, drawing on four syllabuses of this period such as the Inner London Syllabus (1968), Working Paper 36 expounded this as follows: 'these syllabuses remain Christian documents written by Christians and aiming at Christian education.'[38]

Now we are in a position to underline firmly what we said at the beginning of this chapter: in the early history of the subject two dominant ways for the flourishing of society in the face of the conflicting truth claims of faiths have been placing a great emphasis on similarities and confessionalism. With regard to the former, seeing the Bible more as unifying in state schools amounts to the flourishing of society envisioned by lending great importance to what was common among faiths. In Hull's expression, religious educators' tendency to omit religious doctrines was driven by the fear that discussion of different doctrines could yield controversy.[39] Regarding the latter, if this period was assessed on a distinction between the conception of the worldview of religion and the perceptions of different approaches proposed for the study of faiths, the former could claim its sovereignty, despite the confessional account can be considered as an approach. The confessional approach therefore means the subject has been in favour of Christianity in terms of the flourishing of society: teaching something as true and

[33] See, for example, Robert Jackson, *Religious Education for Plural Societies: The Selected Works of Robert Jackson* (London, 2019), p. 5. Pett and Cooling, 'Understanding Christianity', p. 258. Julia Ipgrave and Ursula McKenna state that confessional RE was a common theme in the first half of the twentieth century but this was questioned by educationalists concerning its appropriateness running up against an increasingly secular and religiously plural society. (Ipgrave and McKenna, '*Diverse experiences and common vision*'). For a similar view see also, David Carr, 'Religious Education, Religious Literacy and Common Schooling: A Philosophy and History of Skewed Reflection', *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 41. 4 (2007), p. 660. Leni Franken, 'Religious studies and Nonconfessional RE: Countering the debates', *Religion and Education* 45.2 (2018), p. 155). The Commission on Religious Education, *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward - A National Plan for RE* (Final Report*,* London, 2018), p. 5.

[34] Copley, *Teaching Religion,* pp. 62-63.

[35] Jackson, *Religious Education for Plural Societies,* p. 5.

[36] For previous support to teach other religions see Dennis Bates, 'Christianity, culture and other religions (Part 2): F H Hilliard, Ninian Smart and the 1988 Education Reform Act', *British Journal of Religious Education* 18. 2 (1996). Bates also argues that the origin of the view to study world religions derives from Liberal Protestantism, emphasising the universality of religion. He writes "the basis of this theological position was the conviction of the universality of experience of God as mind or spirit and the belief that each world religion was an interpretation of what was essentially the same experience. The reason for studying other faiths was that they too conveyed knowledge of God; Religion was greater than any one religion, even Christianity. This positive motive for the study of other religions contrasts strikingly with some secularist motives for such study." (Dennis Bates, 'Christianity, culture and other religions (Part 1): the origins of the study of world religions in English education', *British Journal of Religious Education* 17. 1 (1994), p. 15). See also, Rob Freathy and Stephen Parker, 'Prospects and problems for Religious Education in England, 1967–1970: curriculum reform in political context', *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 36. 1 (2015), p. 8. For support to teach other faiths around the 1970s, see, for example, W. Owen Cole, 'Religion in the multi-faith school' *Learning for Living* 12.2 (1972), p. 23. Cole stated that the multi-religious society highlights urgent steps to be taken in education. Working paper draws attention to the point that there was a desire for broadening RE to include other faiths as a separate issue, and the arrival of people reinforced this case. (Schools Council, *Schools Council Working Paper 36*, p. 61).

[37] Grimmitt, *What Can I do in RE?,* p. 20.

[38] Schools Council, *Schools Council Working Paper 36,* p. 34. See also, The Inner London Education Authority, *Learning for Life*: *The Agreed Syllabus of Religious Education of the Inner London Education Authority* (London, 1968).

[39] Hull, *Studies in Religion and Education*, p. 50.

desiring to be lived in that direction aims to establish a society within the framework of that faith's worldview.[40]

Finally, in the early history of the subject, while the flourishing of society was the aim e.g., with the teaching of Christianity a great emphasis could have been placed on individuals' salvation and spiritual development, as Geoff Teece points out, in early syllabuses the aim 'was the nurturing of pupils' spiritual lives within the context of a common Christian heritage', the contribution that RE can make to this via centralising happiness in relation to what we ultimately aim to achieve is not evident, or it is not evident that happiness as the ultimate end has been realised and developed in any deep and meaningful way.[41] Thus, it could be concluded, RE has been deprived of an important path if centralising happiness could have great potential in leading to the flourishing of society.

C) Tension in the early approaches of non-confessional RE

Even though the subject remained predominantly confessional in the 1960s, the challenges posed by these various educational and social changes were influential on RE, and, therefore, since specifically the 1970s British RE has transformed from a confessional approach to a non-confessional stance.[42] This transformation was highlighted in Working Paper 36, which acknowledged that the significant changes in society and education necessitated a re-evaluation of many issues that most RE teachers were hardly aware of twenty-five years ago.[43] In Grimmitt's words: 'the task of establishing RE on a sound educational footing within a total curriculum which was no longer seen as being rooted in a Christian consensus of beliefs and values took on a new urgency in the early seventies.'[44] If the non-confessional period was assessed on the distinction between the conception of the worldview of religion and the perceptions of different approaches proposed for the study of faiths, then the latter could claim its sovereignty, despite these approaches could be committed to reflecting the nature of faiths truthfully.

The new route for the subject significantly came with Working Paper 36, which was published under the direction of Ninian Smart who in the UK first established The Department of Religious Studies at the University of Lancaster in 1967, with a note: ''religious studies should emphasise the descriptive, historical side of religion', and should 'enter into dialogue with the parahistorical claims of religions and antireligious outlooks'.[45] Denise Cush's words are worth quoting here:

> *'It is perhaps hard for those new to the profession in the UK to understand what a massive and liberating revolution was started by the work of Smart and the Schools Council Working Paper 36 (Schools Council 1971). Not only did the content of RE change (e.g.,*

[40] For a similar idea see Keith Sharpe, 'Religion and worldviews in 1944 and 2021: a sociological analysis of religious education in two sociohistorical contexts', *Journal of Religious Education* 69.3 (2021), p. 333.
[41] Geoff Teece, 'The aims and purpose of religious education', in L. Philip Barnes (ed.), *Learning to Teach Religious Education in the Secondary School A Companion to School Experience* (*3rd edn*, London, 2017), p. 10.
[42] We should note, the confessional stance persisted later into the 1990s for instance, and some scholars such as Brenda Watson and Penny Thompson continued to advocate for it into the 2000s. What is meant by this transformation can, therefore, be explained as a great growing tendency towards a non-confessional stance. Brenda Watson and Penny Thompson, *The Effective Teaching of Religious Education* (2nd edn, London, 2007).
[43] Schools Council, *Schools Council Working Paper 36,* p. 8.
[44] Grimmitt, 'Contributing to social and community cohesion', p. 263.
[45] Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity*, p. 59. For the establishment of the religious studies department, see Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism,* p. 183. Ninian Smart, *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion* (London, 1968), p. 106. See also, Denise Cush, 'Changing the Game in English Religious Education: 1971 and 2018', in Olof Franck and Peder Thalén (eds), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age: Case Studies from Europe* (Cham, 2021), p. 140.

to include religious traditions other than Christianity), but the approach also. The RE teacher was no longer expected to assume or to teach pupils that the claims of a particular tradition or text were 'true', but to embark with them on a journey of exploration with the goal of better understanding.'[46]

Interpreting the confessional approach as dogmatic, Working Paper 36 presented itself as the opposite: it aimed not to promote the reasons of one faith over others. Working Paper 36 pertains to human rights, suggesting the inclusion of other people's faiths should be incorporated into RE. The approach being advocated in this booklet is phenomenological.[47] There are some important convictions in this account. One of them is *epoche* (bracketing), which refers to the restraining of our assumptions in order to reflect and understand any faith objectively. The next one is *eidetic* vision implying the 'intuition of the 'essence' of a phenomenon through investigating sufficient manifestations of it.'[48] *Eidetic* vision is associated with the notion of *epoche*. Clive Erricker puts this well, stating 'whilst epoche involves the restraint of judgement, or 'bracketing out', eidetic vision is the resultant capacity to see what is really, 'objectively' there, as a result.'[49] Another one is empathy, which amounts to an attempt to see things from the perspective of other people who subscribe to different worldviews. What is more, Smart previously recommended that religions had dimensions: doctrinal, mythological, ethical, ritual, experiential, and social.[50] Smart's vision of the dimensions of religions has been adapted to this phenomenological approach: it is highlighted, faiths should be studied according to these elements.

An important criticism directed at the phenomenological approach is about the question of truth. It is a matter of dispute whether Smart's phenomenological approach in Working Paper 36 ultimately aimed to rule out any account of the question of the truth of faiths. Perhaps, one of the longest debates about this issue has taken place between Barnes and Kevin O'Grady.[51] Barnes argued, despite the strengths of the phenomenological approach, some weaknesses threaten the whole enterprise. Drawing a comparison between Smart's book *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion* published in 1968 and Working Paper 36, Barnes insists, the question of religious truth is endorsed in this book, whereas 'this position contrasts to his later view in Working Paper 36, where no mention is made of parahistorical studies and where the critical element in religious education is reinterpreted to mean that no one religious viewpoint should

[46] Denise Cush, 'Schools Council Working Paper 36, several books by Ninian Smart, and the 2019 Golden Anniversary of non-confessional, multi-faith RE', *British Journal of Religious Education* 41.3 (2019), p. 367.
[47] Schools Council, *Schools Council Working Paper 36*. Kathleen Engebretson, 'Phenomenology and Religious Education Theory', in M. de Souza, K. Engebretson, G. Durka, A. McGrady, and R. Jackson (eds), *International Handbook of the Religious, Spiritual and Moral Dimensions of Education* (Dordrecht, 2006), p. 652. See also Aldridge*, A hermeneutics of religious education*, p. 57.
[48] Denise Cush, 'Without Fear or Favour: Forty Years of Non-confessional and Multi-faith Religious Education in Scandinavia and the UK', in Leni Franken and Patrick Loobuyck (Eds), *Religious Education in a Plural, Secularised Society A Paradigm Shift* (Münster, 2011), p. 73. Revell, 'Religious education in England', p. 227. See also, Franken, 'Religious Studies and Nonconfessional RE', p. 156.
[49] Clive Erricker, *Religious Education: A Conceptual and Interdisciplinary Approach for Secondary Level* (London, 2010), p. 45.
[50] Smart, *Secular education*.
[51] Barnes, 'Ninian Smart and the Phenomenological Approach'. L. Philip Barnes, 'The Contribution of Professor Ninian Smart to Religious Education', *Religion* 31.4 (2001). L. Philip Barnes, 'What is wrong with the phenomenological approach to religious education?', *Religious Education* 96. 4 (2001). L. Philip Barnes, 'The disputed legacy of Ninian Smart and phenomenological religious education: a critical response to Kevin O'Grady', *British Journal of Religious Education* 29.2 (2007). L. Philip Barnes, 'An honest appraisal of phenomenological religious education and a final, honest reply to Kevin O'Grady', *British Journal of Religious Education* 31.1 (2009). Kevin O'Grady, 'Professor Ninian Smart, phenomenology and religious education', *British Journal of Religious Education* 27.3 (2005). Kevin O'Grady, 'Honesty in religious education: Some further remarks on the legacy of Ninian Smart and related issues, in reply to L. Philip Barnes', *Journal of Religious Education* 31. 1 (2009).

enjoy a privileged status within the school curriculum.'[52] Barnes advocated the argument that when British RE became non-confessional, with an adaptation of the phenomenological approach, it was in fact replaced by another type of confessionalism. This was, namely, liberal theology because of the deep convictions of the phenomenological theory, which, beneath the doctrinal diversity, support the foundational agreement of religions.[53] One of the answers O'Grady gives is that being influenced by something does not presuppose the requirement to influence others. Smart has been influenced by Buddhism for example, but he is not accused of converting people into Buddhism. There can be searching for a shared foundation in the phenomenological approach, this does not assume Smart designed his approach for a universal theology, the idea that religions are the complementary parts of the same sacred. Although the document does not provide an in-depth account of the pursuit of truth, and the theological influence of phenomenology can be found, Smart, I maintain, involves both historical (descriptive i.e., whether Jesus lived in Galilee) and parahistorical (the truth or the value of religion i.e., whether Jesus died for sin) sides.[54] The question of truth is acknowledged in this paper. For example, it is stated, 'objective teaching seeks to present for beliefs, so that they may be accepted or rejected freely and intelligently'; also Andrew Wright and Alberts acknowledge the importance of truth in this paper: while Wright states working Paper 36 is the clearest evidence of liberal religious education's original commitment to the pursuit of religious truth, Alberts expresses, the phenomenological account aimed to direct students to understand religion and engage with questions about truth and value of religion.[55]

On this reading, the flourishing of society in the face of conflicting truth claims of faiths is not only imagined through objective study of religions with the hope of getting people to reach a certain level of knowledge and understanding about different beliefs and in turn navigate their lives accordingly in a multicultural society; but also by aiming to establish values like trust among people in terms of justice by emphasising the necessity of teaching different faiths, especially in a multicultural society, in terms of human rights. Additionally, it involves refraining from promoting any particular religious tradition as superior to others in the belief that a confessional form can produce division among individuals in RE and perhaps later in life. The question of truth is also regarded as significant for the good of society: truthful living is seen as a good path for society. What is more, the appeal to concepts such as empathy was an attempt to develop understanding among people.

Finally, just as in the previous line, in the face of this tension, the contribution RE can make to society by centralising the notion of happiness in relation to what we ultimately strive for is bypassed in this document, at the very beginning of non-confessional RE, so to say. The same conclusion, then, can be drawn about this document: non-confessional turn was deprived of an

[52] Barnes, 'Ninian Smart and the Phenomenological Approach', p. 327.

[53] Barnes here goes back to Friedrich Schleiermacher and speaks about how Schleiermacher has had a role in this trajectory as he gave momentum to the inner turn of theology in the face of criticism of natural theology by philosophers such as Hume and Kant. The heart of religion, therefore, has been understood as located in the experiences of the self. In the priority of religious experience, different faiths could claim agreement in terms of the experience of the same sacred. Thus, religions have been deemed complementary parts of the same universal spirit experienced in different doctrinal ways. Though the phenomenological approach was replaced by a multifaith approach in the late 1980s, theological convictions 'remained the same: the different religions are regarded as equally valid expressions of the Sacred.' (L. Philip Barnes, *Religious education: taking religious difference seriously* (*Impact* 17, 2009), p. 32). Since such a view is contrary to the truth assuming nature of religious traditions, and posits a particular thesis, it is a different kind of confessionalism.

[54] For the theological influence of phenomenology see, also Kevin O'Grady, *Religious Education as a Dialogue with Difference: Fostering Democratic Citizenship Through the Study of Religions in Schools* (New York, 2019), p. 131.

[55] Schools Council, *Schools Council Working Paper 36*, p. 24. Andrew Wright, *Critical religious education, multiculturalism and the pursuit of truth* (Cardiff, 2007), pp. 84-85. See also, Andrew Wright, 'The Contours of Critical Religious Education: Knowledge, Wisdom, Truth', *British Journal of Religious Education* 25.4 (2003). Alberts, *Integrative Religious Education*, p. 89. For a similar argument see, Cush, 'Changing the Game in English Religious Education', p. 146.

important path if centralising happiness has great potential in handling this tension in the best way.

Scholars defending a non-confessional approach often think that RE should be grounded in educational principles. After Smart, one of the early influential names of non-confessional RE was Grimmitt whose approach is greatly grounded in educational concerns. The influence of Grimmitt can be discerned in this passage from Cooling: 'every now and again a book is published that radically challenges the prevailing academic consensus concerning the nature and purpose of religious education (RE). The names of Smart, Grimmitt and Jackson spring to mind.'[56] The approach he proposed is known as *human development*.[57] Thinking about what it means to be human, Grimmitt endeavoured to place RE around the answer he gave to this question. The main reason he rotated RE around the notion of humanisation related to what he understood of the conception of education. Education is a 'process by, in and through pupils may begin to explore what it is, and what it means to be human.'[58] Since the subject matter is RE, a subject in education, alongside its concerns appropriate to its subject matter, it should be populated with humanisation. Reflecting on what individuals have in common, he speaks to us that certain characteristics of what it means to be human could be identified and one important one was that we as humans give meaning to our lives.

Having beliefs is a process of producing meaning, and this is the process of humanisation. Being non-value-free is recognised by both education and religion because they both contribute to its interpretation and thus contribute to humanisation. At this point, Grimmitt holds that:

> *"In this functional analysis of beliefs and believing is then related to education, it follows that education is concerned with promoting understanding of the different ways in which human beings engage in meaning-making, and religious education is especially concerned with promoting understanding of the contribution that holding religious beliefs makes to this process and recognising the effects that holding particular religious beliefs have upon them."*[59]

RE can supply a basis from which children can discern a self-transcendent reference point for their way of looking at the universe. If holding beliefs is a humanisation process, and individual choice is important in this, then understanding the religious way of meaning-making and the influence of holding particular beliefs is important for individual choice and therefore humanisation.

Despite the influence of the phenomenological approach as a guide for the non-confessional route on later accounts, the 'bracketing out' dimension has been criticised by many names. Accusing *epoche*, Grimmitt acknowledges children's assumptions as a part of learning. He is convinced that 'we must learn to harness this with the needs, experiences and questions of young people themselves, especially those which either arise from their own search for meaning and identity or which are conducive to their recognition of the importance of engaging in such a search.'[60] Grimmitt names the representing of religions and personal side as 'learning about religion' and 'learning from religion'. He states how RE should not only dwell on what it means to be a Christian, but also enable children to 'evaluate their understanding of religion

[56] Trevor Cooling, 'The search for truth: postmodernism and religious education', *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 26.1 (2005), p. 87.
[57] Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity,* p. 103.
[58] Michael Grimmitt, *Religious education and human development* (Essex, 1987), p. 200.
[59] *Ibid.,* p. 195.
[60] *Ibid.,* pp. 202-203.

in personal terms and evaluate their understanding of self in religious terms.'[61] More clearly this appears in this passage from Grimmitt: 'if religions are studied in such a way as to juxtapose the 'content' of the religious life-worlds of adherents with the 'content' of the pupils' life worlds, pupils become informed about religious beliefs and values and are able to use them as instruments for the critical evaluation of their own beliefs and values.'[62] Mark Chater acknowledges this as follows: Grimmitt 'identified the lifeworld of the learner and the life-world of the religion as being two major reference points that meet in RE, and argued that measures of effectiveness should derive from these two worlds.'[63]

Learning from religion is concerned with two types of evaluation: impersonal and personal. The former pertains to evaluating truth claims of religions and of religion itself. In light of questions such as are these beliefs and values attractive and persuasive to me, the latter is a scrutiny in which more individual understanding is at the centre. There is a self-evaluation process here in connection with faiths.

Once again, it is important to evaluate the truth claims of religions because, to a great extent, it is significant in the context of conceiving what exists in the humanisation process of children, that is, a process of having beliefs. Grimmitt regards knowledge as socially constructed and therefore according to him, what human beings become is contingent and this belongs to socio-historical conditions and personal stories. The meaning we give to our life shapes what kind of person we become. In Cooling's words 'it is an inescapable fact of the human condition that we are products of what we believe.'[64] In this respect, 'our freedom to choose beliefs, and the shaping effects that our beliefs have on our personal future, adds up to our having responsibility for the people we are becoming. The more we take this responsibility seriously, the more fully we are human.'[65] This being the case, children should be equipped to choose for themselves, avoiding being stuck in the cultural norms imposed on them. Grimmitt at the same time points out, there are no publicly agreed criteria in the religious domain, and 'religious choices, therefore, must always be provisional as they take us beyond the limits of reliable knowledge.'[66] On this view, Cooling states, 'religion, seemingly, becomes true as it is chosen by an individual, but cannot be regarded as true in some objective, pre-existent sense outside of the realm of human experience.'[67] Religion is regarded as being about the promotion of the inner being of individuals, rather than as being about 'discovering the truth about a God or an objective reality outside of ourselves.'[68]

Grimmitt is committed to reflecting the religious account of reality, yet the central contention in Grimmitt's work is personal or human development. Though it can be argued that the main point of religious traditions is also driven by the humanisation concern in relation to the existence of ultimate reality as they, in Pring's words, 'embody different, though related, narratives of what it means to be human'; for example, believing in God can be associated with being human, or who are genuine humans are those who believe in God; and therefore,

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[61] *Ibid*., p. 213.
[62] *Ibid.,* p. 141.
[63] Mark Chater, 'The heart of the enterprise: a pedagogical problem', in Mark Chater and Clive Erricker, *Does Religious Education Have a Future?: Pedagogical and Policy Prospects* (London, 2013), p. 53.
[64] Trevor Cooling, *A Christian vision for state education: Reflections on the Theology of Education* (London, 1994), p. 22.
[65] *Ibid.,* p. 23.
[66] *Ibid*., p. 24.
[67] *Ibid.,* p. 23.
[68] Trevor Cooling, 'Commitment and indoctrination: a dilemma for Religious Education?' in Lynne Broadbent and Alan Brown (eds), *Issues in Religious Education* (London, 2002), p. 47.

Grimmitt's account does not attach the secondary importance to the nature of religion.[69] This, however, necessitates another discussion of the coherence between the nature of religion and Grimmitt's approach; and in cases where, for example, the existence of God should be given priority over human development, –as for instance, Brenda Watson argues, RE should be mainly God-centred to open up 'for pupils the *possibility* that the fundamental focus of religion on a Reality that transcends this empirical world is true',– then, his tendency to focus attention on personal human development can be found problematic for paying mere lip-service to the religions as accounts purchasing on reality.[70]

In addition to this, Grimmitt's approach can be said to lack a deep and systematic account of evaluative judgements of knowledge we hold. Grimmitt values encouraging pupils to explore knowledge for themselves and arrive at their own conclusions. Yet, how to have a more reasonable account is not as deep as the former concern. Moreover, the fact that Grimmitt, on the one hand, is prone to defend evaluative judgements, and on the other hand, he holds a thoroughly constructivist account, indicating a strong sceptical attitude towards the possibility of our knowledge describing reality; this suggests, pursuing truth comes close to being a futile task.

In this scheme of things, adopting the lifestyle most worthy of being human constitutes the fundamental principle of the flourishing of society in the face of conflicting truth claims of faiths: the more we are human the more we can contribute to the flourishing of society. Knowledge and understanding come to the fore in this conception: they are important in terms of the comprehension of what exists as accounts in the humanisation process of children. In this light, once again, Grimmitt argues in favour of making our own decisions, however, this is not deep and systematic. Added to this, though Grimmitt acknowledges faith differences, he applies a unity having to do with being human: despite our faith differences, we are all human giving meaning to our lives. Finally, similar to Smart, Grimmitt also holds fast to precepts such as empathy for they can establish a link between students so that they can appreciate diversity.[71]

There is a distinction made between Smart's vision of the phenomenological approach and the later usages and influences of this approach in RE.[72] Wright, for example, argued, 'regrettably, the history of the various forms of liberal religious education that have dominated the curriculum since the mid-1970s can be read as the history of the failure to realise Smart's embryonic vision of a genuinely critically realistic religious education.'[73] A phenomenological approach to RE is often questioned on the grounds that it paves the way for glossing over differences between faiths. This is particularly related to the notion of seeking a similar basis while making differences not important and downplaying the question of truth. Similar to the idea of such unity, seeing faiths as rotating around the same sacred was picked up by two early important scholars in British RE: Hull and David Hay. In the case of Hull, Barnes, in comparison with the phenomenological approach, brings this out as follows:

> *"[Hull] has no interest in identifying the essence of religion or in attempting to identify and explain what is distinctive about it. Nevertheless…these are insignificant compared with the similarities. Both Hull and phenomenological religious educators…perceive a*

[69] Richard Pring, 'Is Religious Education Possible?', in Scherto Gill and Garrett Thomson (eds), *Redefining Religious Education: Spirituality for Human Flourishing* (Palgrave, 2014), p. 17.
[70] Brenda Watson, 'Secularism, Schools and Religious Education', in Marius Felderhof, Penny Thompson, and David Torevell (eds), *Inspiring faith in schools: studies in religious education* (Aldershot, 2007), p. 12.
[71] Grimmitt, 'Contributing to social and community cohesion', p. 274.
[72] O'Grady, 'Professor Ninian Smart'. See also, Barnes, 'Ninian Smart and the Phenomenological Approach', p. 324.
[73] Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism*, p. 185.

common spiritual dynamic in the different religions and both believe that the divine is present and is active to save in all religions; and on the basis of these commitments both believe that religious intolerance and discrimination can be effectively challenged in schools."[74]

Much of Hull's work within RE has been on the challenges of plurality.[75] According to Hull, what people previously saw as absolute is questioned by relativization and privatization. As a result of increasing secularization and pluralism challenging what is at the heart of faith, religious believers have a "bafflement".[76] For Cooling, Hull believes that in other areas of life, people have cognitive bargaining which means they reconsider their beliefs when encountering others. However, in the sphere of religion, bargaining is difficult because the stakes are too high. For this principal reason, the answer is generally to preserve religion rather than answering the challenge of living in the modern world. Cooling states, Hull characterises this as ideological closure, which is a sickness in the way to learn. For Hull, those who suffer from this sickness are stage defenders, referring to people 'who are unwilling to progress in their faith development, preferring to remain with their childhood experience of religion.'[77] In this sense, the main function of RE is to combat this sickness.

'The Song of Roland' poem which has the potential to generate tension between Christians and Muslims is an important example of this sickness in Hull's work. Hull intended to discuss how it was unfortunate such work was still on school shelves.[78] Using the term religionism for such behaviours, Hull explains it as follows:

"Religionism describes an adherence to a particular religion which involves the identity of the adherent so as to support tribalistic or nationalistic solidarity. The identity which is fostered by religionism depends upon rejection and exclusion. We are better than they. We are orthodox; they are infidel. We are believers; they are unbelievers. We are right; they are wrong. The other is identified as the pagan, the heathen, the alien, the stranger, the invader, the one who threatens us and our way of life. Religion is in principle universal in its outlook but religionism is committed to the partial."[79]

If tolerance is understood as putting up with what we disagree with, schools, on this view, should develop a positive approach to different faiths. In order to develop a positive approach, different religions should be seen as not in competition with each other. RE should motivate pupils to 'move away from divided loyalty and limited, tribalistic loyalty into the true monotheism of universal faith.'[80] The idea that needs to be advanced in RE is that religions are united in certain ethical and spiritual ideals: with the light of mediating God's presence, an endeavour should be working for establishing peace and justice.[81] Therefore, precepts such as

[74] Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity*, p. 140.
[75] *Ibid*., p. 127. Hull, who is often evaluated within the liberal paradigm of RE as a wider model, was the editor of what is known today as the *British Journal of Religious Education* (BJRE) for 25 years. (Robert Jackson, 'Professor John Hull: theologian, educationist, mentor and friend', *British Journal of Religious Education* 38.1 (2016)).
[76] Cooling, *A Christian vision for state education.*
[77] *Ibid.,* p. 11.
[78] John Hull, 'The transmission of religious prejudice', *British Journal of Religious Education* 14.2 (1992).
[79] *Ibid.,* p. 70. See also, John Hull, 'Religionism and Religious Education', in Mal Leicester, Celia Modgil, and Sohan Modgil (Eds), *Spiritual and Religious Education* (London, 2000), p. 111.
[80] John Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* (London, 1985), p. 38.
[81] John Hull, *Utopian Whispers: moral, religious and spiritual values in schools* (Norwich, 1998), p. 1. See also. Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity*, p. 131.

tolerance were important but were found not enough; alongside this, it is said, the denial of the truth of religions was in operation.[82]

Barnes states that although an existential encounter with the reality of religion took up space in the works of scholars such as Grimmitt, 'many of the textbooks that purported to express a phenomenological approach to religious education amounted to little more than a catalogue of religious phenomena arranged thematically.'[83] Developing an experiential approach, Hay, on the other hand, pointed out, the study of religions has often been informative within the phenomenological approach, ignoring religious experience, though studying religion according to the dimensions of religions Smart put forward, including the focusing on experimental aspect of religion. In this context, Hay uses the analogy of science, noting that avoiding the practical life in an educational approach to religion is like disallowing students from entering a laboratory.[84]

Though Hay in 2006 argued how this approach can go hand in hand with the debate about the truthfulness of religious belief, this approach primarily holds that religion has a hidden core and this can only be conceived of by experience because this is beyond language: 'it is the personal experience that matters to the religious believer, and without some grasp of that intention, students will have no real understanding of religion.'[85] Since we have a biological base, the duty of a teacher is to help pupils recognise what they already potentially know: the essential purpose of RE is to get a genuine grasp of the nature of religion via entry into a spiritual ground state. This process will assist students 'to open their personal awareness to those aspects of their experience which are recognised by religious people as the root of religion.'[86] In this direction, in the experiential approach one of the central convictions is that religion must be presented for what it claims to be, and this is the 'the response of human beings to what they experience as the sacred.'[87] Just as Hull sees religions as united in certain ethical and spiritual principles, so do Hay, considering the essence of religious understanding as a spiritual experience of the same transcendent. Faiths were seen as the different parts of the

[82] L. Philip Barnes, *Crisis, Controversy and the Future of Religious Education* (London, 2020), p. 161. According to Barnes, what Hull proposed is tantamount to saying that religionism 'is to be combated by explicit teaching on the universalist thrust of religion – the notion that followers of a tradition are working to extend God's kingdom in the world, and that followers of different religious traditions recognise each other as working towards the same end.' (Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity*, p. 131).

[83] Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity*, p. 106.

[84] David Hay, 'The religious experience and education project', in Michael Grimmitt (ed.), *Pedagogies of Religious Education: Case Studies in the Research and Development of Good Pedagogic Practice in RE* (Essex, 2000), p. 73. Hay was influenced by Alister Hardy who approached religion in terms of natural history: theology and the natural world were to be related. Working on the biology of spirit, Hardy stated, religious experience was common among people, and in fact, it was natural: religious behaviour and experience of mankind was part of their nature. (Alister Hardy, *The living stream: Evolution and Man* (New York, 1965), p. 11.) Hay says that for Hardy this awareness which has a positive function with respect to helping individuals survive in their natural environment potentially exists in all humans and is different from everyday awareness. (David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The spirit of the child* (revised edn, London, 2006), p. 22). Following Hardy, Hay points out, spirituality is a natural biological reality. (*Ibid.,* p. 11).

[85] John Hammond, et al., *New Methods in Religious Education Teaching: An Experimental Approach* (Essex, 1990), p. 10. Christopher, 'RE as liberal education', p. 36. On giving room to reason see, Hay and Nye, *The spirit of the child,* p. 170. See also, Anta Filipsone, 'Religious literacy or spiritual awareness? Comparative critique of Andrew Wright's and David Hay's approaches to spiritual education', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 14.2 (2009), p. 123.

[86] David Hay, 'Suspicion of the Spiritual: Teaching Religion in a World of Secular Experience', *British Journal of Religious Education* 7.3 (1985), p. 141. See also, Hammond et al., *New Methods*, p. 22. Hull explains well Hay's approach as 'experimental awakening' seeking to 'awaken pupils or to sensitize them to features of their own lives such as sensitivity to human relationships, awareness of emotions and dreams, and so on. Such insights will be relevant to understanding the intentions and characteristics of religion.' (John Hull, 'A gift to the child: a new pedagogy for teaching religion to young children', *Religious Education* 91.2 (1996), p. 174).

[87] Hay, 'Suspicion of the Spiritual', p. 142.

same reality: 'the difference between religions is to be explained by the diversity and range of human cultures through which the same spiritual awareness comes to expression' [88]

The main criticism of universal monotheism thought of this approach as misrepresenting the nature of religious traditions having contested truth claims.[89] However, as soon as we start seeing religious traditions from the perspective of these two scholars, we may find ourselves saying the true nature of religions is based on seeing them as different parts of the same reality. This signifies that one of the main issues in which an approach differs from other accounts is related to how the nature of religion is actually comprehended.

The primary strategy of handling this tension in Hull and Hay, thus, consists, in light of the existence of God, in seeing different faiths as different parts of the same Sacred; in spreading an understanding of togetherness between people through the vision that we ultimately believe in the same God, or that we are the children of the same ultimate reality: they wish to ground solidarity in transcendent being. As Barnes and Wright summarise such approaches posit, ''experience unites whereas doctrine divides.''[90] This can also be read in this way: since the same reality, which is regarded to constitute the heart of religion and around which different faiths are seen united, is deemed as of utmost importance, contested truth claims of faiths become insignificant.

These analyses spell out that unity whether in the manner of focusing mainly on faith similarities, seeing faiths as different parts of the same sacred, and concentrating on a similar base rather than faiths is an important notion that has been embraced by many throughout the history of British RE.

Finally, though the tension between exclusive truth claims and the need to promote the flourishing of society is a central driving force in establishing valid educational objectives in the works of those early scholars; similar to the early trajectory of the subject, the contribution RE can make via centralising the notion of happiness in relation to what we ultimately aim to achieve is not evident. In this thesis, it will be argued, centralising happiness has the potential to contribute to the flourishing of society.

These approaches can be classified as early non-confessional accounts. There are also more contemporary influential accounts in British RE.

D) Tension in the works of contemporary scholars

Given the contested nature of truth claims of faiths, more contemporary post-confessional forms of RE also seek to establish valid educational objectives. Because they can be accepted as general common accounts, three influential approaches are presented here, which are: interpretive, conceptual enquiry, and Critical Religious Education (CRE).

Individuality and diversity and contextual looking take a central place in the first of these approaches in the way to the flourishing of society. Robert Jackson has developed the

[88] Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity*, p. 106. Alberts, *Integrative RE*. See also, Wright, Religious education and Critical Realism, pp. 192, 193.
[89] See, for example, L. Philip Barnes, 'The misrepresentation of religion in modern British (religious) education', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 54.4 (2006).
[90] Barnes and Wright, 'Romanticism, representations of religion and critical religious education', p. 68.

interpretive approach. His article written in 1995 provides the foundation of his account.[91] In this article Jackson observes that RE is problematic in countering deep-seated racism, and the main problem resides in the representation of religious traditions.

Criticising a dimension of the phenomenological strain, he points out, religion has been seen as a *sui generis* phenomenon with its own essence and character. In Smart, religions were reflected with the same dimensions; while in Grimmitt, religion was a worldview of the universe and our experiences. For Hull, religions are understood as different parts of the same reality whilst; in Hay, this emerges as human responses to the Sacred. If these scholars were categorised in the same group on the basis that they tend to comprehend religion as having a substantial enduring identity, Jackson would be placed on the opposite side, criticising such approaches for the sake of a 'much looser portrayal of religious traditions and groupings.'[92] Aldridge summarises, 'Robert Jackson, drawing on Wilfred Cantwell Smith' s deconstruction of the Western concept of 'religion', offers a convincing account of how the phenomenological approach came to 'entrap' the objects of RE within 'schematic formulations of key beliefs and concepts' which did little justice to insiders' experiences of their own faith.'[93]

Jackson relies on the work of Smith according to whom the contemporary concept of religion and the names of world religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism were invented during the Enlightenment era by the West.[94] Smith argues that although the term religion stems from the Latin term *religio* and can be traced back to a time BC (such as in the writings of Lucretius and Cicero), it was an aspect of human life marked by evolution in process and generally meant piety and devotion; the meaning has been changed tremendously since the Enlightenment.[95] The term has been ascribed to a fixed entity, abstractly representing religious traditions as unified belief systems. For Smith, a religious tradition is not a separate, identifiable system, since faith is intermingled with other dimensions of culture and it changes from one town to another, even from one day to the next in one's own life. Thus, the concept of religion is incompatible with any adequate understanding of the religious aspects of human life. Jackson also draws on the works of some other important names; in particular, Clifford Geertz, where he finds the approach to culture flexible as opposed to seeing it as a discrete whole. Drawing on the implication of this, Gearon infers, 'as the critical realist sees the learner as a budding philosopher, the interpretive approach sees them as anthropologists and ethnographers.'[96] Building on the works of those scholars, Jackson's main goal is driven by a concern to reflect religious traditions in the classroom environment in a way showing diversity and change within and between them. His approach can be well conceived of in this passage from Jackson:

> *"In particular, I pointed to the dangers of representing religious worldviews as bounded systems of belief and proposed a more personal and flexible model allowing for the uniqueness of each person, while giving due attention to the various influences which help to shape any individual's sense of personal and social identity."*[97]

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[91] Robert Jackson, 'Religious Education's Representation of 'Religions' and 'Cultures'', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 43. 3 (1995). See also Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity,* p. 184.
[92] Wright, *Critical religious education*, pp. 143-146. Robert Jackson, 'Creative pedagogy in Religious Education', in Hans-Günter Heimbrock, Christoph Th. Scheilke, and Peter Schreiner (eds), *Towards Religious Competence: Diversity as a challenge for education in Europe* (Münster, 2001), pp. 34-35. See also, Julian Stern, *Teaching Religious Education*: *Researchers in the Classroom* (London, 2006), p. 77.
[93] Aldridge, *A hermeneutics of religious education*, p. 40.
[94] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The meaning and end of religion: A new approach to the religious traditions of mankind* (New York, 1963), pp. 19–50.
[95] See, for example, Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On the Nature of Gods*, trans. Harris Rackham (Cambridge, 1933), p. 4.
[96] Gearon, *On Holy Ground*, p. 72.
[97] Jackson, *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality*, p. 88.

This approach focuses on diversity and change through individuals' lives in membership groups, such as family, peers, and denominations, and, in a wider sense, in their cumulative religious traditions. In Wolfram Weisse's words, 'in this approach, religion needs to be understood not as homogeneous and bounded systems, but in ways that recognise the diversity within religions and the uniqueness of each member, as well as the fact that each member is subject to many influences.'[98] For example, if the Shabbat in Judaism is to be studied, the texts represent a Jewish child experiencing this event with his or her family in the context of Judaism as a religious tradition and reference point.[99] In this light, this approach requires contextual looking in RE, embracing the idea that religious traditions need to be understood in relation to the circumstances surrounding and constituting them. Jackson writes:

> *"The basic point is that when one meets a person from within a religion one does not meet someone who relates straightforwardly to a whole cumulative tradition. One might meet someone whose "faith" is strongly influenced by the priorities and perceptions of one or more "groups", and whose personal transcendental interests might be inextricably intertwined with agendas set by those groups."*[100]

Another important element of Jackson's approach is called reflexivity, which is attributed to 'different aspects of the relationship between the experience of students… and the experience of those whose way of life they are attempting to interpret.'[101] This includes edification which refers to reassessing our own worldview through entry into a ground state of reflecting on the beliefs of others and implies a change in the face of the alternative worldviews.

Focusing on diversity in such an individual sense begs the question of downplaying the substantial identity of a religious tradition; that is, denying the possibility of having an enduring identity. Because his approach was found to reduce religious traditions to the atomistic level of individuals, Jackson has been accused of having been confused about the nature of religion.[102] Jackson retorted that reflecting the complex social reality of religions does not mean reducing them to the sum of its participants.[103] Concentrating on diversity does not prevent seeing religious traditions as a whole in general terms.[104] Speaking of them as a whole is, indeed, necessary for hermeneutical understanding. However, one needs to be careful of certain points when reference is given to wholes, such as considering insider and outsider perspectives, and the evolution of the traditions in time. Therefore, to represent the Hindu tradition as a whole accepted by all Hindus is misleading.

In this light, Jackson's strategy of promoting the flourishing of society consists of presenting religious traditions in a flexible and open way, implying not only that different groups within

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[98] Wolfram Weisse, 'REDCo: A European research project on religion in education', *Religion and Education* 37.3 (2010), pp. 187– 202. See also, Kevin O'Grady, *Conceptualising Religion and Worldviews for the School: Opportunities, Challenges, and Complexities of a Transition from Religious Education in England and Beyond* (New York, 2022), p. 96.

[99] Robert Jackson, 'The Warwick RE project: An Interpretive Approach to Religious Education', *Religious Education* 94.2 (1999), p. 209. See also Robert Jackson, 'Why study religions in publicly funded schools?' in Alberto Melloni and Francesca Cadeddu (eds), *Religious Literacy, Law and History: Perspectives on European Pluralist Societies* (London, 2019).

[100] Jackson, *Religious Education for Plural Societies*, p. 116.

[101] Jackson, *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality*, p. 88. See also Robert Jackson, 'Misrepresenting religious education's past and present in looking forward: Gearon using Kuhn's concepts of paradigm, paradigm shift and incommensurability', *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 36.1 (2015), p. 71.

[102] Andrew Wright, 'Contextual religious education and the actuality of religions', *British Journal of Religious Education* 30.1 (2008). See also, Gearon, *MasterClass in Religious,* p. 130.

[103] Robert Jackson, 'Contextual religious education and the interpretive approach', *British Journal of Religious Education* 30.1 (2008). See also Jackson, *Religious Education for Plural Societies,* p. 7.

[104] Jackson, *Religious Education for Plural Societies,* p. 119.

a religious tradition could feel satisfied because their faith differences are reflected, but also our prejudices can be challenged in seeing religion and its adherents as a whole and the same. Moreover, interestingly, similarly to Hull and Hay, albeit in a different way, Jackson argues that representing religions with similar structures is to imagine them 'in competition with each other'; which suggests religions are not to be seen in competition: where Hull and Hay embrace universal monotheism, Jackson, by focusing on diversity, change, and fuzzy edginess between religious traditions, inclines to argue that religious traditions to an extent lack a separate meaningful and sustainable identity from which substantial conflicting truth claims can be identified.[105] Even though Jackson states the truth is important, and his approach, specifically in the context of the reflexivity element, allows an examination of different ideas of truth held within the classroom, the expense of this is that engagement with the question of truth in RE somehow loses its meaning.

Together with individuality and diversity, embracing thoroughgoing relativism is another pattern occurring in contemporary British RE. This is central in the conceptual enquiry approach developed by Erricker and his wife Jane Erricker. The following passage can be said to summarise their basic premise well: 'in asking teachers to value the children's narratives we are asking them to act in opposition to the demands increasingly made by curricula to concentrate on objective knowledge and instead to value subjective knowledge in the form of the narratives, or stories that the children tell.'[106]

They believe a particular spell was reinforced by the Enlightenment and its progeny modernism. The shared point is rationality 'a belief that epistemological constructions are the means to human progress.'[107] Education is based on a curriculum consisting of knowledge, which is often conceived as objective. This has had tragic effects such as a lack of concern for imagination and individuality, as it is ensured that children should inherit the constructions of the past. One rationale for concentrating on objectivity is that of ensuring the flourishing of society and the normalisation of morality.

Influenced by names such as Jean Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault, Erricker and Erricker adopted a postmodern worldview. For Erricker and Erricker, what is accepted as knowledge is tied up with certain values underpinning it: 'what we call knowledge has to be subjected to close scrutiny because it is always situated in political contexts and within political structures and climates.'[108] Moreover, ordering of knowledge seeks to serve to those who order knowledge, and 'consigns others to silence.'[109]

It is no accident that they argue against absolute knowledge claims. Cooling states, 'organized religions seem to be particularly guilty of these problems and therefore deep doubt of their content is in order.'[110] Their intention is not only to deconstruct grand narratives of faiths but

[105] Robert Jackson, *Religious Education: An interpretive approach* (London, 1997), p. 127. L. Philip Barnes, 'Does the worldviews approach provide a new paradigm for religious education?', in L. Philip Barnes (ed.), *Religion and Worldviews: The Triumph of the Secular in Religious Education* (London, 2023), p. 88.
[106] Clive Erricker and Jane Erricker, 'The children and worldview project: A narrative pedagogy of religious education', in Michael Grimmitt (ed.), *Pedagogies of Religious Education: Case Studies in the Research and Development of Good Pedagogic Practice in RE* (Essex, 2000), p. 201.
[107] Clive Erricker and Jane Erricker, *Reconstructing Religious, Spiritual and Moral Education* (London, 2000), p. 1. See also Erricker and Erricker, 'The children and worldview project', pp. 188-206.
[108] Clive Erricker, 'Shall We Dance? Authority, Representation, and Voice: The Place of Spirituality in Religious Education', *Religious Education* 96.1 (2001), p. 22.
[109] *Ibid.,* p. 23.
[110] Trevor Cooling [review], 'Clive Erricker and Jane Erricker, *Reconstructing Religious, Spiritual and Moral Education* (London, 2000)', *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 23.1 (2002), p. 108. See also Robert Jackson, 'Paradigm shift in religious

by doing this, also to arrive at the point that children should construct meaning from their own experiences. In this light, the narratives of the children are placed at the centre of RE.[111] To use Aldridge's analogy, this move is similar 'to the consciously postcolonial design of the displays of objects in the Museum of Sydney, where taxonomies have been done away with in favour of pastiche, collage and irony, so that the visitors are required to construct their own narratives.'[112] This line of thought is exacerbated by the claim that the only credible knowledge we can rely upon is the one originating in ourselves.[113] Patrick Joseph Quirke puts this as follows:

> *"As a consequence of this line of thought, Erricker determines that any 'knowledge' of value is determined by a person's own experiences, often referred to as narratives, which are used to construct our own understanding of the world. It is our own interpretation of 'experiences' that allow an individual to make progress and provide relevance to his/her own situatedness."*[114]

In this direction, they insisted RE should embrace widespread relativism: 'the first principle that underpins a narrative pedagogy is that all knowledge is relative. Relativism posits, there is no absolute or objective knowledge, in effect there is no 'contrary' to place in opposition to relativism.'[115] While Grimmitt describes their point, expressing 'they follow Foucault in holding that the meaning which the individual constructs represents reality and that truth is related to personal narratives constructed out of individual experiences', Cooling poetically tells us they 'attempt to slay the dragon of religious absolutism with the sword relativism.'[116]

There have been some modifications in their approach. Aldridge observes, while Erricker 'still draws on a constructivist model of learning, he now presents a model that does not rely on the postmodern form of constructivism.'[117] Quirke expounds this as a move from individual constructivism to the social-centred perspective relying on working together, rather than individualistic construction.

Yet, Erricker and Erricker's work has been highly criticised. Cooling, Brenda Watson and Penny Thompson, and Daniel Moulin talk about how relativism includes a logical inconsistency in that embracing relativism in the sense of the unknowability of things affirms that it cannot prove its validity: it is self-refuting.[118] Moreover, because a widespread relativism is embraced, they were criticised for underestimating the nature of reality. Jackson writes, 'they adopt a non-realist and strongly relativist stance, embracing post-modernism fulsomely... the Errickers' non-realist view removes any criteria for evaluating different sources and personal

education? A reply to Gearon, or when is a paradigm not a paradigm?', *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 39.3 (2018), p. 384. Jackson writes that generic and powerful representations of religions are rejected in Erricker and Erricker's account.

[111] Erricker and Erricker, *Reconstructing Religious.*

[112] Aldridge, *A hermeneutics of religious education*, p. 41.

[113] Patrick Joseph Quirke, 'Teachers' Voices: An investigation into secondary school teachers' experiences of The Living Difference Agreed Syllabus', PhD thesis (University of Southampton, 2018), p. 48.

[114] *Ibid.,* p. 49.

[115] Erricker and Erricker, 'The children and worldview project', p. 194

[116] Michael Grimmitt, 'Contemporary Pedagogies of Religious Education: What are they?', in Michael Grimmitt (ed.), *Pedagogies of Religious Education: Case Studies in the Research and Development of Good Pedagogic Practice in RE* (Essex, 2000), p. 45. Cooling [review], 'Clive Erricker and Jane Erricker', pp. 110-11.

[117] David Aldridge, 'Schemes of work and lesson planning', in L. Philip Barnes (ed.), *Debates in Religious Education* (London, 2012), p. 200.

[118] Cooling, [review] 'Clive Erricker and Jane Erricker', p. 111. Watson and Thompson, *The Effective Teaching of Religious Education*, p. 47. Daniel Moulin-Stozek, ''Religion', 'worldviews' and the reappearing problems of pedagogy', in L. Philip Barnes (ed.), *Religion and Worldviews: The Triumph of the Secular in Religious Education* (London, 2023), p. 146.

narratives.'[119] Similar to this, Wright accuses them of downplaying the nature of reality, stating that they 'in the name of personal autonomy, sought to free pupils to create their own virtual spiritual realities. This was seen as a necessary antidote to the dangerously intolerant attitudes implicit in the exclusive truth claims of many religious traditions.'[120]

In resolving this tension between the contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society, in comparison with universal monotheism, seeing religious traditions as different parts of the same Sacred, aiming to establish an intimacy between people through explaining that we are ultimately connected to the same Sacred give place in Erricker and Erricker to the way of seeing the question of truth as meaningless because the relationship between reality and knowledge is one of unknowability: there is no need to evaluate the beliefs we hold against each other in terms of their truthfulness because the nature of reality is unknowable. That is, a bond of unity is attempted to be established between people via the vision of obscurity. Moreover, similar to Jackson, through the method of deconstruction, they seek to prevent religious traditions from providing definitive narratives. As a result, there remains an unsustainable identity from which substantial conflicting truth claims cannot be identified. It follows that: since the recognition of conflicting truth claims is discouraged, this tension loses its meaning.

Finally, pursuing truth and truthful living is another influential approach in contemporary British RE. Cooling, when praising the voices of Smart, Grimmitt, and Jackson, as previously given, goes on to guide us to think about how with his approach 'Wright is set to join the small group of influential academics who have charted a new course for the subject.'[121] We have seen many scholars such as Smart, Grimmitt, and Jackson have concerns for truth, however, I maintain, Wright is the most prominent scholar offering the most thorough and influential account to engage with the question of truth in a deep and systematic manner in the field of British RE. In other words, Wright offers the best account of what it means to pursue truth in RE. I follow Wright in his claim that 'this desire to engage with questions of ultimate truth has rarely been realised in any deep, consistent or meaningful way', and that 'contemporary religious education has not merely marginalised the issue of truth; rather, it has sought to neutralize and contain it within a wide discourse about truth and truthfulness. Instead, there is a tacit understanding that it does not matter what you believe, provided you do so with integrity.'[122]

In a review of one of Wright's books, on the basis of the dictum of Heraclitus that 'wisdom is to speak the truth and act in keeping with its nature', which takes place at the beginning of the book, Wilna A.J. Meijer et al. spell out, the main point of Wright's work is to argue 'for the importance of attending to questions of religious truth and truthful living in religious education (RE)'[123] I agree with them in acknowledging Wright's approach has being based around the notions of reality, truth, and truthful living.

Wright's account is called Critical Religious Education (CRE), rooted in the philosophy of Critical Realism (CR) which has been developed by Roy Bhaskar since the 1970s.[124] The main

[119] Jackson, *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality,* pp. 59, 73.
[120] Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism,* p. 195.
[121] Cooling, 'The search for truth', p. 28.
[122] Wright, *Critical religious education*, pp. 80, 84.
[123] Wilna A.J. Meijer et al. [review], 'Andrew Wright, *Critical religious education, multiculturalism and the pursuit of truth* (Cardiff, 2007)', *British Journal of Religious Education* 32.1 (2010), p. 77.
[124] It is illuminating to elaborate on Bhaskar's philosophy. Bhaskar's philosophy is described in three main stages. (See Mervyn Hartwig, 'New Introduction', in Roy Bhaskar, *Reflections on MetaReality: Transcendence, emancipation and everyday life*

argument of CR suggests the relationship between reality and our knowledge of reality should be established correctly. CR, therefore, is indeed attributed to being an underlabourer: it is the philosophy that can be used for the resolution of problems in a way to understand reality. N. T. Wright's exposition of CR can be said to reflect this notion well: 'this is a theory about how people know things.'[125] CR posits that reality determines what is true and truthful living depends on living in harmony with it. CR formulates this situation around three elements: ontological realism, epistemic relativity, and judgemental rationality. Bhaskar calls these three components the 'holy trinity' of his approach.[126] Ontological realism refers to the view that reality to a great extent exists independently of us. As such, ontology 'is in fact irreducible to epistemology'.[127] Epistemic relativity denotes that there are different accounts of the same ontological reality held by different people. Judgemental rationality indicates that we can make informed and reasonable decisions about the nature of reality. The relationship between these three components is as follows: ontological realism precedes epistemic relativity, and epistemic relativity allows for different accounts of the same ontological reality. Since this is the case, people employ judgemental rationality so as to make informed and plausible decisions between the explanatory power of alternative accounts.

The core influence of Bhaskar on Wright can be seen in Wright's sentence, 'I am suggesting that the pursuit of truth in religious education should adopt the working assumption that there is a real world existing largely independently of our knowledge of it, and that to live truthfully is to live in harmony with the ultimate order-of-things.'[128] As opposed to mere constructivism seen specifically in Erricker and Erricker, and also in Grimmitt; Wright, following the principles of CR, argues, reality is accessible to our knowledge, it is attainable, or we can have relatively secure knowledge despite our knowledge of reality being contingent. In other words, our knowledge can be in touch with the actual order of things and therefore could possess a warrant transcending social interests. If reality was not open to our knowledge, we would not be making open heart surgeries, for instance.

Subtly distinct from centralising diversity and individuality in representing faiths, though Wright embraces this, and contrary to the generic account of religion in the matter of seeing faiths rotating around the same reality; he sees religious traditions as discrete accounts. For Wright, religions have substantial identities. As Iversen puts it, in Wright's approach, 'learners should study the mainstream orthodox traditions within each religion [as…] the most effective

(London, 2012), p. x. See also Andrew Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism: Ambiguity, truth and theological literacy* (London, 2013), pp. 9- 38). The first stage which is known as CR or Transcendental realism concerns the issues of the primacy of ontology over epistemology, and judgemental rationality in natural and social sciences. The second stage which has been built on CR and is known as Dialectical Critical Realism (DCR) has mainly to do with human emancipation with a critique of Western dialectic. This stage involves Transcendental dialectical critical realism (TDCR). It is the philosophy of self-realization and therefore ultimately God-realization. The third stage is known as the philosophy of Meta-reality (PMR) marked by the strategy of removing the dual world understanding, that is, the distance between object and subject; it is to establish a non-dual world. Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (London, 2008). Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences* (3rdedn, London, 1998). Roy Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (London, 1986). Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality: A critical introduction to contemporary philosophy* (London, 2011). Roy Bhaskar, *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom* (Oxford, 1991). Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (London, 2008). Roy Bhaskar, *Plato Etc.: Problems of Philosophy and their Resolution* (London, 2010). Roy Bhaskar, *From East to West: Odyssey of a Soul* (London, 2000). Roy Bhaskar, *From Science to Emancipation: Alienation and the Actuality of Enlightenment* (New Delhi, 2002). Roy Bhaskar, *Reflections on Meta- Reality: Transcendence, Emancipation and Everyday Life* (New Delhi, 2002). Roy Bhaskar, *The Philosophy* of *Meta- Reality: Creativity, Love and Freedom (The Philosophy of Meta- Reality, Volume 1)* (New Delhi, 2002).

[125] Nicholas T. Wright, *Christian origins and the question of God. Volume one: The New Testament and people of God* (London, 1992), p. 32.

[126] Roy Bhaskar, 'Contexts of interdisciplinarity: Interdisciplinarity and climate change', in Roy Bhaskar et al. (eds), *Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change: Transforming Knowledge and Practice for Our Global Future* (London, 2010), p. 1.

[127] Bhaskar, *Dialectic,* p. 4.

[128] Wright, *Critical religious education*, p. 18.

way to grasp the deep (and mutually exclusive) truth claims of the different religions.'[129] Of course, the emphasis on this orthodox approach has been criticised. Aldridge pointed this out with the phrase that: 'Wright applies the charge of religious nominalism to Jackson, who in return levels the charge of essentialism at Wright's claim that religions must have discrete 'prototypical identities'.[130] Jackson argues, Wright fails to give due attention to contested representations, differences up to an individual level: Wright's approach has shortcomings in representing religious traditions.[131] Just as Jackson distrusts Wright, so do Hannam, arguing that 'the capacity to recognise plurality and other elements of religious significance human existence is limited', as it is profoundly engaged with propositional truth claims.[132] Mentioning the relationship between doctrinal and lived reality aspects, recently the Ofsted 2021 report joined them by insisting: 'other pedagogical models exclude certain 'ways of knowing'. This amounts to saying that pupils would develop only a partial perspective on religion. For example, the 'critical realist' model focuses more on truth claims and less on the lived realities of global religion.'[133]

In response, Wright admits that modernity has an overly rigid and essentialist account of religion but adds that the overreaction to this is just to embrace another peril. This danger is to replace modern construction with a postmodern deconstruction. His reply consists in the suggestion that the answer to modern rigid representation is not a nominal view, tearing religions into pieces. Although the concept of Hinduism was generated, it was in response to a substantial socio-cultural reality. For Wright religious traditions have substantial identities, although not essential, accepting diversity. Moreover, though Wright claims that seeing religions within the generic account can be reflected because CRE allows different positions to be studied, he says priority should be given to the discrete account.

What is more, *pace* placing religious experience or children's own experiences at the centre of understanding faiths as seen, for instance, in Erricker and Erricker, and Hay, according to Wright the means to understand truth claims of faiths is religious language employed by religious believers: religious language is the best means to understand and access the truth claims of faiths. To put it in short, language embodies those claims.[134] According to Wright religious language of faiths is open to non-adherents because they make claims about reality. Wright accepts that although there can be a gap between 'outsiders' and 'insiders' with regard to getting the same level of insight, a certain level is clearly possible.[135] To say a worldview is closed to being conceived and accessed is to imply that its propositional descriptions of reality are anti-realist, repudiating its connection with external reality. Wittgenstein drew attention to how within different areas there can be different language games.[136] Reading these language games from a critical realist perspective invites us 'to attend to the diversity of ways and contexts within which human beings actually use language to make sense of the world.'[137] There can be language games, Wright maintains, but this does not occlude cross-cultural

[129] Lars L. Iversen, ''Can You Be a Muslim and Not Believe in God?' How Fluid or Solid Are Religions? Introducing Viscosity to the Interpretive Approach', in Joyce Miller, Kevin O'Grady, and Ursula McKenna (eds), *Religion in Education: Innovation in International Research* (Abingdon, 2013), p. 169.
[130] David Aldridge, 'Religious education's double hermeneutic', *British Journal of Religious Education* 40.3 (2018), p. 250.
[131] Jackson, *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality,* p. 81.
[132] Hannam, *Religious Education and the Public Sphere*, p. 433.
[133] Ofsted, *Research review series: religious education* (2021), p. 44.
[134] Andrew Wright, 'Mishmash, Religionism and Theological Literacy: An Appreciation and Critique of Trevor Cooling's Hermeneutical Programme', *British Journal of Religious Education* 19. 3 (1997), p. 150.
[135] Wright, *Critical religious education*, p. 158.
[136] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P.S.M Hacker, and Joachim Schulde (4th edn, Oxford, 2009).
[137] See for example, Andrew Wright, 'Part One: the hermeneutics of modern religious education', *British Journal of Religious Education* 18.2 (1997), p. 204.

understanding because we possess similar language games in the same areas since we live in the same reality. For it is possible to recognise similarities between their and our language games, and one of the primary functions of language is to describe reality, we can, for example, understand what Azande people say.

Moreover, similar to other scholars like Smart and Grimmitt, Wright holds fast to some precepts such as respect and tolerance. He believes these precepts can function better regarding the flourishing of society when they are placed into the context of his approach. For example, while real respect for others and their beliefs is thought to be genuinely developed when different accounts are given the possibility that they may be more truthful than our own worldview, tolerance is seen as 'allowing other people to hold their beliefs…whilst being willing to voice reasons for why you think that they are wrong.'[138]

We can think of Wright as conceiving the flourishing of society in two main ways. The first one is about the belief that truth based around the knowledge of reality is good, and therefore being committed to truthful living which demands engagement with various worldviews has a great potential to lead to the flourishing of society. In Aldridge's words 'a concern with the truth of things will also entail that the learner lives truthfully.'[139] Other points such as how the nature of religion is viewed, and which means is best to understand it are all connected to this issue. The second refers to the genuine development of elements such as respect and tolerance: these principles are important for a society to flourish, and the claim of CRE is that it could develop them in a more genuine way.

Finally, similarly to the previous trajectory of the subject, the contribution RE can make to the flourishing of society through centralising the notion of happiness in relation to what we ultimately aspire to is bypassed in these contemporary approaches. In this thesis, it will be discussed that centralising happiness has the potential to contribute to the flourishing of society more than concentrating on these individual approaches.

E) A better conceptualisation of these approaches

Given these analyses, we can start asking whether these ways of handling this tension can be conceptualised in a more systematic way for us to understand and evaluate them better. Drawing on the disputes between scholars, two different ways, with the risk of oversimplifying, can be conceptualised. This tension is approached in terms of pursuing truth deeply and systematically; and an alternative vision that does not engage with the question of truth thoroughly but offers different approaches. To be clearer, the idea lying behind the claim that this alternative vision avoids the question of truth as a central theme has to do with the issue that the general visions offered in this camp require us to do somehow different things rather than centralising the question of truth. In this respect, prioritising something tells us it should come to the fore more and other concerns should be put backwards, which renders it less important to carry these parts to actuality.

We should also think of this grouping as not only two actual main sides manifested in the field, but also, and this underpins why this division is preferred over other possible distinctions that

[138] Christina Easton et al., *Critical Religious Education in Practice: A Teacher's Guide for the Secondary Classroom* (London, 2019), pp. 10-11.
[139] Aldridge, *A Hermeneutics of Religious Education*, p. 63.

can be drawn, as a reflection of the nature of what is in question in this thesis which relates to the issues of reality and truth, that is, understanding the field in terms of the question of truth derives from the fact that this tension relates to the question of truth as various worldviews have contested claims to truth.

As an extension of this division, there have been different patterns, albeit with their details and differences, belonging to these two camps. The patterns encompassing the main ground the most have been the confessional approach; focusing mainly similarities; concentrating on similarities and differences; seeing faiths as relative parts of the same reality; embracing thoroughgoing relativism; developing knowledge and understanding; developing positive attitudes such as respect, tolerance, and empathy; contextual looking; placing individuals and diversity at the centre; and unity.

In order to make better sense of this conceptualisation, we can draw attention to several other points. While some patterns can greatly belong to one camp, e.g., the confessional approach can mainly be a path in the alternative vision; many other patterns can belong to both camps, for example, knowledge and understanding, and developing positive attitudes such as respect and tolerance may be part of the pursuit of truth argument and encouraged in the alternative vision. In this respect, it is important to underline that some patterns such as, and specifically, knowledge and understanding, of course, emerge in almost every approach. Also, these patterns can be used in relation to one another; for instance, respect and tolerance can be used in the context of knowledge and understanding. More than this, as seen in Jackson's approach, for instance, pursuing truth camp can be a concern, though not the primary, of the alternative vision. How then, once again, can the alternative vision be more clearly defined? It is taken as the vision offering various approaches, formed by centralising at least one of these patterns other than the pursuit of truth, such as seeing faiths as relative parts of the same reality. Lastly, and this is also an important point to make, at least two different patterns of unity are discerned in the history of British RE: seeing faiths as relative parts of the same reality, indicating the essential unity of faiths; and only unity. While the former is highly criticised in the literature, many scholars hold the latter which is the idea of unity in something else rather than in faiths. With regard to the latter, it, for example, manifested in the work of Grimmitt as 'humanisation'. It is like saying that even though we have different beliefs, we are all humans. Indeed, recently this has been conceptualised well by a distinction made between cultural and metaphysical domains. The authors argue that their approach to RE:

> *"will enable individuals to see that all religions pursuing the same truth on the axis of 'empathy' can be the product of a shared revelation. In this way, while evaluating the 'other' in cultural terms, the individual will develop a 'human'-centred pluralistic perspective. In metaphysical (creedal) terms, he/she will exhibit an inclusive approach to the 'other' by respecting the search for truth by other religions. In this context, the PCIRE model aims to enable the individual to live in peace and tranquillity with the 'other' in multicultural societies without giving up his/her own belief and to interact with practical (lived) religion as well as an institutional religion."*[140]

This is viable because finding out common grounds e.g., in values, in perceived virtues, in the matter of being human, in the sense of truth, in caring for nature or for others, and so on and so forth, can render engagement with differences more meaningful and sustainable. This thesis

[140] Muhammet Fatih Genc and A.H.M. Ershad Uddin, 'The model of religious education in today's secular and multicultural societies – Post-Confessional Inclusivist Religious Education (PCIRE)', *British Journal of Religious Education* 45.2 (2023), pp. 133-134.

will argue, this overarching unity, by virtue of its importance, should also be greatly concerned with the notion of happiness as what humans ultimately strive for.

Returning to this division, I also wish to argue, in explaining different accounts concerning how they approach the tension between contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society, this relationship has been articulated differently such as how the flourishing of society is envisioned by any approach in the face of conflicting truth claims of faiths. Such efforts are entirely compatible with the original idea and are deliberate because they can help us conclude that the flourishing of society, considering the distinction between the two camps, is imagined in two main ways. One account poses that a systematic and deep pursuit of truth would generate a genuinely flourishing society, whereas the alternative conception has unveiled the good of a society that does not engage with the question of truth thoroughly.

Finally, when thinking about various approaches in the history of the subject, the pursuit of truth argument and the alternative vision centralising different paths have shown alteration around different themes. One important one is related to how religion is understood, such as a belief system representing God's revelation, or culturally relative account of the same Sacred, a tradition that is diverse and changing, or the primary bearer of ultimate reality. In relation to this, another reason that leads to differences in these accounts has to do with the question of why religion should be studied. For example, the aim of human development in Grimmitt and pursuing truth in Wright's approach have been important reasons for the emergence of a certain difference in their visions of RE. Of course, the ultimate purpose of various accounts can be deemed as a flourishing happy society. However, whether they are aware of this ultimate desire or not, they differ in what can be considered aims revolving around this ground purpose. It can be concluded that the flourishing of society in a particular approach is bound up with the understanding of these components in that approach. This issue shall be addressed in the third chapter.

F) Conclusion

In light of the idea that a RE that best addresses the tension arising between contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society may have the highest potential for achieving the flourishing of society, it has been stated that existing approaches should be taken into account in the search for such a form of RE, as they provide the only available important accounts. This chapter has shed light on what important available approaches in British RE offer in the face of this tension.

In this context, since this tension revolves around the question of truth and the existence of different claims to reality, it has been pointed out that we can categorise different approaches to this tension in terms of pursuing truth: on the one hand, there is a line supporting pursuing truth in a deep and systematic way; on the other hand, an alternative vision that tends to avoid engagement with the question of truth as thorough and influential but centralises different ways. As an extension of this, there have been various patterns belonging to these two camps. The patterns coming to the foremost have been confessionalism; focusing mainly on faith similarities; concentrating on similarities and differences; seeing faiths as relative parts of the same reality; contextual looking; placing individuals and diversity at the centre; embracing thoroughgoing relativism; developing knowledge and understanding; developing positive attitudes such as respect and tolerance; and unity. It has also been stated, following the division between these two camps, the flourishing of society could be read in terms of the question of

truth: according to an account, the flourishing of society is more likely to be generated by a deep engagement with the question of truth, while the alternative conception offers alternative frames.

With pursuing the most powerful account among existing approaches, this thesis argues that centralising the best approach together with the notion of happiness can enhance RE regarding the flourishing of society. In this light, in the context of the matter that revealing an absence prepares a basis for us to put forward an argument that can eliminate this absence, this chapter has made a historical reading regarding the notion of happiness as what human beings ultimately strive for. It has been argued, in British RE, in its history from the early decisive marker of the 1870 Education Act to the recent approaches, the contribution that RE can make to the flourishing of society by centralising the notion of happiness as what we ultimately aim to achieve has not been realised and developed in any deep and meaningful way.

In the course of discussing that the prevalence of the best existing approach together with the notion of happiness can be the best response to this tension concerning the flourishing of society, this thesis finds the notion of religious literacy fruitful. This is because using the term religious literacy has practical value, and therefore it has the potential to carry more the principles of the most powerful available account and the notion of happiness to actuality. Moreover, the accounts offered in the context of religious literacy can be subjected to pursuing the most promising account of handling this tension. Now before proceeding to the ground from which the best existing account of handling this tension can be identified, to the comparison of various approaches on that ground, and to the argument that happiness can enhance RE in the face of this tension, the next chapter sheds light on the notion of religious literacy.

Chapter 2

Religious Literacy: the meaning of religious literacy

A) Introduction

In the previous chapter, it has been argued that there is a line supporting pursuing truth in a deep and systematic manner, and an alternative vision that does not centralise the question of truth as the main stimulus. Following this categorisation, it has been stated that according to the former camp, the flourishing of society is more likely to be generated with the question of truth taking up a great space on the table, while the alternative conception offers alternative frames. Moreover, it has been highlighted, the notion of happiness as what we ultimately strive for has been ignored in British RE. Making use of these analyses, this thesis will discuss which account is more promising for the flourishing of society and emphasise that it should pervade schools and will indicate that placing the concept of happiness at the centre of RE will have a higher potential for the subject to achieve the flourishing of society.

While it is argued that centralising the best existing approach together with the notion of happiness has great potential to contribute to the flourishing of society in the face of this tension, this thesis finds the notion of religious literacy fruitful. In this chapter, I suggest that the contribution RE can make to the flourishing of society can be empowered by using the notion of religious literacy. This is because religious literacy implies the practical value of what is learned in RE. This observation is discerned through the implication of existing religious literacy accounts in the literature. At the same time, I highlight, religious literacy should be thought of as the product of RE. This is expressed in two ways. First, in analysing various accounts of religious literacy, it is emphasised that scholars do not actually worry about the relationship between religious literacy and RE. Despite this general tendency, it is also noted that there is a broad understanding of using the term religious literacy as a product of the study of faiths. Secondly, it is expressed, the relationship between religious literacy and RE should be established correctly, through taking up accounts that more clearly touch on the relationship between RE and religious literacy. Overall, it is discussed, if religious literacy is taken as the product of the study of religion on its own merits, it can empower RE to contribute to the flourishing of society because it implies the feasibility of what is studied in the subject.

Drawing on this connection between RE and religious literacy, this chapter further underlines, accounts offered in the context of religious literacy can also be involved in the discussion of which approach offers the most convincing account of handling this tension, having the greatest potential for the flourishing of society. At this point, I wish to state that the tension between exclusive truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society is also central to the notion of religious literacy; therefore, this chapter takes this tension as an important point in its analysis of various accounts of religious literacy. We should also not forget here that engaging with different accounts of religious literacy is also significant in laying the ground for the analysis of the empirical study on religious literacy.

Finally, similar to the first chapter, these analyses are accompanied by the argument that also in the context of religious literacy, from early main tendencies to contemporary approaches, imagining the flourishing of society in relation to the notion of happiness as what humans ultimately strive for is not evident. Revealing this absence is an important point from which positive recommendations will be offered.

In making these points, the chapter is divided into three parts: it first analyses three early approaches and then focuses on five contemporary accounts. This is followed by a reflection on the connection between religious literacy and RE.

B) Three early approaches

Although the idea of religious literacy gained popularity in recent decades, three examples of its use - it is difficult to find any other early account in a Western context- can be seen around the middle of the twentieth century.[141]All three studies were published in the United States. Its first use is found in an article written by Douglas G. Grafflin in 1946. The article concerns the restrictions specifically by the constitution of the United States against the study of religion in public schools.[142] The reason for these reactions is not in any feeling against religion itself, but it concerns sectarianism. For an acceptable form of RE, although it has been said that different faiths can further develop their sectarian differences, Grafflin configures his approach as an interfaith agreement focusing on similarities: RE in this model should be organised around three categories – moral, worship, and religious literacy – and in all of them similarities should be favoured. Moral education should outline basic moral precepts about which there is no sectarian disagreement. Within worship, Grafflin proposes 'meditation' as a general unifier concept. Religious literacy as a third category refers to 'an acquaintance with and understanding of religious history and literature.'[143]

Though Grafflin's wrestling with the problems of sectarianism presents a depiction of him avoiding denominational division, his approach is confessional. Grafflin is prone to argue in favour of a RE in which the Bible is the unifier, as was the case in Britain at the time at which Grafflin was writing. Grafflin himself cited the British agreed syllabus as an illuminating example of an interfaith agreement.[144]

The second work, 'The Right to Religious Literacy', was written by Leo R. Ward in 1953. The core argument of this work is to realise that a child has the right to know, love and worship God. We 'starve and rob him when in home or State or Church or society at large we leave him illiterate in the matter of knowing and loving God.'[145] Ward identifies the right to know as an essential human need. Accordingly, humans have been worshipping beings throughout their history, and being a part of universal humanity depends on believing in God. Secular beliefs such as atheism are not for universal humanity.

Ward advances his argument by saying that children in high schools could learn about these facts, but of course, lessons in schools 'are "about" religion, not the practice of religion, and much less are they what Protestants call "commitment".'[146] However, he goes on to state, 'yet they are relevant, and we who are tutors and pedagogues of the human spirit may well feel that we are obliged both to learn and to teach them.'[147] Although he accepts a kind of non-confessional study of religion in schools, he favours to teach students about how being a member of human family owes to believing in God.

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[141] Gert Biesta et al., *Religious literacy: a way forward for religious education?* (London, 2019), p. 18.
[142] Douglas G. Grafflin, 'Religious Education for Public Schools' *Phi Delta Kappan* 28.4 (1946), pp. 175–176.
[143] *Ibid.,* p. 176.
[144] *Ibid.* See also, for example, Cox, *Changing Aims in Religious Education*, p. 11.
[145] Leo R. Ward, 'The Right to Religious Literacy', *Religious Education* 48.6 (1953), p. 381.
[146] *Ibid.,* p. 382.
[147] *Ibid.* Ward further argues religious literacy can go beyond this, and it implies learning at least the essentials available in introductions to comparative religions and theologies. This may be a duty and right of man in particular cases. Here religious literacy sounds like it is conceived as being critical in favour of religion and against the questions posited by philosophers like Kant, Hume, and Marx. Hence, the spirit of Ward's approach, similar to that of Grafflin, is confessional.

The last early example is seen in the following year, 1954. Vladimir D. Lissovoy approached religious literacy from a sociological perspective. It should be noted, Lissovoy referred to religious literacy among prospective teachers rather than school pupils. There has been a rapid increase in research in relation to specialisation, but the introductory course in sociology, which includes an area called 'Religious Institutions of the Community', is intricate, according to Lissovoy. This is because the theory and principles that existing textbooks cover are impossible to achieve in a year of class work. Lissovoy instead argued for a community approach to the teaching of introductory sociology which would enable students to engage experientially with the subjects studied at university. Lissovoy intended for the prospective teachers to become acquainted with the institutions in the society, and the dynamics of community interaction, and to understand the structure, function, and integration of the value systems as they manifest in community life. Religious literacy, if one follows Lissovoy, purports to represent understanding the structure and function of religious institutions and having knowledge and understanding of the basic principles of religions and their denominations.[148] That said, it is intended that students could make sense of religion, history, culture, and current affairs in the light of the acquired knowledge.

Lissovoy goes on to say: 'we wanted our prospective teachers to know the basic tenets of the Protestant, Roman Catholic and the Hebrew Faiths. It was our purpose to convey knowledge, to correct misinformation, to emphasize the basic similarities and to foster attitudes beyond the scope of mere tolerance.'[149] Though corrective misinformation is underlined which can mean the importance of objective knowledge, focusing on similarities tends to be important for the flourishing of society in Lissovoy's perception of religious literacy.

In these three early approaches, it is seen that there is no clear examination of the relationship between the school subject or RE and religious literacy. However, religious literacy that appears does appear to refer to an insight formed as a result of learning about religion or, and this is evident in Grafflin and Ward, religiously learning. Moreover, in Grafflin, alongside morals and worship religious literacy is imagined as only one part of RE. In this light, drawing on the notion of religious literacy, these early scholars are inclined to use the term to mean overcoming an existing issue which they considered a problem. Religious literacy is applied in Grafflin in the context of finding a solution to sectarianism, in Ward in the belief of understanding the importance of religion against secular worldviews, and in Lissovoy to gain socio-cultural awareness. Therefore, it can be said, in these three authors, a practical value is expressed with the notion of religious literacy: religious literacy serves the purpose of bringing to actuality what is learned in the subject. This seems to be a plausible idea since especially the notion of literacy makes a connotation in the matter of knowing something and applying it to life. Biesta et al., imply a similar idea when they point out: ''being literate' suggests that one is knowledgeable about religions and able to navigate the complexities of religious domains, which seems to be a worthwhile ambition for religious education.'[150] Understood in this way, we can argue, if it is important to reflect the understanding formed as a result of learning about faiths to life, which perhaps constitutes a main reason for RE to exist as a separate subject in its own right, using the term religious literacy seems to be fruitful. I take this to mean that when this concept is used in the context of a promising account of how to study faiths, it can contribute to the fulfilment of the aims of RE such as contributing to the flourishing of society.

[148] Vladimir de Lissovoy, 'A Sociological Approach to Religious Literacy', *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 27.9 (1954), pp. 419–424.
[149] *Ibid.,* pp. 419- 420.
[150] *Ibid.,* p. 3.

To read these scholars in relation to the tension between exclusive truth claims and the need to promote the flourishing of society, the issue is negotiated in three main ways. The first refers to placing a great emphasis on similarities, and this is more evident in Grafflin and Lissovoy. The second path is confessionalism, and it comes to the fore in Grafflin and Ward. The third way is driven by knowledge and understanding.

Finally, similar to British RE, in the early accounts of religious literacy, while the flourishing of society is the aim, the contribution that religious literacy can make to this through centralising happiness in relation to what we ultimately aim to achieve is not evident.

C) Five influential contemporary approaches

Contemporary uses of religious literacy go back to the 1990s: Wright used the term in 1993.[151] We have brought out Wright's account in some depth in the first chapter, and indeed CRE is also known as religious literacy approach in the UK; thus, it is sufficient to elaborate on Wright's concepts specifically in the context of religious literacy here.[152] Wright explains religious literacy as the pursuit of truth and truthful living, the ability to reflect on different religious and non-religious worldviews critically, reasonably and responsibly, concerning the ultimate order of things. More specifically, it is 'the capacity to exercise judgemental rationality vis-à-vis the ultimate order-of-things and our place within it: the capacity to pursue ultimate truth and live increasingly truthful lives *sub specie aeternitatis*.'[153] *Sub specie aeternitatis* indicates having a life informed by the ultimate nature of reality, as it really is. Hence, similar to Grafflin and Ward, though not in a confessional form, one of the core themes in Wright's approach is a concern with ultimate reality.

Wright also has not clearly worried about the relationship between RE and religious literacy. However, he, though to an extent implicitly, uses the term religious literacy as the product of the study of religion in education, predicated on CRE. For example, he writes:

> '*It is [religious literacy] being used here to identify both the academic study (through the disciplines and fields of Theology, Philosophy and Religious Studies) of worldviews (both religious and secular) insofar as they mediate ultimate reality (whether Transcendent or non-Transcendent), and the exercise of the fruits of such study in the habitus of our ordinary (and, at times, extraordinary) everyday lifeworlds.*'[154]

Similar to the early scholars, therefore, in Wright, the notion of religious literacy stands as an understanding used in the matter of embodying the vision generated by his own account. In other words, there is a status that religious literacy is seen as valuable in terms of creating a kind of practical value.

Regarding the tension, while the three early scholars approach it without pursuing truth by taking seriously truth claims of different faiths into account, the pursuit of truth is paramount according to Wright. This division can be generalised: aside from Wright, generally speaking,

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[151] Andrew Wright, *Religious education in the secondary school: Prospects for Religious Literacy (The Roehampton Teaching Studies)* (Abingdon, 1994).
[152] See, for example, Grimmitt, 'Contemporary Pedagogies of Religious Education'. See also, Julian Stern, 'Research as pedagogy: building learning communities and religious understanding in RE', *British Journal of Religious Education* 32.2 (2010), p. 136.
[153] Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism*, p. 233.
[154] *Ibid*., p. 234.

religious literacy approaches, including contemporary stances, are shallow or mostly ignore pursuing truth in a deep and systematic way in handling this tension.

Also, the same distinction, as given above, can be made for the flourishing of society: although the flourishing of society emerges as a recurring theme, two general understandings of it are conceived. Since there are contested truth claims, Wright's account poses that a systematic and deep pursuit of truth is important for a genuinely flourishing society, while the alternative conception that has different visions does not give as much attention to the question of truth.

After Wright, one of the best known early present scholars is Stephen Prothero who, according to Adam Dinham and Stephen Jones, popularised the idea of religious literacy in the United States.[155] Drawing a comparison between the students in Europe and the ones in America, Prothero thinks Europeans are relatively more literate about religion but less religious, while those in America are more religious but more ignorant about religion. He goes on to say 'here [in America] faith without understanding is the standard; here religious ignorance is bliss… here faith is almost entirely devoid of content.'[156]

Prothero tells us that Americans were once literate about religion, but since have forgotten their knowledge. One main reason for this illiteracy goes back to the early 19th century, when denominational differences of Christianity were diminished for the sake of bringing the nation together, with the idea of Jesus being at the centre as a unifying factor, while for this a common moral ground was sought entailing the collapse of giving necessary emphasis to theology. This was reinforced by emphasising similarities not only between the sects of Christians including Catholicism but also Jews in the 20th century against 'atheistic communism' during the Cold War for example, and Muslims after 9/11, for instance. According to Prothero, ignoring differences in this manner has led to more religious illiteracy. This trend was exacerbated by the Supreme Court's verdicts in the early 1960s on banning the *promotion* of religion in public schools and its influence on public schools. Though the Supreme Court prised *academic* study of religion, many schools have failed to embrace this suggestion.[157]

Ironically, while two early scholars Grafflin and Lissovoy emphasised similarities in the context of being religiously literate, Prothero – a fellow US academic – contends, focusing on similarities to avoid faith differences has been one of the biggest reasons lying behind Americans' religious illiteracy. Prothero is clearly right because concentrating on similarities implies that there will be a narrowing of our knowledge. What is ignored will tend to be forgotten, and we will move away from being religiously literate in terms of knowledge. As Copley states, an omission is not value-free: it also sets a route.[158]

Knowledge and understanding of religious traditions are central to his vision of religious literacy. Prothero refers to E.D. Hirsch's well-known book *Cultural Literacy*, which argued that people in America have become ignorant of their own culture. Hirsch found the seed of this problem in educational reformers such as John Dewey who played an important role in shifting content-based learning in favour of skill-based learning.[159] This new model in turn

[155] Adam Dinham and Stephen Jones, *Religious Literacy Leadership in Higher Education: an analysis of challenges of religious faith, and resources for meeting them, for university leaders* (York, 2010), p. 4.
[156] Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know — and Doesn't* (Harper, 2007), pp. introduction, 6.
[157] Stephen Prothero and Lauren R. Kerby, 'The irony of religious illiteracy in the USA', in Adam Dinham and Matthew Francis (eds), *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice* (Bristol, 2015).
[158] Terence Copley, *Indoctrination, Education and God: The Struggle for the Mind* (London, 2005), p. 5.
[159] E. D. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston, 1987).

engendered a gradual decline in our ability to communicate in an informed way from our cultural memory. This loss of our cultural memory has civic implications, blocking our ability to become an informed citizenry. Hirsch's call was therefore to return to core knowledge in schools. Following Hirsch, Prothero underlines the importance of gaining knowledge and understanding in order to be an informed citizenry of their cultural memory.

Moreover, Prothero thinks lacking religious knowledge is more dangerous because 'religion is the most volatile constituent of culture, because religion has been, in addition to one of the greatest forces for good in world history, one of the greatest forces for evil.'[160] Indeed, mentioning the civic implications of this ignorance, for example, in the case of Branch Davidians religious sect Waco, where FBI was involved, religious ignorance paved the way for the death of a lot of people because it was not understood what this religious community actually wanted to do; Prothero insists, religious literacy is important not because it is nice to be multicultural, but because understanding America's diverse faiths is necessary.

When Prothero defines religious literacy, he refers to *'the* ability to understand and use in one's day-to-day life the basic building blocks of religious traditions—their key terms, symbols, doctrines, practices, sayings, characters, metaphors and narratives.'[161]

After Prothero spread the notion of religious literacy, Diane L. Moore put forward an important religious literacy approach in America. Sharing Prothero's concerns that the vast majority of Americans are woefully ignorant about religious traditions, Moore also finds the solution in religious literacy. She identifies a cultural studies approach as more appropriate to underpin her vision of religious literacy. This approach, Moore proclaims, does justice to the complexity of religion and its role in past and present contexts, as well as the diversity within and between religious traditions. Some features towards religion are important in this account: religions are seen as internally diverse, constantly evolving and changing, and embedded in other dimensions of human experience. A cultural studies approach challenges studying human experience through discrete disciplinary lenses such as political and economic. Rather it recognises how these lenses are fundamentally entwined. That said, this approach treats all knowledge claims as situated: they arise in a particular cultural/social/ historical atmosphere and therefore are partial rather than universal. In this scheme of things, she defines religious literacy as:

> *"the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess 1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts, beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts; and 2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place."*[162]

The need for religious literacy is multiform. Moore argues that religions should be studied in public schools because they are entwined with other social/political/cultural dimensions of human experience and without learning about these religious traditions, much of our history

[160] Prothero, *Religious Literacy*, p. 4.
[161] Prothero, *Religious Literacy*, pp. 11–12.
[162] Diane L. Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education* (Palgrave, 2007), pp. 56, 57. See also, Diane L. Moore, 'Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: Expanding the Boundaries of Religious Education', *Religious Education* 109.4 (2014).

and culture is rendered incomprehensible. Moreover, failure to include religion in education can pave the way for ignorance and misrepresentations of religions that may diminish respect for diversity, impoverish tolerance toward minorities, and weaken functioning democracy; as in the concluding section of her book, *Overcoming religious illiteracy*, she writes: 'my purpose in writing this book has been to articulate the ways in which religious literacy can serve to enhance efforts aimed at promoting the ideals of democracy in multicultural, multireligious America.'[163] This concern has likewise been expressed by other scholars. Randle H. Lewis explains the stimulus behind Moore's religious literacy with this passage: "her motivation for producing this work is the 'lack of understanding [of Americans] about the ways that religion itself is an integral dimension of social/historical/political experience coupled with our ignorance about the specific tenets of the world's religious traditions... [which] hinder our capacity to function as engaged, informed, and responsible citizens of our democracy'."[164]

A point on which Moore and – to a lesser extent – Prothero place particular emphasis is that children should be provided with critical thinking skills and experiences in schools to become active citizens contributing to the ideals of democracy, to be thoughtful moral agents, and to lead to fulfilling lives. Two things are noteworthy here. First, her account of critical thinking is more about contested claims of socio-cultural issues such as negating what is unpleasant as the repression of minorities; she is inclined to rule out any account of the question of ultimate reality. Critical thinking tends to be not in the context of which religion is more likely to be the most truthful account vis-a-vis the actual order of things which was the case in Wright. Though she points to how learning about religions can offer alternative frameworks so that secular assumptions can be criticised, and that she endorses personal choices specifically for the competing conceptions of the good life, when we take into account how she proceeds in the face of competing truth claims about ultimate reality for example, Moore says, 'I reminded students regularly that the focus of inquiry from a cultural studies lens is to learn about differing interpretations of religious expression as opposed to asserting the truth of one interpretation over others. The focus, on this view, needs to shift from "God" and/or the "divine" as subject to interpretations about "God" and the "divine."'[165] The attention is paid to the rhetoric that these different interpretations are partial, and universal claims should be discouraged and challenged. Using the terminology of CR, while the greatest attention is placed on epistemic relativity, ontological realism tends to be ignored. Second, compared with Wright, even if critical engagement is underlined which can lead to value truth, Wright's account offers a deeper and more systematic account of critical reflection, and pursuing truth. Pursuing truth does not take up the central space in her account of religious literacy.

Gert Biesta et al. argue, 'improved religious literacy is needed for the good of society has been picked up by a number of others in the UK, in particular Dinham.'[166] In an argument which echoes that of Prothero and Moore, Dinham highlights the religious illiteracy of people in Britain. Similar to the structure of the story that Prothero told us about Americans' religious illiteracy, according to Dinham, religions in the UK are more on the agenda in the 21st century; however, people have lost the ability to talk about them.[167] Two important driving reasons in

[163] Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach*, p. 177.
[164] Randle H. Lewis [review], 'Diane L. Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education* (Palgrave, 2007)' and 'Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know — and Doesn't* (Harper, 2007)', *Religion and Theology*, 16.4 (2009), p. 553.
[165] Moore, *Overcoming religious illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach,* p. 150.
[166] Biesta et al., *Religious literacy: a way forward for religious education?*, p. 21.
[167] Adam Dinham, 'Public Religion in an Age of Ambivalence: Recovering Religious Literacy after a Century of Secularism', in Lori G. Beaman and Leo Van Arragon (eds), *Issues in Religion and Education: Whose Religion?* (BRILL, 2015), p. 20. Adam Dinham, *Religion and Belief Literacy: Reconnecting a Chain of Learning* (Bristol, 2021), p. 1. Grace Davie and Adam Dinham, 'Religious literacy in modern Europe', in Alberto Melloni and Francesca Cadeddu (eds), *Religious Literacy, Law*

this loss are changes that have occurred in the domains of welfare and RE.[168] Welfare was transferred from churches to the state in the 20th century, weakening people's connection with faith communities. However, when the Thatcher government endorsed market-led approaches, minimising the role of the state in favour of non-government providers, faith providers became highly visible again. Dinham contends that some phenomena such as changes in the religious landscape (faiths are less formal and credal now) and the terrible events of 9/11 and London 7/7 accompanied this, and together they imposed a new dimension: anxiety. Thus, faiths became more visible again, but because the religious landscape has changed during a period of declining general engagement with religion, and the issues of 9/11 and London 7/7 in relation to extremism, migration, and globalisation, we are now unable to talk well about it and 'what tends to happen instead is a muddled conversation, often mired in anxiety about violence and sex, and leading to knee-jerk reactions.'[169]

RE has turned into a relativistic, non-confessional form and has been mainly populated by politically determined themes like cohesion and citizenship. Religion is not being studied in its own right, and this has had a detrimental impact on our knowledge about religion. Moreover, placing such themes at the centre of RE runs the risk of seeing the religious domain as something that produces division and anxiety. This prevents approaching religion in a positive way. The idea of religion as a problem should be challenged in favour of a view of religion that is 'something pervasive, nuanced and pressing in the contemporary world – something to be engaged with.'[170] In addition, RE has not kept up with changes in the religious landscape: there is a gap between the 'world religions' approach that has dominated RE and a religious landscape which is diverse and dynamic.[171] The consequence is likely to generate religious illiteracy 'among school leavers, who are confused by the religion and belief messages communicated in schools, and by extension, in wider society. '[172] Similar to Prothero and Moore, Dinham finds the solution in a religious literacy approach which reflects a new religious landscape and is relevant to all people in society regardless of their beliefs. Thus, his account primarily dwells on individuality and diversity. As David Lewin puts it, Dinham's religious literacy is 'underpinned by a desire to ensure that diverse religious traditions and communities are understood in all their complexity and richness.'[173]

To repeat, according to Dinham's exposition of religious literacy, faiths should be studied in their own rights, according to the lived reality of faiths, and are not to be approached as something to be feared, but pervasive, interesting, and something to be engaged with. For Dinham, his approach 'distinguishes between learning for a politically determined purpose (making cohesion) and learning for a task (encountering variety well).'[174] Describing Dinham's work, Stephen Parker argues, this approach 'to religious education is said to move the subject

and History: Perspectives on European Pluralist Societies (London, 2019), pp. 21-22. See also, Adam Dinham and Martha Shaw, 'Landscapes, real and imagined: 'RE for Real'', in Mark Chater (ed.), *Reforming Religious Education: Power and Knowledge in a Worldviews Curriculum* (Melton, 2020).

[168] Dinham, 'Public Religion in an Age of Ambivalence', p. 19. See also, Adam Dinham, 'Religious literacy and welfare', in Adam Dinham and Matthew Francis (eds), *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice* (Bristol, 2015).

[169] Dinham, 'Public Religion in an Age of Ambivalence', p. 20.

[170]Adam Dinham and Matthew Francis, 'Religious literacy: contesting an idea and practice', in Adam Dinham and Matthew Francis (eds), *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice* (Bristol, 2015), p. 3.

[171] For the view on the 'world religions' approach, see, Martha Shaw, 'New Representations of Religion and Belief in Schools', *Religions* 9.11 (2018), p. 3.

[172] Adam Dinham and Martha Shaw, 'Religious Literacy through Religious Education: The Future of Teaching and Learning about Religion and Belief', *Religions* 8.7 (2017), p. 3.

[173] David Lewin, 'Religion, Reductionism and Pedagogical Reduction', in Gert Biesta and Patricia Hannam (eds), *Religion and Education: The Forgotten Dimensions of Religious Education?* (Leiden, 2021), p. 58.

[174] Adam Dinham and Martha Shaw, *RE for REal: The Future of Teaching and Learning about Religion and Belief* (London, 2015), p. 3.

away from its political purposes of community 'cohesion and citizenship' towards 'preparing students for the practical task of engagement with the rich variety of religion and belief encounters in everyday, ordinary life''[175] Viewed from this perspective, despite advocating that RE should not to be populated by such themes, there are practical social reasons at the centre of Dinham's imagination of religious literacy since the main reason for studying religions in themselves is encountering diversity well. A similar view was articulated by another scholar. Questioning Dinham's departure from a social cohesion agenda, Justine Ellis noted, 'it remains unclear, however, how "encountering variety well" would not, in itself, be serving its own kind of political, social purpose, since learning to engage with difference arguably constitutes its own form of attitude and behavioral shaping.'[176]

Finally, another important name in the UK is James Conroy. Similar to Prothero, Moore, and Dinham, according to Conroy there is a marked decline in religious literacy in the Western world. Conroy defines religious literacy as 'an acquaintance with, and an understanding of, the nature of religious experience, religious concepts and practices, together with some basic grasp of the complexities, contradictions and challenges of at least one religious tradition.'[177] Language plays a vital role in Conroy's account, as he writes that perhaps more importantly religious literacy necessitates engagement with religious language.

According to Conroy, the decline in religious literacy on a wider spectrum lies in the fact that religion has not been seen as a transforming source because the worldview of the Enlightenment being influential in education has relegated religion to secondary importance. RE as a school subject joined other subjects in terms of the spirit of education predicated on delegitimating traditional forms of religion for human flourishing; and evacuating meaning from religious language. Conroy asserts we have ceased to subject our relationship with religion to any kind of serious scrutiny. Here, he attributes culpability specifically to the phenomenological approach. Aldridge literalises well this hermeneutic circle: mentioning different sides of a hermeneutical process in RE such as the object of knowledge that can be some religious text, student, teacher, and subject matter; he speaks to us that 'understanding results not from the dissolution of our own prior prejudices in favour of the author's intention in writing the work, but from the play or tension between the text and the reader 's prior conceptions.'[178] In the phenomenological attitude, as previously stated, students are invited to understand what objects of learning mean to believers, how these things are considered by the believers or adherents, but while doing this, there is a tendency to ignore the fore-meanings of individuals or suspend their judgement on the religious beliefs of others in the narrative of *epoche*, 'bracketing out'. In Conroy's reading, the meaninglessness created by being a divorced observer leads to religiously illiteracy: 'if religious illiteracy is a problem in and for Religious Education then it may well be so because the pedagogical practices that emerged in the wake of Smart's thought disconnected the self as subject from the thing to be studied.'[179]

Moreover, Conroy, referring to the results of an ethnographic study conducted by himself and his associates in Britain, specifically laments for the lack of a deep study of religion in RE where theological truth claims are ignored and relevant historical context is neglected. An ignorance of theological understandings and the historical background of religion in RE paves

[175] Stephen Parker, 'Religious literacy: spaces of teaching and learning about religion and belief', *Journal of Beliefs and Value* 41.2 (2020), p. 129.
[176] Justine Ellis, *The Politics of Religious Literacy: Education and Emotion in a Secular Age* (Leiden, 2022), p. 145.
[177] James Conroy and Robert Davis, 'Citizenship, education and the claims of religious literacy', in Michael Peters, Alan Britton, and Harry Blee (eds), *Global citizenship education* (Rotterdam, 2007).
[178] Aldridge, *A hermeneutics of religious education*, p. 2.
[179] Conroy and Davis, 'Citizenship, education and the claims of religious literacy', p. 195.

the way for religious illiteracy because for example students are deprived of comprehending the genesis of religious ideas and they are rarely invited to contemplate the merits of a religious claim as a proposition. Conroy writes, 'in our own study examples included, in church schools, an invitation to 'feel' the suffering of Jesus without any discussion of the theology of sacrifice, or where religious propositions serve as forms of proof texting intended to secure particular behavioural outcomes in the classroom.'[180]

Conroy also argues that the effects of religious illiteracy reinforce the 'hermetically sealed epistemologies of religious believers and religious sceptics alike.'[181] He imagines that being stuck in our own rhetoric and not being open to modification, and therefore seeing the claims of the other as wrong, does not benefit society.

Thus, Conroy places a great emphasis on religious language in the matter of understanding faiths; and argues in favour of personal engagement with religion as an important source that can shape human life. In this sense, what is of central importance relates to knowledge about faiths including their historical background, practices, and complexities for example, and understanding that specifically may come with knowledge and language. It is important to note, despite differences, there is an affinity between Conroy and Wright, and in fact, Conroy says he is in broad agreement with Wright.[182] However, Conroy's approach, though there are implications and statements, is not as deep and systematic as Wright's approach with respect to engagement with truth claims of religions and pursuing truth in the face of the exclusive truth claims.

The tension between contested truth claims and the need to promote the flourishing of society is handled by centralising different paths in these scholars. While knowledge and understanding come to the fore in Prothero and Conroy, Moore centralises contextual looking (multiple lenses). In Dinham, individuality and diversity precede any other concern.

Moreover, just as in the early accounts, the contribution RE can make to the flourishing of society by centralising the notion of happiness in relation to what we ultimately strive for is also ignored in these contemporary religious literacy accounts.

Added to this, similar to Wright and three early scholars, these contemporary academics have also not clearly worried about the relationship between RE and religious literacy. They also, however, though to an extent implicitly, use the term religious literacy as a result of something, and this is related to the study of religion in education, for example. Moreover, the notion of religious literacy in these contemporary scholars also tends to denote the practical value of what is studied in RE. For example, in Moore, it implies the feasibility of the vision of her cultural studies approach.

However, at the same time, we need to underline that there are practical social reasons at the centre of some of these approaches. Of course, once again, religious literacy in Dinham for instance, also, seems to be imagined as a product of the study of faiths. This may mean that these scholars greatly justify the study of religion on its own merits in terms of practical social reasons. At this point, we can point out, when RE is thought to have some other values going

[180] James Conroy, 'Religious illiteracy in school Religious Education', in Adam Dinham and Matthew Francis (eds), *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice* (Bristol, 2015), p. 170. The point that the lack of engaging with text or the evolution of theological conceits yields religious illiteracy is reiterated in Conroy's other works. (James Conroy, 'Religious Education and religious literacy – a professional aspiration?', *British Journal of Religious Education* 38.2 (2016), p. 173).
[181] Conroy and Davis, 'Citizenship, education and the claims of religious literacy', p. 188.
[182] *Ibid.,* p. 197.

beyond such practical socio-political issues, then this tendency implies a distinction between religious literacy and RE. Thus, the observation of religious literacy being implied as both the product of the study of faiths in their own rights and a practical solution to social issues demands a clearer explanation of the relationship between religious literacy and RE.

In this light, it is easy to agree with the common statement that the term 'religious literacy' is contested.[183] However, I maintain that thinking of religious literacy as the product of the study of religion on its own merits may clarify the blurry waters in this domain. The next section emphasises this point by taking up arguments that more clearly touch on the relationship between RE and religious literacy.

D) The relationship between RE and religious literacy

The relationship between RE and religious literacy is not clearly considered by the scholars given above. This connection, however, is more explicitly examined in some other studies. The All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPG) on RE published a report about religious literacy entitled *Improving Religious Literacy: A Contribution to the Debate*.[184] Pointing to changes in the religious landscape and the place of religion in our lives, the report calls for education to teach knowledge and skills to enhance religious literacy, which it defines as 'the ability to understand and engage effectively with religion and religious issues'.[185] It underlines that high-quality RE can improve religious literacy. Thus, the definition of religious literacy includes learning about faiths, and religious literacy is seen in relation to RE. Nevertheless, religious literacy is also regarded as a more pragmatic endeavour that should be developed outside the RE world. In this respect, 'the APPG notes that religious literacy and RE are not the same thing.'[186] Fiona Bruce, then MP and Chair of the APPG on RE, points out, religious literacy should differ from RE: religions need to be studied in their own rights, while religious literacy should be concerned with engaging diversity well. She states:

> *"I do not think Religious Education should be a vehicle for policy objectives, community cohesion or religious integration. School-based RE must be a credible, engaging and academically challenging subject in its own right. But the realities of life in modern Britain necessitates that religious literacy must be a much more pragmatic endeavour than RE, and one which has, at the very heart of it, the need to equip individuals and communities to understand, respect and engage with the rich tapestry of religious difference and diversity present in our society."*[187]

A distinction is made between RE and religious literacy: specifically, the argument that rigorous academic study of religions should differ from religious literacy posits an important gap between these two.

[183] See, for example, Janet Orchard, 'Does RE still matter?' *Journal of Religious Education* 68.3 (2020), p. 281. Benoit, 'An exploration of pupils' and teachers' discursive constructions of religion(s)', p. 87. Martha Shaw, 'Towards a religiously literate curriculum – religion and worldview literacy as an educational model', *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 41.2 (2020), p. 150. See also, Sharpe, 'Religion and worldviews in 1944 and 2021', p. 337.
[184] All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education, *Improving religious literacy: A contribution to the debate* (London, 2016).
[185] *Ibid*., p. 3.
[186] *Ibid.,* P. 8
[187] *Ibid*., p. 1.

Similar to this, Hannam et al. engaged with the question of the place of religious literacy in RE.[188] Those scholars, firstly, make a distinction between literacy as navigating a domain (functional literacy) which implies empowering individuals to know something as it is, such as knowing about the tasks of having intelligent conversations about faiths or developing only knowledge about key beliefs of faiths, and literacy as awareness of what one is doing when engaging with such tasks (critical literacy). To explain what is at stake here they give the case of Rosa Parks 'who had no problem in understanding the message that white people could sit in the front section of the bus and coloured people had to sit in the back – and in that sense can be regarded as literate – but who objected to the particular way in which this 'domain' was defined.'[189] Critical literacy 'leads to the question of whether one should or should not identify with the domain as it is, or should seek to change or redefine the domain.'[190] In this sense, it is passing from socialisation to subjectification: 'unlike socialisation, where one gains an identity within and in function of a particular semiotic or social domain, subjectification focuses on the question of how one takes a position in relation to the existing state of affairs.'[191] Socialization is necessary for one to emancipate because 'one needs to know what one is critical about.'[192] This is like to say that social structures are real and pre-exist for individuals but they can transform them. They further understand this division as 'useful knowledge' (functional literacy) and 'really useful knowledge' (critical literacy). Secondly, they discuss in favour of subjectification: 'religious literacy ought to empower a student to go beyond the ability to decode and understand the meanings of religious practices and beliefs in order to take action over the social order implied in a given message about religion.'[193]

Against this background, they argue that religious literacy should not be seen as the way forward for RE. The first reason is they believe 'useful' religious literacy, understood 'as the ability to navigate the complexities of modern multi-religious and multi-cultural societies well', is invaluable for the whole of education. Therefore, 'just to see it as a task for RE would be to narrow the broader importance of religious literacy too much.'[194] What this amounts to is that religious literacy should not be the central way forward for RE, because functional religious literacy is of such importance that it should be a concern for the whole of education. The second reason they give is that functional religious literacy 'should not take over the 'agenda' for the study of religion. RE needs to 'work' on other educational dimensions as well.'[195] At this point, they highlight, 'really useful' religious literacy is more important in RE. However, the conclusion they derive is as follows:

> *"Critical religious literacy also brings the domains of literacy itself into question and operates across them, therefore it cannot be contained within the specific curriculum space of RE. Religious literacy then becomes a way forward for the whole of education, and would leave more curriculum space allocated to the educational exploration of religion in RE. The question as to where the boundaries should lie between religious literacy and RE is interesting in curriculum terms and our work here has opened up the need for further exploration of this point."*[196]

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[188] Patricia Hannam et al., 'Religious literacy: a way forward for religious education*?', Journal of Beliefs and Values* 41.2 (2020).
[189] *Ibid,* p. 222.
[190] *Ibid.*
[191] *Ibid.*
[192] *Ibid.*
[193] *Ibid.,* p. 223.
[194] *Ibid.*
[195] *Ibid.*
[196] *Ibid.,* pp. 223-224.

These scholars are prone to argue that the meaning of religious literacy is bound up with the underlying account. This is to an extent taken in the context of religious literacy as socialisation or empowering. However, a distinction between religious literacy and RE tends to run throughout their argument. The implication that the educational exploration of religion in RE should somehow differ from religious literacy justifies this. Interestingly, when they give Hannam's analysis of Wright's approach, they argue that Wright is pursuing an approach ''that can weave back together divisions he sees opened up in the Enlightenment between reason and experience, placing this within a contemporary understanding of education in a liberal democracy.' It is this project, rather than religious literacy which is his primary focus.'[197] This holds true but the reason why Wright does not concentrate on religious literacy as the primary focus or as a different project is because he is inclined to see, as given above, religious literacy as the product of his approach. Thus, their comment on Wright's work again captures that they see religious literacy as somehow separate from RE. At this point, we can, however, question if socialisation is important for emancipation and if it is necessary to adopt a critical perspective enabling us to see who defines a domain for example, then, considering the principles of CR, does not an understanding of religious literacy as the product of Wright's approach, to a great extent, contain these two dimensions? Even though CRE can be regarded as one path among others and therefore it is still the one that defines the socialisation area, CRE enables different accounts including its premises so that one can understand why a domain is what it is, and at the same time offers criticality as judgemental rationality.

In addition to these works, similar to Grafflin's vision of RE in which religious literacy constitutes only one part, there is a tendency in the literature to conceive religious literacy as *one* of the aims of RE. Parker comes close to this idea when he writes that religious literacy 'is an aim of the subject (the subject may have other aims).'[198] The project *Does Religious Education Work?* shows that religious literacy is listed as one of the thirteen expectations.[199] Similar to this, data from stakeholders (community interest groups-religious and non-religious groups that have an interest in RE; SACRE members; parents; MATs -Multi Academy Trusts, Heads and SLTs -Senior Leadership Teams-; Academics and Policy Professionals) was collected as a part of the project undertaken by The Faith and Belief Forum, The Open University and Inform, with funding from Culham St Gabriel's, explored their views on three areas: the current state of RE, religion and worldview approach, and what stakeholders need in order to understand this approach better.[200] The data revealed that religious literacy was seen as a primary purpose of RE specifically by community interest groups and SACRE members. The report stated, 'the majority of participants [community interest groups] saw a largely practical role for RE with social cohesion and religious literacy identified as the most important purposes.'[201] Another part of the project aimed to gather RE teachers' ideas about the purpose of RE, and the vision of religion and worldview, amongst other things. Teachers pointed out, they believed RE should promote understanding, critical reflection, religious literacy, and developing tolerance of others. [202] Enough has been said to spell out that religious literacy has been seen as *one* of the aims of RE.

[197] Biesta et al., *Religious literacy,* p. 19.
[198] Parker, 'Religious literacy', p. 129.
[199] James Conroy et al., *Does Religious Education Work?: A Multi-Dimensional Investigation* (London, 2013), pp. 43, 44.
[200] Sarah Harvey et al. *Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews in Schools – Fostering Coherency and Diversity: Insights Report*, (2022), p. 4.
[201] *Ibid*., p. 5.
[202] Sarah Harvey et al., *Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews in Schools – Fostering Coherency and Diversity Baseline Report* 2: *Public Perception: Student and Teacher Views* (2021).

Given these arguments, we should first highlight that the meaning of religious literacy is tied up with the underlying account of how to study faiths. Children who are educated according to a specific understanding of the study of religion in schools may be considered by different authors to be religiously literate, poorly literate, or even illiterate. A vision of religious literacy as the product of RE in which truth claims of faiths take the central place and attempts are made to understand the nature of reality is expected to be different than the vision of religious literacy predicated upon a RE in which claims of faiths to truth have not been engaged sufficiently, and in which, for example, understanding of diversity within and between faiths is the central contention. It is in this sense that Kerstin von Brömssen et al., after analysing the curricula of Austria, Scotland, and Sweden in terms of factors such as their objectives and content, thought religious literacy to be the construction of the result of these elements. They believe such enquiries can help them 'understand what kind of religious literacy is constructed through each of the curricula in the three different national contexts.'[203]

Since the term religious literacy is not adequate in itself to indicate what it means for one to be religiously literate; and being religiously literate can have a meaning depending on how faiths are studied, then religious literacy in RE can make sense when conceived of as the product of (it can be attained through) the study of religion on its own merits.

Does this, however, imply the term religious literacy is devoid of meaning? Another way of expressing this question would be to say whether it is really necessary to distinguish between religious literacy and RE. Would it not be enough simply to say that individuals who study religions are becoming educated about faiths, though being educated about faiths as a saying can also be accepted as blurry or unclear? One can argue that the term religious literacy expresses a departure from the confessional approach with a frame of avoidance from producing commitment on the part of the child. For example, pointing to the differences between non-confessional and confessional views, Leni Franken points out:

> *"The former enables all students to learn in an empirical, critical and objective way about different religious traditions, without a (dogmatic) priority position for one particular tradition. Besides, this "outsider perspective" ..., which no longer aims at socialization in one tradition, but at knowledge of and dialogue between different traditions, makes it possible for the state to design a core curriculum for RE, aiming at religious literacy for all the students."*[204]

However, religious literacy, as seen in the early examples could be used in a confessional form. We can carry the discussion further by claiming that even in the context of non-confessional RE, since there are different approaches, saying that the aim of RE needs to be religious literacy is in fact like saying that the aim of RE should be RE. Despite this, using this terminology, as previously discussed, seems to bring some advantages because it implies the practical uses of learning about faiths.

In this context, we can ponder on the merits of regarding religious literacy as a much more practical endeavour and to a great extent outside RE. Following the APPG report and Hannam et al. for example, we can then argue that RE can contribute to religious literacy and religious literacy as a practical endeavour can be the concern of the whole of education. While RE as

[203] Kerstin von Brömssen, Heinz Ivkovits, and Graeme Nixon, 'Religious literacy in the curriculum in compulsory education in Austria, Scotland and Sweden - a three-country policy comparison', *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 41.2 (2020), p. 133.
[204] Leni Franken, 'Autonomy and Shared Citizenship: A 'Neutral' Justification for RE?', in Olof Franck and Peder Thalén (eds), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age: Case Studies from Europe* (Cham, 2021), p. 208.

separate from religious literacy can be a promising, engaging and academically challenging subject on its own merits. In this respect, religious literacy can be only seen as *one* of the concerns of RE. Such distinctions posit a gap between the account of how to study religion in its own right and the vision that underpins religious literacy. If they are not separate, then there is no point in thinking of religious literacy as not the product of the study of religion on its own merits. If they are different, then we should ask questions like to what extent it is reasonable to talk of religious literacy without deeply considering the fruits of the study of religion in itself. In response to this, we can argue that if the flourishing of society is closely connected to the rigorous study of faiths, then religious literacy should be thought of as the product of RE. The main reason for this is related to the potential that can arise when the merits of studying religion in its own right are combined with the practical value of using the notion of religious literacy. It is better, therefore, to think of the term religious literacy as the product of the study of religion in its own right.

In this light, since religious literacy can be thought of as the product of the study of faiths, it should be highlighted that accounts offered in the context of religious literacy can also be involved in the discussion of which approach offers the most convincing account of handling this tension, having the greatest potential for the flourishing of society.

Finally, however, similarly to an idea expressed by Grafflin, though not separate from the study of religion in its own right, one may ask whether religious literacy can be considered mainly only a part such as a shared vocabulary. Since religious literacy would be a part of education in which challenging conversation about religion constitutes another part, for example, it is true to say that religiously literate pupils can contribute to the flourishing of society. In this sense, further contexts can presuppose religious literacy. This is persuasive, but there are religious literacy approaches such as that of Moore and Wright going far beyond this. This is more advanced not only because it is not confined to one single part of the study of religion, but also because the saying that religiously literate individuals can contribute to the flourishing of society becomes more meaningful since the acquisition of a shared vocabulary, for example, does not seem to be enough in itself to contribute to the flourishing of society, it contains further contexts. The Final Report of the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE), published by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), calls for a paradigm shift for RE; however, the notion of religious literacy is not used in this report. Yet, in a later report written by Cooling, the Chair of the REC, and Bob Bowie and Farid Panjwani, the importance of religious literacy is underlined. In the conclusion remarks, it is stated that 'religious Education in schools is a vital means of ensuring religious literacy in any society.'[205] As it appears in this later report, religious literacy is taken as holistic rather than partial. It is more reasonable, then, to say, religious literacy should be construed, as a whole, as the product of the study of religion on its own merits.

E) Conclusion

This chapter has analysed different religious literacy accounts in the literature. It has been argued that religious literacy seems to imply the feasibility of the account that it is predicated on. As such, it has practical value.

It has been further underlined, the same distinction made between two camps in terms of the question of truth can also be used in the context of religious literacy: there is a line supporting

[205] Trevor Cooling, Bob Bowie, and Farid Panjwani, *Worldviews in Religious Education* (Theos, 2020), p. 8.

pursuing truth, including ultimate reality, deeply and systematically; and an alternative vision that tends to avoid an extensive engagement with the question of truth, but which offers different paths as the main stimulus. Moreover, some similar patterns to the British RE occurred such as the confessional approach, focusing on similarities; concentrating on similarities and differences; developing knowledge and understanding; developing positive attitudes such as respect and tolerance; placing individuals and diversity at the centre; and contextual looking (multiple lenses).

Again, the same distinction has been applied to the flourishing of society: although the flourishing of society emerges as a common task, two generally different understandings of it are conceived. Since there are contested truth claims, Wright's account reveals that a systematic and deep pursuit of the truth is important for a genuinely flourishing society, while the alternative conception that has different visions has unveiled a flourishing society that does not pursue truth, in a thorough manner. In this light, it was highlighted, these religious literacy approaches can be involved in the process of pursuing the most appropriate account of handling this tension.

Moreover, the chapter highlighted that the notion of happiness as what we ultimately strive for is also bypassed in the context of religious literacy. This constitutes the point from which a positive argument will be made.

The central argument of this thesis revolves around how centralising the best existing approach together with the notion of happiness may indeed be the best response to this tension, thereby RE can have the greatest potential in achieving the flourishing of society. The idea of religious literacy has been found fruitful because it has a practical value in terms of implementing the principles of the best existing account together with happiness.

In order to educate individuals to be religiously literate greatly in line with the principles of the best existing approach and the notion of happiness, this best approach must first be pursued. This brings up the subject from which the best approach can be identified. The next chapter is primarily concerned with this issue.

Based on this basis, the issue of which approach is the best available response to this tension will be discussed in the sixth chapter. However, some approaches seem already to be irrefutably problematic with sound reasons. In order not to make these accounts the subject of the sixth chapter, the next chapter is secondly devoted to this matter.

Chapter 3

Finding the right ground to identify the most appropriate account for approaching this tension: why some approaches are irrefutably problematic for the flourishing of society?

A) Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I have brought out how this tension has been approached within the context of British RE; and more specifically, I have explained the different perspectives on religious literacy.

These two chapters established a reference point for a critical discussion of which path offers the most compelling account for handling this tension, having the greatest potential for the flourishing of society. Given the existence of these various accounts, we must now, more clearly, begin to inquire about the subject from which the account that can be seen as the most appropriate way of handling this tension can be identified. This chapter first identifies this ground. Building on this, the chapter also sets out why some approaches are irrefutably problematic for handling this tension in the best available way.

B) The ground to identify the most appropriate account for approaching this tension

If we aim to identify a subject from which we can truly understand the potential of different approaches to the flourishing of society, then we first need to point out that the vision of the flourishing of society of different approaches in addressing this tension is closely tied up with the understanding of elements like the nature of faiths and the purpose of the study of faiths. As stated previously, among scholars, differences have emerged in terms of what religion is and why it should be studied, for example.

If the flourishing of society is related to such issues in the face of this tension, then we can attempt to determine which approach has great potential to contribute to society based around such issues. That is, elements such as content and purpose in the study of faiths can serve as a benchmark in pursuing which approach effectively copes with this tension.

This argument inevitably raises questions about the nature of faiths, along with inquiries into how accurately different approaches reflect their nature. It also brings along questions about whether approaches that are more or less tied to the true nature of faiths in terms of such elements may have different potentials for the flourishing of society. We will answer this in due course.

What we can say at this point is that such a process undoubtedly demands a long-term study because, for example, religion is notoriously difficult to define. Anyone who researches religions soon finds out that there is no consensus on what religion is, or even whether there is a separate religious dimension of culture.[206] As Hannam with reference to Barnes stated, ‘the

[206] For various opinions, I especially have in mind the names: Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational,* trans. John W. Harvey (2nd edn, London, 1950). Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion,* trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1957). Smith, *The meaning and end of religion.* Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago,1982). Jonathan Z. Smith, ‘Religion, Religions, Religious’, in Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago, 1998). Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford, 1997). Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford, 2000). Timothy Fitzgerald, ‘A critique of "religion" as a cross-cultural category’, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9.2 (1997). Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, 1993). King, *Orientalism and Religion.* Kevin

'controversial issue is not that religious education should aim to reflect the nature of religion', but that there remains a persistent disagreement about the nature of religion itself.'[207] Indeed, it is in this sense a project called Big Ideas has been developed by Barbara Wintersgill et al.: the content and sequence should be chosen in line with these Big Ideas developed which are 'Continuity, Change and Diversity; Words and Beyond; A Good Life; Making Sense of Life's Experiences; Influence, Community, Culture and Power (later shortened to Influence and Power); and The Big Picture.'[208]

The question of which approach has greater potential for the flourishing of society, once again, can be greatly discussed based around the nature of faiths. Given this complexity, however, there is no space here, as it is not the direct aim of this thesis, to delve into a detailed definition of religion for instance, and, in relation to the flourishing of society, the compatibility of different accounts with this.

I think understanding which approach has better potential can be pursued through a different-yet-related topic: the flourishing of society. That is, the grounds to identify the most appropriate account for handling this tension in the best way can, I maintain, be approached with respect to the potential of various accounts in leading to the flourishing of society. Of course, identifying the best account of handling this tension in terms of the flourishing of society means evaluating various approaches based on the flourishing of society. Here, when we say different accounts can be evaluated through the subject of flourishing, we mean engaging with these accounts primarily on the subject of flourishing, while not directly including elements such as defining faiths.

Such a process does not mean to ignore the study of faiths in terms of elements such as content and purpose. Approaching these elements in the right way can be crucial for the flourishing of society. One possible way of involving these elements in a way that they can be approached in the right way while evaluating various approaches through the subject of flourishing can be explained as follows: the study of faiths in terms of such elements neither directly needs to be addressed nor this issue needs to be ignored.

This suggests in the evaluation process of various approaches, the study of faiths in terms of these elements remains somehow in the background. However, the issue that these elements remain in the background raises questions like how the study of faiths in terms of such elements should be understood in the background so that they can be approached in the right way, which can be crucial for the flourishing of society. A clarification on how these elements should be

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Schilbrack, 'Religions: Are There Any?', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78.4 (2010). Hand, *Is religious education possible?* Brian Leiter, *Why tolerate religion?* (Oxford, 2013). See also, Keith Ward, 'The Study of Religions', in Ernest Nicholson (Ed.), *A Century of Theological and Religious Studies in Britain* (Oxford, 2003).

[207] Hannam, *Religious Education and the Public Sphere*, p. 105. In the same vein, some scholars such as Cush and Catherina Robinson tell us that if the term religion continues to be used in RE, it should be with a lot of caveats and discussions. (Denise Cush and Catherine Robinson, 'Buddhism Is Not a Religion, But Paganism Is': The Applicability of the Concept of 'Religion' to Dharmic and Nature-Based Traditions, and the Implications for Religious Education', in Gert Biesta and Patricia Hannam (eds), *Religion and Education: The Forgotten Dimensions of Religious Education?* (Leiden, 2021), p. 71.)

[208] Barbara Wintersgill (ed.), *Big Ideas for Religious Education* (Exeter, 2015), p. 15. The first idea denotes that there are various faiths, and there is diversity and change within and between them. But at the same time, they maintain their continuity. According to the second idea significant texts and cultural elements can be interpreted in multiple ways by individuals and communities. There are also different ways of expressing, real and figurative, our beliefs, values, experiences, and identities. The third idea means that faiths have guidance on how ought to live. The next idea is mainly driven and informed by the concern of experience. Religions and worldviews are not only about beliefs but also about experience. They provide people with the opportunity to interpret their experiences. The fifth idea indicates that faiths are in a relationship with other domains of life such as politics, and they both shape and are being influenced. The last idea on the list implies that religions and worldviews offer overall narratives of the nature of reality.

understood in the background is important in justifying that the flourishing of society can be a subject from which we can truly comprehend the potential of different approaches to the flourishing of society in addressing this tension.

In order for this clarification, I find the notion of the study of faiths in their own rights helpful here: studying faiths in their own rights is capable of addressing these elements in the right way. The point here is not to find out the account that approaches such elements in the best way, but to have an understanding in the background that can include such an account. I will first argue that an approach offered as the study of faiths on their own merits would be an ideal candidate to be evaluated in terms of its power for the flourishing of society in the face of this tension.

In order to understand how the notion of the study of faiths on their own merits is promising in addressing these elements in the right way, we can compare it with an important opposite side that can be/is called as merely or thoroughly instrumentalized RE.

David R. Smith et al. argue, 'if RE is increasingly driven by extrinsic demands, then this may be an instrumentalization of the subject towards a different epistemic understanding, where the study of religion is less about religious belief, practice, and action, as social facts; but more about a presentation of those that serves extrinsic forces.'[209] In this context, scholars who argue against the scarification of RE for extrinsic aims, typically define the opposite camp as the study of faiths on their own merits which is regarded as crucial for various reasons. Two of the most important reasons refer to the correct representation of faiths and in relation to this the flourishing of society.

A sufficient way of understanding the issue better is to relate it to some incidents in Britain and the world, such as the 2001 riots in Oldham, Bradford, Leeds, and Burnley, 9/11, and 7/7. These incidents have given an impulse, it can be claimed, to the importance of RE to achieve social cohesion.[210] This took up great space in some of the government documents. For instance, in Ofsted's 2007 report, it was stated, 'recent world events have raised the profile of religious education significantly and schools have new responsibilities to promote community cohesion.'[211]

This being the case, some scholars such as Gearon, Barnes, Christopher, Dinham, and Moulin, in the UK argued that RE has been populated by themes such as social cohesion, undermining the study of faiths on their own merits. Gearon, whose works speak to the Enlightenment's negative influence on the position of religion, for example, states that despite this influence in reducing the importance of religion, religion retains a position in education.[212] However, within RE, religious life marked by the perspective of religion as a path to be lived, mainly Christianity

[209] David R. Smith, Graeme Nixon, and Jo Pearce, 'Bad Religion as False Religion: An Empirical Study of UK Religious Education Teachers' Essentialist Religious Discourse' *Religions* 9.11 (2018), p. 7.
[210] Christopher, 'RE as liberal education', p. 83. See also Michael Grimmitt, 'Introduction: Living in an era of globalised and politicised religion: What is to be Religious Education's response?', in Michael Grimmitt (ed.), *Religious Education and Social and Community Cohesion: An exploration of challenges and opportunities* (Great Wakering, 2010), pp. 12- 13.
[211] Ofsted*, Making sense of religion* (2007)*,* p. 1. Barnes expounds this as the 'civic model' which aims to create good citizens, in the context of the changing role of the relationship between morality and religion in British RE. (L. Philip Barnes, 'What has morality to do with religious education?' *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 32.2 (2011), p. 137. See also, Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity,* p. 221.)
[212] Gearon, *MasterClass in Religious Education.* Vivienne Baumfield [review], 'Liam Gearon, *MasterClass in Religious Education: Transforming Teaching and Learning* (London, 2013)', *British Journal of Religious Education* 36.1 (2014). Gearon, *On Holy Ground.* Liam Gearon, 'Which community? Whose cohesion? Community cohesion, Citizenship and Religious Education: From revolutionary democracy to liberal autocracy', in Michael Grimmitt (ed.), *Religious Education and social and community cohesion: An exploration of challenges and opportunities* (Great Wakering, 2010).

in Gearon's case, is separated from RE. He points out, 'we learn about the world's religions in order to understand those who might hold these views, and, so the argument goes, understanding them will contribute to a more harmonious, less conflict-ridden world.'[213] The risk of such justification for Gearon is that it might impair the integrity of religion which should mainly be reflected in relation to religious life. To give another example, Barnes wrote in 2019 that contemporary justifications of RE are greatly concerned with the moral and social contributions RE can make; thereby religions are ideologically manipulated because their true educational value, which is understanding the nature of religion, is overlooked.[214] Barnes also emphasises that misrepresenting religions is problematic in terms of RE's contribution to the flourishing of society because, for example, genuine respect for people and their faiths is not upheld.[215]

It follows that the study of faiths on their own merits is conducive to approaching elements such as content and purpose in the right way because faiths tend to be represented correctly, and in relation to this it is promising for the flourishing of society; while a merely instrumentalized RE can be accepted as defective particularly because such elements can be impaired. This suggests, because the notion of the study of faiths on their own merits is capable of approaching elements in the right way, which can be influential with respect to the flourishing of society, we have to engage with the accounts, be they confessional or non-confessional, offered as the study of faiths in their own rights.

However, as soon as we accept the study of religion as predicated on the nature of religion for instance, the content and the purpose of the study of religion, it can be claimed, should revolve around the self-understanding of religion. Does this, then, not suggest that the most compatible account with the study of religion in its own right is the confessional approach? In such a scenario, when a non-confessional approach holds greater potential for the flourishing of society for instance, a conflict emerges between the study of religion on its own merits and assessing various perspectives based on the flourishing of society. A solution to this might be found by formulating the question in a different way. If the nature of religion has to do with the reality of God in a confessional form, as Hella and Wright state many religious traditions 'claim that a harmonious society is ultimately dependent on the successful conversion of the human race to their way of thinking', and for example, Thompson's statement that 'Christianity is true and therefore it ought to be taught as such' reflects this; then we face with the question that can any approach different from confessional path avoid from being instrumental?[216]

This is not to deny that religion may prise individuals to choose freely, yet on educational principles claiming that God exists is also found confessional and indoctrinatory in the

[213] Gearon, *Masterclass in Religious Education*, p. 4.

[214] Barnes, *Crisis, Controversy and the Future of Religious Education*, pp. 84-85. To give the perspectives of the other three scholars, Christopher argues that the sole purpose of RE on educational grounds should reside in 'understanding'. She engages with the argument of social cohesion and states that such an agenda is not primarily educational, falling short of the flourishing of society because it does not furnish 'students with a good understanding of the roots and types of prejudice and discrimination in Britain, but to affirm positive views of diversity.' (Christopher, 'RE as liberal education', p. 82.) For Dinham, studying religion justified for civic reasons prevents approaching religion as something positive because this domain is depicted as problematic to overcome. (Dinham and Francis, 'Religious literacy: contesting an idea and practice'.) Stating that issues such as 9/11 have had a great impact on RE in England, triggering several pedagogical and policy developments, Moulin on the other hand believes that these developments should not be seen as entirely positive. One main reason for this is that the study of religions has become purely instrumental, undermining its long-standing, vital role as a subject concerned with issues such as scriptures, traditions, and beliefs for instance. Daniel Moulin, 'Religious Education in England after 9/11', *Religious Education* 107.2 (2012), p. 171.

[215] Barnes, *Religious education: taking religious difference seriously*, p. 44.

[216] Elina Hella and Andrew Wright, 'Learning 'about' and 'from' religion: phenomenography, the Variation Theory of Learning and religious education in Finland and the UK', *British Journal of Religious Education* 31.1 (2009), p. 56.

literature. Cooling's words 'even theology was not to be viewed as a *religious* activity' illustrate the point.[217] One recent example of this can be found in Anneke Schmidt. One principal reason she offers is, stating that the divine is at the heart of religion tells us God exists, and this is defective since we are unable to know the existence or non-existence of a God in practice, religions may be a product of human imagination.[218] She imagines a RE in which there is a delicate sensitivity in light of the fear of crossing the line of confessionalism, discouraging to say God exists.

Non-confessional RE can, therefore, be contrary to the self-understanding of the vast majority of world religions. Grimmitt explains this as follows: values such as respect, tolerance, and open-mindedness are endorsed by education, to which Grimmitt is subscribed, and they do not stem from religions 'as no religion advocates that, for example, human beings should be 'open-minded' regarding its beliefs'.[219]

Turning to our question, if the answer is no, I read this as saying that most of the approaches are instrumental. Stanley Hauerwas made a similar point when he drew attention to 'the presumption that students ought to be educated to "make up their own minds" since indoctrination is antithetical to "education." Of course, teaching students to "make up their own minds" is a form of indoctrination, but since it underwrites the hegemonic character of liberalism, few notice it as such.'[220] In an argument echoing that of Hauerwas, more recently, Ellis stated that the call for taking religion seriously reflects its truth claims, whereby individuals can make their own choices, invokes a secular paradigm because the personal *choice* is privileged.[221]

When the confessional approach is praised for approaching these elements in the right way, we should also note here, we face here with an important question regarding a conflicting situation that is likely to arise with the application of more than one confessional approach in a multifaith classroom. As Teece states, the subject becomes 'controversial when an approach includes the study of more than one religion.'[222] If most of the approaches are non-confessional and the potential of the confessional approach to the flourishing of society is not known, then can't we, as a way of involving various approaches into discussion, consider an approach that can preserve the integrity of various faiths and allow them to be studied together in their own rights? At this point, we can ask whether a non-confessional approach can preserve the integrity of faiths, while being committed to some educational principles. Answering this question is especially important when the confessional approach is found as flawed for the flourishing of society, while a non-confessional approach preserves the integrity of faiths and has great potential for society.

It is reasonable to assert that faiths can be instrumentalized in at least two ways. One would be

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[217] Cooling, 'Commitment and indoctrination', p. 46. Thompson's statement is quoted in Cooling. *Ibid.,* p. 47.
[218] Schmidt, 'Discovering Views of the Divine'.
[219] Grimmitt, *Religious education and human development,* pp. 245, 246. Indeed, non-confessional RE is epistemically found flawed by Gearon in his book *On Holy Ground.* (Gearon, *On Holy Ground.*) Jackson and Judith Everington argue that Gearon believes initiation into the religious life is the only option. (Robert Jackson and Judith Everington, 'Teaching inclusive religious education impartially: an English perspective', *British Journal of Religious Education* 39.1 (2017), p. 9.) Barnes characterises this as Gearon's dilemma, stating that 'Gearon's book effectively concludes with a dilemma — Gearon ' s dilemma: either a confessional form of religion that takes the pursuit of learning and practising holiness seriously or a non-religious form of religious education forever in travail as it seeks a secular, non-religious foundation.' (Barnes, *Crisis, Controversy and the Future of Religious Education*, p. 177.)
[220] Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham, 1994), p. 13.
[221] Ellis, *The Politics of Religious Literacy*, p. 59.
[222] Teeece, 'The aims and purpose of religious education', p. 15.

about reflecting the nature of faiths in terms of the content, while the other can be said to refer to the purpose of the study of faiths. In this context, it is useful to speak of a *distance spectrum* indicating the degrees of instrumentalization of RE: an approach that distances the most from the nature of faiths in terms of elements such as content and purpose can be attributed to the most instrumental, and the one that distances the least can be called the most appropriate approach to the study of faiths in their rights. These two, content and purpose, can go hand in hand. For example, in a negative sense, truth claims of religions can be downplayed (content) for an argument of social cohesion, not for a purpose informed by the self-understanding of religions (purpose). They also, however, can go separately. For instance, the nature of religion, say its truth claims and different dimensions, can be reflected truly, despite its purpose can be populated with instrumental reasons, downplaying truth claiming nature of religion, such as the view that learning about these features is primarily important for respecting each other. If understood in this way, for example, although Dinham criticises the instrumentalization of the subject, and gives room to reflect the nature of religion which he believes is diverse and changing, his purpose can be regarded as more instrumental as encountering diversity well seems to accept treating religion for civic reasons. As Ellis stated, 'certain proponents of religious literacy [including Dinham] have advanced a civic argument in favour of teaching about religion.'[223] Similarly, in Grimmitt we see the desire to reflect the nature of religions, but on the other hand why he does this greatly reflects instrumental aims, for humanization, as Grimmitt himself puts it: *learning about religion* and *learning from religion* originated 'as descriptions of an essential *pedagogical procedure or strategy* within a human development model of RE which stressed the instrumental value that the study of religion and religions can make to pupils' human/personal development.'[224] For this reason, Grimmitt's purpose of RE can be deemed as more instrumental than his vision of the study of faiths with respect to the content.

The coherence of an approach with the content and the purpose of a faith from its self-understanding position can be discussed based on such issues. It is desirable for an approach to reflect the content of faiths correctly, while it is not desirable for a non-confessional approach to adopt the purpose of the study of beliefs from a specific faith's perspective. However, a non-confessional approach can be in line with educational requirements and at the same time give room to self-understanding of faiths also with respect to the purpose. Thus, RE can be instrumental, but this does not mean the integrity of faiths cannot be preserved in non-confessional RE. Indeed, the use of words like 'merely' and 'thoroughly' is deliberate here for the instrumentalization of the subject in the sense that only such instrumentalization is problematic. In this context, while scholars can shift on the spectrum of instrumentalization of the subject, those scholars such as Dinham and Grimmitt can be accepted as having reservations about the study of faiths in their own rights.

It is reasonable to argue, then, various approaches that seem to give credence to the study of faiths in their own rights can be deemed as ideal candidates to be evaluated in terms of being the most appropriate accounts for handling this tension in the best way. This is because, to restate, such approaches are capable of addressing elements like content and purpose in the right way. Engaging with these accounts without directly entering into the discussion about where these approaches stand on this spectrum means having an understanding that can include the account appropriately addressing elements like content and purpose. Thus, neither the issue of approaching these elements in the right way in the background is ignored, nor proceeding through the flourishing of society is precluded.

[223] Ellis, *The Politics of Religious Literacy*, p. 3.
[224] Grimmitt, 'Contributing to social and community cohesion', p. 286.

Now we can more clearly explain how the flourishing of society can be the subject from which we can truly understand the potential of different approaches; that is, how evaluating different accounts via their potential for the flourishing of society can help us pursue the most powerful account, whose vision of approaching elements like content and purpose is included in the background.

I would like to start by pointing out, in fact, it is tempting to contemplate that an approach conforming most to the study of faiths on their own merits would be the most appropriate way in leading to a genuinely flourishing society. As such, what the study of faiths in their own rights actually is would be met alongside the flourishing of society.

However, as mentioned above, can we talk about the possibilities like even if an approach can be the most compatible account with the study of faiths on their own merits, may not be the most promising account with respect to the flourishing of society? Despite being a less conforming account, an account can possess more potential to lead to a flourishing society. As Barnes implies it: 'it is possible to hold that religious education has failed to equip pupils to evaluate and assess religious beliefs and practices while being successful in interesting them in religion and in fostering good community relationships.'[225] Therefore, when the ground from which the most ideal approach can be identified is chosen as the flourishing of society, this raises some questions like if the fundamental focus of religion is on a Reality that transcends this empirical world, and the existence of God should be given priority over human development, then, does not using the flourishing of society as a main benchmark in privileging an account imply casting the nature of religion into shadow? The issue in question is therefore about the relationship between evaluating different accounts based around the flourishing of society and the nature of faiths. Drawing attention to three sides of this argument is enough for us to underline that a distinction between the study of faiths on their own merits and the flourishing of society is not what is imagined in this thesis: while different approaches can be evaluated through the subject of the flourishing of society, this process is responsible to find the account approaching elements such as content and the purpose in the right way.

First, evaluating these approaches in terms of the flourishing of society relates to the nature of faiths because how these approaches define them is influential on how the flourishing of society is envisaged. Second, again, faiths are also greatly concerned with the flourishing of society. A radical example illustrating the point comes from Tillson, who discusses against the name of *religious education* in favour of *ethics* as a more comprehensive terminology that can justify the study of religions and some non-religious worldviews together in their own rights because 'both offer plausible answers to the question of how one ought to live': ethics is considered the utmost point, constituting the importance and meaning of the study of religions and non-religious worldviews.[226] Third, the existence and value of faith can be seen as directly in relation to the flourishing of society: even if there were no direct moral rules but the idea of the existence of God for instance, religion in this sense can have a very important impact on the flourishing of society since, for example, the presence of God can add meaning to human life. Reading these three points together, essentially the argument is that if faiths offer reasonable answers to the question of how one ought to live if they claim to be truthful accounts in this regard, and if the value of a faith can be influential on the flourishing of society, then an approach (it can be non-confessional) cannot be said to possess the greatest potential in leading

[225] Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity,* p.13.
[226] John Tillson, 'In favour of Ethics Education, Against Religious Education', *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 45.4 (2011), p. 681.

to a flourishing society unless it is wholly committed to the study of faiths on their own merits. Therefore, discussing the question of handling this tension in the best available way through the issue of the flourishing of society includes the possibility of adopting the worldview of a faith containing many aspects such as ethical principles and the existence of God making these principles meaningful, for example. The mention of God here is on purpose, because including the content of religion through its potential for the flourishing of society may tell us that religion is only approached in terms of a kind of *morality*, renouncing, what Copley calls, the backbone of religion, God: the existence of God, once again, can be taken as having the utmost importance in religion and only in this context its moral account can be deemed as the one that can have the greatest potential in leading to the flourishing of society.[227]

I would like to touch on some final points regarding the argument developed above. We should note that the phrase *without directly entering* implies somehow entering into this arena. In an argument where the flourishing of society relates to the nature of faiths, this seems to be inevitable, and this thesis somewhat therefore touches this area.[228] We should also emphasise that the saying that not entirely entering into the discussion of where an approach stands on this instrumentalization spectrum does not exclude the matter of which domains different approaches can be discussed in relation with. We dwell in a universe that we perceive as multi-dimensional. This is expressed as reality is pluriform in CR: 'it is possible to provide multiple explanatory accounts of the same reality: the physicist, chemist, psychologist, sociologist, historian, geographer, artist, poet, philosopher and theologian are all able to provide diverse retroductive explanations of the same person, object or event.'[229] Similarly, Paul Hirst believed knowledge has become differentiated, and therefore different forms of knowledge emerged, including mathematics, physical sciences, religion, and philosophy: because we possess bodies, a sense of beauty, and speech, there are the disciplines of biology, aesthetics, and language, for example.[230] We can take up different approaches in relation to various domains such as ultimate reality and environment: evaluation of the potential of these different accounts in leading to the flourishing of society can be related to these different knowledge areas because these domains are influential for the flourishing of society.

Now we should also reflect on a possible objection to the argument developed here: does not arguing in favour of an approach to pervade in schools based on the flourishing of society posit losses in relation to the nature of reality? If the nature of reality is ultimately bad – say God is defined as a despotic one – then does not privileging an account that has a great potential in leading to the flourishing of society come at the expense of truthful living? Wright himself deals with a similar objection. He tackles this critique in the context of individuals' desire to live morally, with the possibility of God being a despotic one. The solution he seems to give for the connection between pursuing truth and having a flourishing life is as follows: even when

[227] Copley, *Indoctrination, Education and God,* p. 148.
[228] In this context, I also wish to touch upon a potential tension between the centrality of this thesis and the argument developed here: does not the acceptance of faiths as having conflicting truth claims to an extent contravene the argument that the potentials of different approaches can be evaluated in terms of the flourishing of society? In other words, how consistent is it not to directly evaluate different approaches in regard to the nature of religions in terms of content and purpose because defining religion is accepted as not the direct subject of this thesis, if, on the other hand, these approaches are evaluated in terms of their power for handling this tension which involves an argument accepted at first hand on the content of religions? In response to this, we can say that there is no contradiction between accepting religions as having conflicting truth claims and avoiding a direct and deep comparison of different approaches regarding how they define religion vis-a-vis what religion really is. The simple reason for this is that while the former reflects the understanding of the present thesis towards religion, the latter is about the perspectives of other approaches. Although what religion means is of great dispute, according to this thesis religious traditions have conflicting truth claims. Accepting this is one thing, evaluating different approaches in terms of the compatibility of these approaches with what religion is, is another thing.
[229] Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism,* p. 52.
[230] Paul H. Hirst, 'The Logic of the Curriculum', *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 1.2 (1969), pp. 151-152.

we say the nature of reality is bad, we imply the necessity or existence of a moral domain, that is,

> *"In making this act of ontological rebellion, we affirm the belief that our sense of goodness, rather than the immoral power of God, is itself the ultimate moral principle in the Universe. In which case, our true beliefs about the ultimate order-of-things remain profoundly moral, albeit deeply tragic: we affirm goodness as the ultimate ontological reality, and identify the despotic God as simply the most powerful –rather than ultimate– reality."*[231]

The stance this thesis embraces is twofold. First, although because we do not know the totality of reality it is difficult to claim that the nature of reality is supremely and totally good and living in accordance with it will lead to the most flourishing lives, there seems to be a moral dimension. In addition to this, even reality can involve an evil dimension, pursuing truth can imply following the right path. Since this requires reality, the moral dimension, to shape our beliefs, it is not a kind of stance that posits what is good for us to believe while ignoring reality. Second, again, the flourishing of society is not only that at which we aim, but also it is central to many belief systems such as Christianity and Islam. Therefore, arguing in favour of an approach on the basis of the flourishing of society is one of the (perhaps the) most important grounds, which neither ignores the nature of reality nor undermines the nature of religion.

We should briefly take up another possible objection to comparing different accounts: one can attack the argument, holding that various approaches can be implemented together and therefore to discuss in favour of an account to pervade in schools is not necessary. In fact, some scholars advocate a multiple perspectives stance. Although Moulin discusses in favour of a form of CRE, he is clear that individuals have right to learn about faiths from different pedagogical standpoints, and any single method may not be compatible with pupils' sincerely held convictions.[232] Freathy et al., have made a similar move, arguing that their approach, which is called 'RE-searchers', goes beyond seeing different pedagogies in competition, but instead it 'promotes the use of multiple perspectives, multiple theories, and multiple methodologies and methods in teaching and learning in RE.'[233] They go on to claim that their pedagogy 'avoids promoting certain approaches, and understandings of religion(s), over others.'[234] Indeed, Wright also claims that he is increasingly convinced that 'religious educators have much in common than they like to think, and that the subject would benefit enormously from a new era of consensus…we need to move towards a single vision of religious education in which the contested nature of religion is explored within a common framework.'[235]

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[231] Wright, *Critical religious education*, p. 110.
[232] Daniel Moulin, 'A too liberal religious education? A thought experiment for teachers and theorists', *British Journal of Religious Education* 31.2 (2009), p. 154.
[233] Freathy et al., *RE-Searchers,* p. 6. See also, Rob Freathy et al., 'Pedagogical Bricoleurs and Bricolage Researchers: The case of Religious Education', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 65.4 (2017).
[234] Freathy et al., *RE-Searchers,* p. 7. This approach is provided for primary schools. It presents four characters, which are Ask-it-all Ava, Debate-it-all Derek, Have-a-go Hugo, and See-the-story Suzie. Faiths are to be investigated through the eyes of these characters. The first one, Ask-it-all Ava, is concerned with understanding individuals' faiths. The aim is to understand self and others' faith differences and similarities. The second one, Debate-it-all Derek, is about the question of truth regarding, for instance, the existence of God, life after death, and good and evil. Have-a-go Hugo refers to understanding emotions, feelings, and experiences rather than beliefs and doctrines. The last character, See-the-story Suzie, looks at faiths with their narratives and how these narratives have shaped people's lives.
[235] Wright, *Critical religious education*, pp. 235-236.

I agree with these scholars in acknowledging that there can be significant overlap between different approaches, various accounts can be used together, and students should see religions from alternative viewpoints and should also gain insights about how to learn faiths. However, we need also to note that the discussion on privileging any account among others can be informed by the possibility that various accounts are likely to have different potentials for the flourishing of society. Indeed, Wright at the same time claims that his account is much more powerful than others:

> *"In proposing critical realism as an appropriate theory to underpin religious education I am assuming that some form of theory is inevitable and seeking to articulate a more powerful theory than those currently available, whilst acknowledging that all theories are contingent on particular cultural contexts and as such must remain open to refinement, revision and potential replacement."*[236]

What is claimed here is only that an account can be *privileged* in schools even if a common framework is offered: the centrality of an approach can be different from other accounts, positing differences in outcomes, and therefore discussion on privileging one account in approaching this tension is reasonable as it can open the way, by adopting the best available account, to approaching this tension in the best available way, whereby contributing to the flourishing of society better. Reading from a different angle, if any account has the potential to respond to this tension in the best way, not privileging any of them runs a great risk of being deprived of its merits, which prevents handling this tension in the best available way. Grimmitt draws attention to a similar point, expressing that using a range of approaches together in a pick-and-mix manner suggests that any approach will not be fully implemented.[237] Added to this, the idea of avoiding privileging any account discourages the development of any good theory since different approaches are somehow given the same value and validity.

In arguing against privileging one account over others in terms of how we should interpret religion, scholars like Moulin typically promulgate fairness. In this light, can we still assert that discussing in favour of an account is incompatible with the notion of fairness? The perspective held here consists in that the account of this thesis, which offers that the approach that has the greatest potential to contribute to the flourishing of society should pervade in schools, can be accepted as an option especially when RE is taken as a subject to contribute to the flourishing of society in the best way. On this view, the next question will perhaps be on choosing one side among others: questions like whether we should follow the fairness argument or opt for the account that has the greatest potential to lead to the flourishing of society. This thesis embraces the view that, once again, the account that has the greatest potential to achieve the flourishing of society should pervade in schools, while also alternative accounts should be reflected.

C) Why are some of these strategies irrefutably problematic for the flourishing of society?

The first part of this chapter was concerned with the issue of on which grounds to identify the most available appropriate account for approaching this tension in the best way. It has been argued that the identification of the approach to handling this tension in the best way in relation to the flourishing of society can be made in the context of the potency of different accounts offered as the study of faiths on their own merits with respect to, again, the flourishing of society.

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[236] Andrew Wright, 'Response to Patricia Hannam's Review of Critical Religious Education, Multiculturalism and the Pursuit of Truth', *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 32.4 (2013), p. 440.
[237] Grimmitt, 'Contributing to social and community cohesion', p. 302.

Moreover, the first two chapters have revealed different ways to handle this tension. This is particularly important because it can enable us to discuss which path is the most convincing account of coping with this tension, having the greatest potential for the flourishing of society. This is the question discussed in the sixth chapter. But, based on the ground identified in this chapter, some approaches are found to be irrefutably problematic, with sound reasons, and in order not to make these paths the subject of discussion again in the sixth chapter, the second part of this chapter attempts to explain briefly that these paths are not promising for the flourishing of society in the face of the existence of contested truth claims of faiths. Taking the accounts given in the first two chapters together, the patterns found to be problematic are the confessional approach, placing a great emphasis on faith similarities while ignoring differences, universal monotheism, embracing thoroughgoing epistemic relativism, and the development of positive attitudes such as respect and tolerance as an end in themselves.

To start with the first point, one may argue that confessional RE does not mean such form is wanted in contributing to individuals' flourishing lives, and in preparing pupils for a multifaith society; a connection between confessional RE and intolerance is not a necessary one for instance, because one who is committed to their faith can contribute to society.[238] Nevertheless, many have argued that the confessional approach is not the ideal one for specifically publicly funded schools in a multifaith society, at least because there is no consensus in such a society, and consequently pursuing particular ends in schools is inappropriate.[239] Many other scholars such as David Carr, Michael Hand, and Tillson drew attention to other possible perils of the confessional approach. While Carr argued that promoting religious affiliation is likely to occlude the possibility of the genuine conversion to a faith different than ours; similarly, Hand conceded that the most reasonable argument for RE as a subject in its own right resides in the possibility of some of the religious propositions may in fact be true, and in the rights of children to be notified of them, and in making their own decisions; Tillson, on the other hand, not only endorsed non-confessional RE in terms of holding true beliefs but also argued that initiating children into a specific faith perspective might result in them suffering from collateral damage.[240] Drawing on these arguments, it is not difficult to come to the conclusion that the confessional approach is deficient for the flourishing of society; and though issues like pursuing particular ends in a multifaith society can lead to conflict among individuals belonging to various worldviews; I believe this is, most convincingly, because a confessional approach, since we don't know which or if any faith is actually the truthful one, is likely to occlude adopting a more truthful worldview which can lead to a better flourishing society.

With regard to the second path, we should first point out that similarities unite when especially there are differences on a wider spectrum. Members of the same family can be deemed the most connected group. Such a way of thinking goes back to philosophers such as Aristotle,

[238] Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity*, p. 21
[239] *Ibid*., p. 63.
[240] Carr, 'Religious Education, Religious Literacy and Common Schooling', p. 664. In this article, Carr argues that religions, whether they are taken literally true, should be considered narratives and should be seen as sources for wisdom and spiritual development, mostly in the context of their own meaning patterns. Michael Hand, 'Religious Education', in John White (ed.), *Rethinking the School Curriculum: Values, Aims and Purposes* (London, 2004). Michael Hand and John White, 'Is compulsory Religious Education justified? A dialogue', *Journal of Education and Christian Belief*, 8.2 (2004). John Tillson, *Children, Religion and the Ethics of Influence* (London, 2019), pp. 2, 167. Tillson writes "I argue that religious initiation is morally wrong whether conducted by parents, teachers or others. The reason is that, very plausibly, it comes at a high opportunity cost – that of being ready to recognize and respond to the truth and to avoid error. This interest is compounded by the fact that 'religious traditions are so comprehensive and all-encompassing in their claims'... Further, it very plausibly comes at the further cost of collateral errant belief formation (i.e. beliefs formed on the basis of premises which don't simply disappear when one later rejects the premises)." (*Ibid.,* p. 2)

who, speaking of friendship, pointed out: 'the affection of parent for offspring and of offspring for parent seems to be a natural instinct, not only in man but also in birds and in most animals.'[241]Therefore, focusing on similarities seems to have great potential in leading to flourishing lives since being connected to each other tells us that things like love and solidarity will be more common. While the most natural connection seems to occur among family members, things in which stakes are high such as religion also tend to be conducive to connection. In this light, it can be claimed, a society or even all human beings on earth can be united on a similar basis. The perspective of this thesis is that this is possible and reasonable, but it depends on the basis we embrace with respect to the flourishing of society. In this thesis, the value of concentrating on similarities is therefore acknowledged.

Focusing mainly on faith similarities brings an important question: to what extent do centralising shared features have the potential to contribute to the flourishing of society, as fundamental differences may not be genuinely considered? When focusing on similarities comes at the expense of something greater than what is concentrated on as a similar base, then this strategy can be deemed deficient. In such contexts, ignoring differences is typically found problematic for the flourishing of society, while considering faith differences is regarded important.

Interestingly this strategy is similar to the path of unity of faiths seen in Hull and Hay's accounts. Why universal monotheism, and in this context concentrating mainly on faith similarities, is problematic can be clarified further through the arguments of Barnes, Prothero, and Cooling.

Barnes argues, 'to present the different religions in the classroom as not in competition with each other but equally valid parts of the same reality, as Hull recommends, is to falsify the self-understanding of many religious traditions.'[242] Barnes also criticises Hay because Hay bypasses the doctrinal side of religion by focusing on the experiential form of religion. He writes how such an approach 'reflects the liberal theological commitments that undergird much post-confessional religious education in Britain; it also, unfortunately, in part, helps to perpetuate the tradition in modern English religious education of ignoring the controversial issue of competing religious truth claims in the classroom.'[243] When respect and acceptance of the other are based on similarity, this carries the implication that no such respect is given to the differences. In such a context, 'current representations of religion in British religious education are limited in their capacity to challenge racism and religious intolerance: they are conceptually ill equipped to develop respect for difference.'[244] And because being different can mean a break from what it should be, such an approach 'has the capacity to 'demonise' the other.[245] Barnes contends, the way forward from this lies in accepting that religions are different with respect to their teachings, courses of action, and practices. Marius C. Felderhof summarises this point

[241] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 8, I: pp, 451,453.
[242] Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity*, pp. 145-158.
[243] *Ibid.,* p. 221.
[244] Barnes, *Religious education: taking religious difference seriously*, p. 44. Indeed, in their article, 'Romanticism, representations of religion and critical religious education', Barnes and Wright argue that positing one particular religious creed, namely universal monotheism, in publicly funded schools is inappropriate. They further argue that the concept of tolerance is devalued in such an approach as the contested claims of faiths are bracketed out. Whereas 'at the heart of genuine tolerance is the notion of forbearance: of accepting and living alongside those whose beliefs are fundamentally incompatible with one's own.' (Barnes and Wright, 'Romanticism, representations of religion and critical religious education', pp. 71-73).
[245] Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity*, p. 157; Geoffrey Teece, 'A religious approach to religious education: the implications of John Hick's religious interpretation of religion for religious education', PhD thesis (University of Birmingham, 2010), p. 51.

well: 'Barnes' case is that if we want genuine respect and tolerance for others then we have to be prepared to acknowledge real and genuine difference.'[246]

Barnes further claims that precepts such as respect for individuals should take priority.[247] Moreover, Barnes, though not as systematic as Wright, also endorses pursuing truth in the face of conflicting claims of truth.[248] As Anna Strhan realises that Barnes insists 'on the importance of religious education grappling with the truth claims that he sees lying at the heart of the different religious traditions.'[249]

Indeed, more specifically, in the context of religious literacy, Prothero painted a similar picture. What annoys him is the habit of ignoring differences as if this could lead to cohesion. Whereas for Prothero 'ignorance is a cheap grace at best; the tolerance that comes with religious literacy comes at a higher price, but it is a far better investment.'[250]

According to Cooling, common frameworks in education such as scepticism, rationalism, and individualism, which are secular in intention and antagonistic to traditional forms of religions, claim to be non-confessional and sympathetic. At this point, Cooling asks: 'have we not here, a classic example of discrimination in the cause of non-discrimination, of indoctrination in the cause of non-indoctrination…?'[251] In this light, Cooling criticises Hull, pointing out that Hull's account of universal monotheism undermines the nature of different religions.[252] If the aim is to achieve diversity within unity, then the perspectives of such frameworks should be open to challenge, different frameworks should be taken into the discussion, and the vantage point of religions regarding reality should not be dismissed.[253] For this aspiration of diversity within unity to be realistic, this is something that needs to be done. Otherwise, it contradicts its own claim.[254] Cooling also, specifically in his works such as *A Christian Vision for State Education*, discusses in favour of pursuing truth, as he states that pupils should be educated 'to make sound choices and decisions of their own.'[255]

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[246] Marius C. Felderhof [review], 'Barnes, *Religious education: Taking religious difference seriously* (*Impact* 17, 2009)' *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 30. 2 (2009), pp. 213-214.

[247] Barnes writes that 'this potential will only be realized . . . when educators fully acknowledge the "intractable" nature of religious difference and implement strategies and policies that predicate respect for others on personhood rather than on theological assumptions about the essential agreement between religions and between religious adherents.' (Barnes, *Religious Education: taking Religious Difference Seriously*, p. 17). In doing this, it seems, while acknowledging the importance of reflecting exclusive truth claims, Barnes embraces a unity in other things: being human and values such as respect in a way that gives priority to individuals.

[248] See, for example, Barnes and Wright, 'Romanticism, representations of religion and critical religious education'.

[249] Anna Strhan, 'A Religious Education Otherwise? An Examination and Proposed Interruption of Current British Practice', *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 44.1 (2010), p. 27.

[250] Prothero and Kerby, 'The irony of religious illiteracy in the USA', p. 74. What Prothero wants us to see is that ignoring faith differences in the name of tolerance is not actually tolerance in a genuine sense, and even results in something like religious illiteracy; instead, he argues that genuine tolerance, that comes with being religiously literate, is to value faith differences.

[251] Cooling, 'Commitment and indoctrination', p. 48.

[252] Wright, *Critical religious education*, p. 100.

[253] The idea that lies behind this principle is that what counts as rational belief is determined by what our beliefs are in the first place; therefore, such a liberal understanding of rationality is contextual.

[254] Initiating into a given faith should be rejected, and rather some shared goals such as learning to listen and hear others should be embraced. In this sense, for Cooling, what should be carried out is 'a reappraisal of liberal values in order to develop a set of shared educational values that can form a basis for cohesion without compromising the reality of religious diversity.' (Cooling, *A Christian vision for state education*, pp.15-16. See also, Trevor Cooling, *Doing God in Education* (London, 2010)).

[255] Cooling, 'Commitment and indoctrination', p. 49. Believers should examine their beliefs in an effort to demonstrate the correctness of their faiths and debate with those who hold other convictions. In this context, it is important to note that Cooling embraces the philosophy of CR. See also, Cooling, *A Christian vision for state education*. Yet, it can be claimed that it is Wright who has developed a substantial account of this: Wright's work can be thought of as deepening and extending the lines of thought also traced by scholars such as Cooling.

There are some important deficiencies of embracing a widespread relativism for the flourishing of society. The first argument suggests widespread epistemic relativism is wanting because it provides an argument for a truthful account not being taken seriously; different worldviews are deemed equally valid or invalid in the case of widespread epistemic relativism, and therefore the credibility of a worldview loses its meaning.[256] In other words, when being committed to truth and truthful living are necessary for a society to flourish, for instance, then thoroughgoing relativism occludes the flourishing of society as the question of truth is bypassed. The second argument goes as follows: because embracing a widespread relativism can direct students to become apathetic towards faiths, it is likely to undermine the call for respect.[257] Third, it can lead pupils to adopt a 'fallacy of tolerance' stance: the fallacy of developing tolerance to some certain beliefs, for instance, even when they are wrong.[258]

Finally, developing positive attitudes such as respect and tolerance tends to be deficient for the flourishing of society when they are taken as the final point. Following Wright, we should, however, emphasise that these precepts are important when they are thought of as means. We shall return to this point in the sixth chapter. If the main reason for RE is to teach individuals to respect each other and to be tolerant of one another, then, for example, pursuing truth may become irrelevant. In this case, these precepts are treated as the final point, and some greater end that may come with pursuing the good life is eschewed. Wright puts the point well: establishing these precepts as the means to some greater end is to seek 'to enable adherents of potentially irreconcilable visions of the good life to explore their differences in a climate of mutual respect and tolerance;' treating them as an end in themselves is to 'view the basic values of liberalism as *constitutive* of the good life itself.'[259]

These criticisms come down to two main arguments. The first one is concerned with the question of truth: lending great importance to similarities while ignoring, overshadowing, or bending fundamental differences; embracing a widespread relativism; and treating concepts such as tolerance as an end in themselves tend to, be similar to the peril of the confessional approach, preclude taking various worldviews seriously in terms of adopting a more truthful worldview which can lead to a better flourishing society. The second argument is more specifically driven by concepts such as respect and tolerance: such approaches undermine the genuine development of such concepts; while real tolerance, for instance, is not to suppress others but accept differences.

In fact, these criticisms testify to the fact that different accounts can possess varying potential in promoting the flourishing of society. Thus, from what we have argued, once again, can be drawn two visions of achieving a flourishing society. One account argues that a systematic and deep pursuit of truth would generate a genuinely flourishing society, while the alternative conception suggests different ways for the flourishing of society rather than pursuing truth in a deep and systematic manner.

If these arguments are viable, placing a greater emphasis on similarities while downplaying fundamental differences in the matter of the unity of faiths for example, and ignoring truth claiming nature of faiths seen in the early trajectory of the subject and in early non-confessional approaches is wanting for the flourishing of society. Moreover, widespread relativism and

[256] Hella and Wright, 'Learning 'about' and 'from' religion', pp. 57, 58. See also, Watson and Thompson, *The Effective Teaching of Religious Education*, p. 22.
[257] Suzanne Rosenblith and Scott Priestman, 'Problematizing religious truth: Implications for public education', *Religious education* 103.2 (2008).
[258] *Ibid.*
[259] Wright, *Critical religious education*, p. 33.

treating liberal values of respect and tolerance as the final end do not also seem to have great potential in leading to the flourishing of society.

D) Conclusion

This thesis argues that RE can have the highest potential to contribute to the flourishing of society in relation to this tension provided that the best available approach pervades schools together with the notion of happiness as what human beings ultimately aspire to. The best available account of handling this tension will be pursued, followed by the argument that centralising this best existing approach together with the notion of happiness can have the paramount potential for society to flourish.

Finding the best available approach to handling this tension raised the inquiry about the basis from which we could truly understand the potential of various accounts. This chapter was primarily concerned with this question. This basis has been identified as the flourishing of society: it has been argued that accounts that seem to be offered as the study of faiths on their own merits, without entirely entering into the discussion where these approaches stand on the instrumentalization spectrum, can be evaluated with respect to their power for the flourishing of society.

Based on this basis, the sixth chapter pursues the best approach. Yet, to avoid engaging with irrefutably problematic paths in that chapter whilst, only focusing on more promising accounts, the present chapter also explored why such accounts are indeed irrefutably problematic: drawing on the ground of flourishing, some of the patterns of the alternative vision (the confessional approach, focusing mainly on faith similarities, seeing religious traditions as different parts of the same ultimate reality, embracing thoroughgoing epistemic relativism, and developing positive values such as respect and tolerance as the final point), have been found ineffective by solid arguments for the sound flourishing of society.

We have stated, when the empirical findings on this tension and religious literacy are taken together with the theoretical part of this thesis, what can be said about these two issues can be more encouraging in terms of change for the better. Now, prior to moving on to the theoretical discussion of determining the best available approach to handling this tension and pointing out that religious literacy should predicate on the principles of this best account, it is found more appropriate to reveal the situation regarding these two issues in schools in this thesis.

Since it is deemed good and necessary to have information about other existing empirical studies and to provide information about the methodology of the empirical study before conducting fieldwork, the next chapter is devoted to these two subjects, while the fifth chapter presents the findings and includes a discussion.

Chapter 4

Literature review on previous empirical studies and research methodology

A) Introduction

This thesis aims to enhance RE to reach its utmost potential in achieving the flourishing of society. Handling the tension between contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society in the best possible way has been regarded as one of the most important ways, if not the most, that RE can genuinely contribute to the flourishing of society. As we have seen, other elements such as pursuing the most powerful existing account and centralising the notion of happiness are connected to this issue. This tension, therefore, is a central theme in the thesis. In addition to this, it has been argued that using the notion of religious literacy can be fruitful in contributing to the fulfilment of the merits of RE such as achieving the flourishing of society, as it implies the feasibility of what is being studied in RE.

In light of these arguments, this thesis involves an empirical study: there is a survey study having two questionnaires that explore RE teachers' perspectives on the notion of religious literacy, and their responses to the tension between contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society.

Now, given the arguments that this tension is an important point, RE should be changed for the better, and using the notion of religious literacy can be fruitful then this empirical work on this tension and religious literacy becomes important because when the existing situation about these issues in schools is considered together with the theoretical part of the thesis, it can play a more instigating role for change of this tension and the idea of religious literacy.

This becomes clearer when imagining a situation of not conducting an empirical study on these topics. For instance, based on theoretical arguments, we could argue that the approach regarded to have the greatest potential for the flourishing of society should pervade in schools and religious literacy should primarily be thought of as the product of such a RE. Without direct research on these topics in schools, this could lead us to readings like teachers in practice may already follow such a path and have a similar understanding of religious literacy, and therefore, it might be seen as not necessary to pay much attention to these suggestions: without some empirical evidence for what teachers are doing and think is possible, we cannot know how our recommended approach relates to actual practice.

A thesis that shows the existing situation of these issues, highlighting various possible trajectories rather than following more reasonable accounts in the field, may play an important role in refinements by proposing alternative approaches.

Thus, it is not only to use philosophical work to inform professional practice but also vice versa.[260] In this regard, examining teachers' comprehension of both the tension and religious literacy can provide insight into the present state within schools; and assessing this understanding in alignment with the arguments presented in the theoretical discourse represents an important step toward addressing these elements in the best currently available way in schools.

[260] A similar idea is expressed in Julian Stern, 'The personal world of schooling: John Macmurray and schools as households', *Oxford Review of Education* 38.6 (2012), p. 729.

Added to these components, we can note, these themes have rarely been investigated. This empirical study provides new data on these two themes, which will contribute to the literature in itself.

Previous chapters have discussed the theoretical element of these issues in the key literature. Because it is important to reflect on existing empirical data before conducting any fieldwork, this chapter will address existing empirical studies. This chapter first considers religious literacy, and then the tension between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society. Next, I will address methodological considerations, including notes on how participants were recruited, ethical concerns, and limitations.

B) Existing research into RE teachers' thoughts on religious literacy

The notion of religious literacy is relatively new despite its increased prominence in recent decades, posing difficulties in finding relevant empirical studies in a Western context. Ole Kolbjørn Kjørven draws attention to this, noting that 'the research on religious literacy within the context of education is mainly theoretical and normative in its approach.'[261] Nevertheless, a study that directly informs this research was published in 2020 and was conducted in the south-east of the United States by John Grant et al.[262] The participants were five teachers of religious study programmes who were expected to prepare students for a pluralistic society. They were asked four questions: how did they define religious literacy, why was religious literacy important in children's education, what did they think the civic consequences of a religiously illiterate society could be, and how could civic values be cultivated through religious literacy? Three main findings emerged. The first was that teachers thought religious literacy involves being knowledgeable on major religious traditions, Abrahamic religions in particular. This knowledge involves basic history, some essential beliefs and practices, religious texts, contemporary manifestations, and religion in relation to other spheres of human experiences such as politics across time and space. The second main finding was a belief that religion is complex but necessary for education. Participants believe that religion can be a catalyst for good and evil (religious *individuals* are found guilty by the participants rather than religious *systems*) but it is necessary to learn about it. Finally, the data suggests teachers believe religious studies can cultivate civic values.

In the UK context, it is not easy to find any direct studies asking RE teachers about their views on religious literacy. Though, it is possible to find data that specifically includes individual teachers' opinions. A study conducted in the UK by Mark Plater in 2015 explored the views of the members of the Standing Advisory Council for RE (SACRE) which consists of different representative groups: 'the Church of England; the other churches and religions in the area; local teachers; the local authority (locally elected councillors).'[263] Participants were asked to rate different aims for RE from absolutely essential to totally unnecessary; religious literacy, after the understanding theme, was found to be the second most emphasised aim.[264] Though

[261] Ole Kolbjørn Kjørven, 'RE Teachers' Religious Literacy: A qualitative analysis of RE teachers' interpretations of the biblical narrative The Prodigal Son', PhD thesis (MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2014), p. 219.
[262] John Grant, et al., 'Teachers' Perceptions of Religious Literacy in the Development of Civic Participation', *World Studies in Education* 21.1 (2020).
[263] Mark Plater, 'What Is Religious Education for? Exploring SACRE Member Views', *Religion and Education* 47.1 (2020), p. 56. RE syllabuses in England are determined locally. Each Local Authority is required to establish SACRE 'to advise it on the provision of RE and convene any' Agreed Syllabus Conference. Robert Long, Philip Loft, and Shadi Danechi, *Religious Education in schools (England)* (House of Commons Library, 2019), p. 4.
[264] Plater, 'What Is Religious Education for?', p. 66.

the options are already present in the question, this study appears to indicate that the idea of religious literacy is widespread among parties, involving teachers, closely related to RE.

In the APPG report a teacher at an independent school pointed out that 'the school has an essential role in the development of religious literacy, just as it has in other forms of literacy. Literacy is about comprehension and communication, and therefore, in the religious sphere, it is important to be able to understand and to be able to communicate ideas.'[265] In this vision, religious literacy is primarily defined as understanding and an ability to talk about these ideas, implying gaining language in order to communicate. Another teacher in the same report drew attention to the point that 'religious literacy includes increased exploration in RE of religious ideas as expressed in literature, theatre, art, and music.'[266] Here, the subject is seen more in the context of socio-cultural awareness.

CoRE's report argues in favour of a transition from RE to *Religion and Worldviews*. As we have previously explored, in 2021, as a part of the project *Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews in Schools—Fostering Coherency and Diversity,* a survey was carried out in the UK by Sarah Harvey et al.[267] The project aimed to 'educate people outside the classroom about the importance of teaching religion and worldviews inside the classroom.'[268] The survey was set up for RE teachers to discover their thoughts about the purpose of the subject, and their vision of religion and worldviews, amongst other things. In total, twenty-five teachers responded to the survey. Concerning the purpose of the subject, some important preconceptions were revealed relating to understanding, critical engagement, religious literacy, and developing tolerance of others. One teacher responded that the purpose of the subject is 'to provide young people with the religious literacy they need to live in modern Britain.'[269] Though this study did not directly ask teachers what religious literacy means, based on this quote it is evident that at least some teachers understand religious literacy in schools directly in relation to the flourishing of communities: a way to navigate religiously plural modern Britain. Similarly, one teacher in the *RE for REal* project stated that if 'you develop religious literacy, in a way you are developing cohesion because people have the right understanding.'[270]

Zameer Hussain, a teacher who contributed a section to *We Need to Talk About Religious Education,* argues that without agreeing on the purpose of RE, it is difficult to map out a better future for the subject, and he contends that the core purpose of RE should be to give young people religious literacy, defined as 'being able to converse about religions and worldviews confidently, accurately and wisely.'[271] In this perception of religious literacy, accurate knowledge of various faiths and the confidence to bring this knowledge to conversation, in combination with being wise, is important. In a recently published book *Reforming Religious Education: Power and Knowledge in a Worldviews Curriculum* practising teachers share their understandings relating to the teaching of worldviews. One teacher, Rachael Jackson-Royal, argued that one of the core aims of the RE curriculum she follows is to enable pupils to develop religious literacy which includes 'an awareness of core concepts or "big ideas" underpinning

[265] APPG, *Improving religious literacy,* P. 9.
[266] *Ibid.,* p. 41.
[267] Harvey et al., *Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews in Schools – Fostering Coherency and Diversity Baseline Report* 2.
[268] *Ibid.,* p. 2.
[269] *Ibid.,* p. 12.
[270] Dinham and Shaw, *RE for REal*, p. 13.
[271] Zameer Hussain, 'Postscript: Purposing RE for a Better Future', in Mike Castelli and Mark Chater (eds), *We Need to Talk about Religious Education: Manifestos for the Future of RE*, (London, 2018), p. 248.

various worldviews.'[272] In this approach, understanding basic beliefs and language are important. Moreover, by big ideas, she, in line with Barbara Wintersgill et al., also may have indicated elements such as the account of a worldview of reality or the big picture, and diversity within and between worldviews.[273]

RE for REal, conducted in England in 2014 and 2015 by Dinham and Shaw, who specifically work on the notion of religious literacy, can be read in this context. Despite the fact that participants were not asked directly about the notion of religious literacy; in an article reporting this research, Dinham and Shaw expressed the main aim of the study as finding out the perspectives of the participants about what children should know about faiths in schools to increase their religious literacy.[274] The basis of this study was the concept that the world religions paradigm taught in schools is insufficient for capturing the real religious landscape, which is diverse and dynamic. In this context, people from different groups were asked questions regarding learning about faiths. The participants of this study were gathered from 19 schools—including 97 teachers, 34 parents, and 190 students, as well as 10 employers from various public and private sectors. There were three research questions: 'how do stakeholders understand the purpose of RE? What are stakeholders' aspirations regarding the content of RE? What do stakeholders think the teaching and learning about religion and belief should look like, both inside RE and outside, in the wider school environment?'[275] Similar to the suggestion of practising teacher Rachael Jackson-Royal, a key finding among the participants was the need for students to be prepared for diversity. At the same time however, Lucy Peacock's case study of The Faith and Belief Forum's School Linking Programme found that 'in School Linking, it appears that teachers have not taken on the now increasingly popular broader understandings of religious literacy as plurality and diversity.'[276] That is to say, Peacock's study demonstrates that, at least in some cases, diversity and plurality did not hold an important place, complicating the claim in some studies that participants see reflecting diversity as an important aim.

This is the extent of investigations into religious literacy in the existing literature. The perspectives of RE teachers in the UK on religious literacy are under-researched; one aim of this study is to contribute to the scholarly literature by directly investigating British RE teachers' understanding of religious literacy. This will in turn contribute to the main purpose of this study, which is to understand routes to resolving the tension in RE between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society. Involving the current utilization of religious literacy in schools into account is thought to be influential for change for the better in accordance with the theoretical framework of this thesis.

C) Existing research into RE teachers' thoughts on the tension between contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society

This area of investigation is also under-researched. One study with direct relevance to this thesis was conducted in Germany by Ulrich Riegel and Eva-Maria Leven. It sought to understand 'how do German RE teachers deal with truth claims in a pluralist classroom

[272] Benjamin Wood, et al., 'How we teach worldviews', in Mark Chater (ed.), *Reforming Religious Education: Power and Knowledge in a Worldviews Curriculum* (Melton, 2020), p. 127.
[273] For a more detailed explanation of Big Ideas, see Chapter 3, Section B.
[274] Dinham and Shaw, 'Religious Literacy through Religious Education', p. 1.
[275] Shaw, 'New Representations', p. 2. See also, Dinham and Shaw, 'Religious Literacy through Religious Education'.
[276] Lucy Peacock, 'Contact in the classroom Exploring relationships between interfaith encounters and peaceful relations through a case study of The Faith and Belief Forum's School Linking Programme', PhD thesis (Coventry University, 2020), p. 247.

setting?'[277] In Germany RE is confessional but teachers should adopt the notion of 'Bildung' (formation) understood as 'more than a passing on of knowledge and fostering the development of competencies', though also 'creating personalities and helping the students to find their position in society.'[278] Students are understood as heterogenous, therefore their individual beliefs and their religious autonomy should be acknowledged in RE. The researchers argue that the role of the teachers in this is important. Teachers have a twofold task: first, they need to represent the truth claims of faiths, and be a trustworthy model of a committed life to these truth claims; and secondly, they need to recognise the diverse beliefs of pupils and create an atmosphere of freedom, 'a safe space in religious education, enabling the students to enter into dialogue with the various truth claims present in the classroom.'[279] Three teachers participated in this study, and the object of knowledge selected was Jesus Christ. In actual teaching, two different styles of teaching were found: a) affirmative, which means the teacher brings up a truth claim without giving children a chance to discuss it; and b) discursive, in which the teacher enables a critical analysis of the truth claim and invites students to make up their own minds. While one teacher used a discursive way of teaching, two other teachers presented a truth claim in an affirmative instruction, and 'since affirmative instruction tends to force the students implicitly to take on the relevant religious truth claims, those teachers do not really acknowledge the student's individual beliefs.'[280]

Fewer studies that direct the questions of the tension, but some relevant data can be found. In a research project funded and carried out by the Woolf Institute/ University of Cambridge twenty teachers participated from the UK and USA (ten teachers from each country). Most of the schools those teachers were working in were faith schools, and the main research focus was concerned about how the faith of 'the other' is taught. In line with the findings in Riegel and Leven's study, it was found that many teachers were greatly hesitant to engage in depth with the stories and texts of the faith of other people; and 'this is a mixture of fear about disrespecting the text or the community who holds to it (which may cause offence), and of not feeling equipped with the subject knowledge and tools to make the study of an 'other's' teachings meaningful, accurate or deep.'[281]

A 2007 ethnographic research project into RE in Anglican voluntary-aided schools found that the universalist understanding (seeing religious traditions as partial accounts of the same Sacred), seen in Hull and Hay, was practised in schools.[282] One head of the RE department, for instance, argued, 'I would want them all [i.e. pupils] to realise that we all have different understandings [of religion] but we're not wrong, we're different, we come from different perspectives and therefore it is good for us . . . to respect everybody's believing system.'[283] According to the researcher, this and others similar interviews show 'a theology which sees all religions as either equally valid cultural expressions of personal experience or expressions of one common transcendent reality.'[284]

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[277] Ulrich Riegel and Eva-Maria Leven, 'How do German RE teachers deal with truth claims in a pluralist classroom setting?', *Journal of Religious Education* 64.2 (2016),
[278] *Ibid.,* p. 77.
[279] *Ibid.,* p. 78.
[280] *Ibid.,* pp. 84-85.
[281] University of Cambridge, *RE-framing education about beliefs and practices in schools: a lens and tools (concept based) approach* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 80. See also, Mary Earl, 'Teaching faith', in Alberto Melloni and Francesca Cadeddu (eds), *Religious Literacy, Law and History: Perspectives on European Pluralist Societies* (London, 2019).
[282] For the discussion on universalist understanding see Chapter One, Section C.
[283] This is quoted in Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity,* p. 143.
[284] *Ibid.* See also, R. Street, 'Religious Education in Anglican Voluntary Aided Secondary Schools: moving from transmission to transformation', PhD thesis (King's College London, 2007).

Though RE is largely not confessional in publicly funded schools in the UK, the data in these studies, which overall spells out that the question of truth is not taken seriously, can be useful specifically in interpreting the perspectives of RE teachers working in faith schools, where RE is likely to be taught in line with the school's trust deed or with the beliefs of the faith or denomination designating the school as having a religious character.[285]

Another source of data is Ofsted inspections. Ofsted inspects teaching practice and can provide some empirical data. A 2007 Ofsted report on RE, which drew on evidence over the period 2001 to 2006, asked pupils about the difficulty of RE when compared to other subjects. Most of the students saw RE as one of the easiest subjects. In some cases, students stated, RE was an easy subject 'because discussion involves giving their own ideas, with no right and wrong answers.'[286] This suggests that even if the truth claims of religions are given in these classes, pursuing truth is not taken seriously. This is reflected by a comment from a student in the *RE for REal* project: 'I think RE is good just to say what you feel…to speak your mind in a way that you can't be judged.'[287] This was further affirmed in the 2013 Ofsted report: it is stated, despite the importance attached to the discussion in many RE courses, too often teachers implied that different views are equally valid, rather than discussing which view might be more truthful or wrong. It is reported that:

> *"too often the tendency was to allow any opinion or viewpoint to stand unopposed, reinforcing a view among pupils that, in matters related to religion or morality, one opinion was as valid as any other. There was insufficient focus on exploring weaker or stronger lines of argument. It was rare to find teachers establishing a climate in which pupils recognised that their opinions needed to be underpinned by good reasoning, and that some points of view were better supported and argued for than others."*[288]

The same report also argues that the expectation of a positive right answer about the value of religion by teachers limited discussion of conflicting issues.[289] 2017 research by David R. Smith et al., involving 465 then-currently practising RE teachers in the UK, supports this view. The researchers argue that religion is often seen as having a fixed and inherently positive essence in broader cultural contexts, and the study of religion is often motivated by extrinsic goals such as promoting social cohesion. They state that teachers are influenced by these trends, and therefore UK RE teachers overall tend to conceptualise religion in the same way. As such, this study revealed that often many RE teachers positively approach religion, seeing the nature of religion as essentially good; where incidents relating to religion are "bad" the blame is placed on individuals rather than the religion. One teacher from an Academy secondary school, for example, stated, 'we teach general tolerance to all people, of all religions and that all religions teach peace, love and compassion, with the odd exception where there may be extremists who misinterpret their holy books, but that they exist within all religions and that they are not true followers.'[290]

CoRE report also drew attention to the fact that a number of successive surveys had shown teachers do not have sufficient confidence to tackle controversial issues.[291] The findings of the

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[285] Long, Loft, and Danechi*, Religious Education in schools (England),* p. 7.
[286] Ofsted*, Making sense of religion*, p. 16.
[287] Dinham and Shaw, *RE for REal*, p. 9.
[288] Ofsted*, Religious education: realising the potential,* (2013), p. 12.
[289] *Ibid.,* pp.10-11.
[290] Smith, Nixon, and Pearce, 'Bad Religion as False Religion', p. 1.
[291] The Commission on Religious Education, *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward,* P. 8. Controversial issues may imply socio-political matters such as abortion, but this can be generalised, involving contested truth claims of faiths towards

three-year ethnographic research, *Does Religious Education Work?*, align with these findings. The research, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council, was conducted by Conroy et al. in twenty-four schools in the UK. The aim of the project was to understand 'from the point of view of students, teachers and other professional stakeholders, the complexities of the processes of teaching and learning Religious Education and how this is experienced, perceived and constructed.'[292] The findings show that many teachers felt uncomfortable expressing truth claims of religions, particularly concerning otherworldly aspects; priority was given to secular and relativistic readings of religion.[293] The theological, philosophical, and ethical claims of particular religious traditions were not given sufficient emphasis.[294] In many cases, profound differences within and between faiths were ignored. It was also expressed, 'there was a desire in many cases to avoid (in the name of respect) comparisons between religions.'[295] Moreover, in line with Erricker's deconstructive model which suggests RE should abandon the narratives of religions, and place pupils' narratives at the centre of the subject; it was evident that pupils were encouraged to construct their understanding of religion, involving their spirituality, while 'the linguistic and conceptual demands of the genealogically rich traditions of religious systems' was given less attention.[296] Finally, it was observed that 'RE as a subject is concerned with sharing opinions rather than reaching significant conclusions.'[297] Overall, these findings suggest that truth claims of religious traditions as accounts with purchase on reality is often underrepresented in schools. Pursuing truth in the face of the exclusive truth claims of faiths has been suspended more often than not in the service of an agenda of social cohesion. As David Lundie argues, 'the core elements of learning about and from religions and beliefs were often subservient to a range of social, civic and performative agendas…[and] two-thirds of students participating in a follow-up survey stated that RE was most like Citizenship.'[298] Moreover, according to Leslie Francis et al., the overall conclusion for Conroy meant 'that religious education is not working effectively and not delivering efficiently.'[299]

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other dimensions of reality, ultimate for instance. Hand, with reference to Robert Dearden, states, 'something can be regarded as controversial if different claims of that thing can be held without being contrary to reason', - there are various truth claims of different faiths regarding different dimensions of reality about which different arguments can be held without being contrary to reason. (Michael Hand, 'What should we teach as controversial? A defence of the epistemic criterion', *Educational Theory* 58. 2 (2008)). Hand also points out there can be only one rational explanation for some issues. Religions have claims opposing such rational explanations. For example, slavery is morally wrong but the Bible permits purchasing slaves from neighbouring countries. Thus, Hand argues, religious scriptures should not be considered when determining if something is controversial. Rather, the authors of the Bible, for instance, should be seen as storytellers rather than taking it as mouthpieces of God. Cooling proposed that Hand's argument violates the notion of fairness because it delivers decisive decisions about religious beliefs based on mere rationality. (Trevor Cooling, 'What is a controversial issue? Implications for the treatment of religious beliefs in education', *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 33.2 (2012)). As such, it misses the issue that there can be different ways of interpreting evidence. According to Cooling, Hand's criterion is not sufficient alone, and there should be another benchmark which he names as a diversity criterion. On a pragmatic basis, in order for people to have fulfilling lives in the same society, they need to respect each other's rights. In this context, this diversity criterion involves two elements '(a) to value and practise fairness by embracing pragmatism in community building and a commitment to working alongside other people despite fundamental differences in belief; and (b) to develop rationality by valuing evidence, reason-giving and taking careful account of the arguments of others.' (*Ibid.,* p. 177.) Thus, on this account, pace Hand, an issue is controversial simply when there is important disagreement in society.

[292] Conroy et al., *Does Religious Education Work,* p. 14.

[293] Barnes, *Crisis, Controversy and the Future of Religious Education*, p. 19.

[294] Conroy et al., *Does Religious Education Work*, pp. 121-122. For theological claims, See Conroy, 'Religious Education and religious literacy', p. 173.

[295] Barnes, Crisis*, Controversy and the Future of Religious Education*, p. 19. Conroy et al., *Does Religious Education Work,* p. 121.

[296] Conroy et al., *Does Religious Education Work,* p. 226. Barnes, Crisis*, Controversy and the Future of Religious Education*, p. 20. For Erricker's account see Chapter 1, Section D.

[297] Francis, Penny, and Mckenna, 'Does RE work and contribute to the common good in England?', p. 155.

[298] David Lundie, 'Is RE still not working? Reflections on the Does RE Work? project 5 years on', *British Journal of Religious Education* 40.3 (2018), p. 349.

[299] Francis, Penny, and Mckenna, 'Does RE work and contribute to the common good in England?', p. 155.

Similar to this trend, scholars' ideas referring to the actual classroom practices can be taken in the context of empirical studies. Barnes points out, truth claims were downplayed in RE under the influence of a strain of non-confessional RE, which assumed that all religions initiate an encounter with the divine: the controversial issue of religious truth was side-stepped in favour of tolerant and ecumenical expositions.[300] According to Revell, Barnes argued that religions are presented by educators 'in certain ways precisely because their aim is to justify religious education in schools as part of an exercise to persuade pupils that all religions are equally valid.'[301] She goes on to say, Barnes thinks the roots of this misrepresentation in RE 'can be located in the desire of educators to promote harmony or not to show religions in a "negative" light.'[302]

Copley also draws attention to the fact that in a multifaith RE, practitioners often avoid divisive issues, and the truth claims of religions.[303] Erricker expresses Copley's point well, noting that RE was concerned with multiculturalism, 'that is, it served multiculturalism. This avoided divisive issues in the pursuit of making it a vehicle towards a more tolerant society…RE, in the service of multiculturalism, was focused on the idea of the enrichment brought about by diversity of culture not on the distinctions created by religious distinctiveness.'[304] Copley further argues, because RE dwelled on themes such as citizenship, there has been a tendency to concentrate on similarities between faiths.[305]

Likewise, Wright draws attention to the notion that avoiding the question of truth was seen by teachers as a good way to promote tolerance and engender sympathetic relationships with others. Engaging substantially with truth claims of religions is seen as anxiety-inducing because it has the potential to undermine a sympathetic understanding of them, as it tends to underline ideological differences.[306] More recently, Wright and his associates analysed how 'many liberal forms of RE seek to emphasise similarities between and within religious traditions and often side-line differences, claiming that an understanding of common beliefs and values is more conducive to nurturing tolerance than an understanding of conflicting claims.'[307]

Evaluating Wright's approach, Erricker expressed, teachers generally act in the context of comprehensive liberalism. He states that:

> *"I suggest that it is quite often the case that RE teachers operate according to the comprehensive ideological model rather than the political – and not always to the advantage of liberalism but often so. On the one hand RE teachers are often uncomfortable with criticism of religious teachings; on the other they are often inclined to ensure that what they choose to teach presents liberal virtues as uncontestable and, as a result, tend to present religions through the lens of teaching some virtues uncontroversial because of broad consensual appeal, for example anti-racism... The result can be the teaching of accepted liberal values rather than investigating religion and not presenting the controversial illiberal teachings within religion…"*[308]

[300] See chapter 1, section C.
[301] Revell, 'Religious education in England', p. 231.
[302] *Ibid.*
[303] Copley, *Indoctrination, Education and God*, p. 116.
[304] Erricker, *Religious Education,* p. 60.
[305] *Ibid.*
[306] Wright, *Critical religious education*, p. 80
[307] Easton et al., *Critical Religious Education in Practice*, pp. 40-41.
[308] Erricker, *Religious Education,* p. 57. Wright touches on the distinction between political and comprehensive liberal approaches. He endorses the former because it is convenient for pursuing truth, while criticises the latter on the grounds that

In the same country, Mark Chater argued in 2020 that:

> *"RE seems to lack sufficient inner resilience against the anxiety that some individual or group might be offended. Teachers and advisers observe this anxiety and its effects when, for example, controversial topics are avoided or softened, and when the darker, more destructive facets of religion are studiously side-stepped. For fear of getting it wrong, teachers will almost instinctively take a path of avoidance… At present, we in RE wallow in our anxious avoidance of the risk of causing offence. We even see it as a virtue, a badge of multiculturalist good intent."*[309]

Though there is this general tendency, this does not mean there is no evidence that RE teachers engage with conflicting issues. There are examples of teachers taking conflicting claims seriously. For instance, recently, one practising teacher in England, Robert Orme, stated that he focuses on uncomfortable issues and provocative texts, which he says help children to make informed decisions.[310] Exploring 25 teachers' perspectives in England about non-religious worldviews, Everington argued, there were a number of references among teachers suggesting that in order to evaluate religious claims students need to learn non-religious worldviews too.[311] Including these beliefs was found important for students to make informed decisions about their views of life. Similarly, despite the above findings, some teachers in the Woolf Institute/ University of Cambridge research project chose 'not to privilege any one faith's ideas but to examine the claims to truth of each faith as objectively as they can.'[312] European RE teachers' perspectives of classroom diversity were investigated in a study, in which thirty-six teachers from six countries, including England, participated.[313] A key finding of this research is that in approaching classroom diversity teachers tend not to refer to children's religious affiliations and the differences between these. However, they were motivated to allow students to express their views and feelings and allow perhaps quieter students to have a voice in the matter and feel more secure in the classroom environment they found themselves in.

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it restricts pursuing truth. In other words, while the former provides a basis for searching for what ought to be, the latter says that what ought to be is its own worldview. In this sense, 'political liberals are committed to an economy of difference… comprehensive liberals on the other hand, tend to be committed to an economy of sameness.' (Wright, *Critical religious education*, p. 33. See also, Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism*, p. 35). Since comprehensive liberalism supports a closed account, concepts like freedom and tolerance become an *end in themselves*. Whereas, in political liberalism, such virtues are treated as *means* enabling the pursuit of truth. In political liberalism we are free to choose intelligently between conflicting visions of the good life; while in comprehensive liberalism it does not matter which particular lifestyle choices we make insofar as we choose freely and not cause harm to others. Such freedom differs from the freedom of the pursuit of truth that requires exercising our freedom wisely: 'the freedom of self-determination, understood as emancipation from all external constraints, is very different from the freedom to make informed and reflective judgements about our beliefs, commitments, relationships and responsibilities.' (Andrew Wright, 'Community, diversity and truth: what might local faith communities reasonably expect of Religious Education in the state schools of a secular democracy?', in Michael Grimmitt (ed.), *Religious Education and Social and Community Cohesion: An exploration of challenges and opportunities* **(**Great Wakering, 2010), p. 136).

[309] Mark Chater, 'The deadly seven sins of RE', in Mark Chater (ed.), *Reforming Religious Education: Power and Knowledge in a Worldviews Curriculum* (Melton, 2020), p. 53.

[310] Robert Orme et al., 'What should we teach our pupils?', in Mark Chater (ed.), *Reforming Religious Education: Power and Knowledge in a Worldviews Curriculum* (Melton, 2020), p. 137.

[311] Judith Everington, 'Including nonreligious worldviews in religious education: the views and experiences of English secondary school teachers', *British Journal of Religious Education* 41.1 (2018), pp. 17, 18.

[312] Earl, 'Teaching faith', p. 154.

[313] Judith Everington, et al., 'European religious education teachers' perceptions of and responses to classroom diversity and their relationship to personal and professional biographies', *British Journal of Religious Education* 33.2 (2011).

Finally, in some studies including the one conducted by Joyce Miller RE teachers emphasise the need to develop some values such as tolerance and respect for the process of disagreement among students.[314]

To conclude, the existing empirical literature shows us that two trends occurring in the field of RE teaching, regarding how to deal with the tension that arises between the conflicting truth claims of different worldviews and the need to promote the flourishing of society. On the one hand, there is a main basic line suggesting that truth claims of faiths and the possibility that religions can be truthful accounts of the order of things are often ignored in schools, and this is often done in the name of an agenda such as social cohesion; and on the other, there is a less common tendency of taking religions seriously in terms of truth.

It should be noted that the perspectives of UK RE teachers are not directly well researched; therefore, this study aims to directly investigate British RE teachers' ideas about this tension to fill this research gap. It will therefore contribute to achieving the main purpose of this study, which is concerned with the flourishing of society in relation to the tension between contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society. Involving the existing situation of this tension in schools into account is thought to be influential for change for the better in accordance with the theoretical framework of this thesis.

D) Methodological framework of the survey study

We will now turn to the methodological framework of this empirical study. When setting a methodological framework, it is important to bear in mind that such a framework should be 'a carefully considered way of approaching the world so that we may understand it better.'[315] It in the natural and social sciences involves representing several informed assessments, as different frameworks can have both advantages and disadvantages. It is therefore no accident that justification in relation to the object of knowledge and aims of a study is important. As Andrew Sayer puts it 'methods must be appropriate to the nature of the object we study and the purpose and expectations of our inquiry.'[316]

The methodological framework of this study is undertaken in four steps. The first involves interrogating the philosophical approach to determining the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions of the study. The second step is the identification of qualitative or quantitative research perspectives, and, in line with this, the adaptation of a specific research approach such as phenomenography. The third step is the data collection method including information about the content of the questions, and the fourth concerns the method adopted for data analysis.

John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell discuss how the overall decision behind a research approach should be informed by the philosophical perspective the researcher brings to the

[314] Joyce Miller, 'Raising humanities teachers' understanding of their pupils' religious and cultural backgrounds', in Julia Ipgrave, Robert Jackson, and Kevin O'Grady (eds), *Religious education research through a community of practice: action research and the interpretive approach* (Munster, 2009). See also, Joyce Miller and Ursula McKenna, 'Religion and religious education: comparing and contrasting pupils and teachers views in an English school', *British Journal of Religious Education* 33.2 (2011).
[315] Andrew Sayer, *Method in Social Science* (2nd edn, London, 1992), p. 12.
[316] *Ibid.,* p. 4.

study.[317] This study aims to explore RE teachers' thoughts about the term religious literacy and the tension between contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote social cohesion.

Approaching these issues, Critical Realism (CR), the ontological and epistemological assumptions of it, is perhaps the most appropriate philosophical stance. Ontology relates to being, while epistemology pertains to the nature of knowledge.[318] The relationship between ontology and epistemology in CR, as previously stated, is best understood as distinct yet related: though reality to a great extent exists independently of us we can obtain the knowledge of reality. The philosophy of CR not only accepts the distinctiveness of ontology but is also committed to epistemic relativity. There can be different accounts of the same reality. Moreover, CR posits that some of these accounts can be more truthful than others. The principles of CR fit well with this study, as they help clarify the differing perspectives of the participants with regard to the same phenomenon and enable us to pursue the most powerful account in terms of the flourishing of society, which is the purpose of this thesis. This is particularly important as it can help us not only see which understandings exist in schools but also, by subjecting these understandings to critical scrutiny, issues like to what extent the right approach is being pursued.

According to Catherina Dawson differences between qualitative and quantitative research approaches should be taken into account when the research methodology is being discussed.[319] Research can be quantitative, qualitative, or a mix of these approaches.[320] The two are not rigid distinct categories, but 'they represent different ends on a continuum.'[321] Quantitative research is greatly related to mathematical numbers, and close-ended questions and responses are preferred; qualitative research primarily refers to words, meanings, and the value-laden social world and open-ended questions and responses are favoured. Donna Mertens puts it this way, frequently, numerical data is collected in quantitative research, while words, pictures, and artefacts are collected in qualitative research.[322] Ference Marton states, 'to characterize how something is apprehended, thought about, or perceived is, by definition, a qualitative question.'[323] For this thesis a qualitative approach seems more appropriate: researching RE teachers' interpretations of the idea of religious literacy and this tension is a value-laden process, thus the quantitative approach is an undesirable measurement system.

We should clarify that the philosophical framework of CR can work well with qualitative research.[324] In CR, the natural and social worlds can be studied in the same way because, although their ontological matters are distinctive, they exist independently of our knowledge of them: CR can play an under-labouring role in guiding research into the natural and social sciences.[325]

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[317] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5thedn, Los Angeles, 2018), p. 40.
[318] *Ibid.,* p. 10.
[319] Catherine Dawson, *Introduction to Research Methods: A Practical Guide for Anyone Undertaking a Research Project* (4thedn, Oxford, 2009), p. 14.
[320] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design,* p. 41.
[321] *Ibid.*
[322] Donna M. Mertens, *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology* (4thedn, Sage, 2015), p. 51.
[323] Ference Marton, 'Phenomenography— A research approach to investigating different understandings of reality', *Journal of Thought* 21.3 (1986), p. 33.
[324] See, for example, Amber J. Fletcher, 'Applying critical realism in qualitative research: methodology meets method', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 20.2 (2017). See also, Ayse Demirel Ucan, *Improving the Pedagogy of Islamic Religious Education in Secondary Schools: The Role of Critical Religious Education and Variation Theory* (New York, 2020), p. 71.
[325] Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism.*

Within the qualitative approach, phenomenography, in line with the work of Marton, is appropriate. The rationale for adopting the phenomenographic account resides in its consistency with CR, as according to the phenomenography, people dwell in the world and therefore must have relationality with reality.[326] The phenomenographic approach accepts that there can be different accounts of the same reality, and some of these accounts can be better than others, in Wright's words some ways can be 'more advanced, intricate and significant than others.'[327] Regarding the former, taking account of the ways of seeing the phenomenon that appear among teachers is, therefore, conducive to making variation available to us. As Marton argues, 'when investigating people's understanding of various phenomena, concepts, and principles, we repeatedly found that each phenomenon, concept, or principle can be understood in a limited number of qualitatively different ways.'[328] With respect to the latter, the fact that phenomenography is in line with CR in terms of its perspective of reality allows us to subject the ways of seeing the phenomenon to the discussion of pursuing the most powerful path of approaching religious literacy and the tension. That is, the insight that the phenomenon of interest can be experienced in different ways, coupled with the argument that some ways of seeing the phenomenon can be better than others opens up the possibility of discussing critical differences in teachers' capabilities of understanding the phenomenon under investigation.[329] Thus, not only phenomenography is suitable to learn about different ways in which RE teachers experience religious literacy and this tension in schools but also enables us to discern issues such as the extent to which the right approach is being pursued.

Examining which of the understandings emerging from the investigation of variation is more truthful than others can be thought of in different ways. For example, the way of experiencing the phenomenon of interest can be interpreted in relation to the theoretical part of this thesis. What is meant here is to interpret what different ways of seeing the phenomenon that is expected to emerge with exploring variation mean in terms of approaching religious literacy and this tension in the best possible way. In doing this, different strategies can be followed. For instance, by including how widespread the ways of seeing the phenomenon are, a discussion of how promising the current situation in the field is in terms of best addressing these issues can be brought to the agenda. The second point here is that the potential of variation can enrich our ability to see different aspects of the categories of variation. The possibility of different aspects of the ways of seeing the phenomenon emerge makes it more likely to approach religious literacy and this tension in the best possible way. More specifically, the possibility of various aspects to emerge is to lead to taking them into account; and doing so prepares the ground for approaching the phenomenon in the best possible way. This is to enhance RE regarding its contribution to the flourishing of society, as approaching this tension, for instance, has been regarded as perhaps the most important way that RE can achieve the flourishing of society. Overall, the phenomenographic approach has been deemed appropriate to fulfil the main purpose of this thesis, as it is in line with CR, and variation providing information for change for the better is a significant step to hold the best way of approaching these issues in schools, which means RE can reach a very high potential in achieving the flourishing of society.

[326] See, for example, Demirel Ucan, *Improving the Pedagogy of Islamic Religious Education in Secondary Schools*, p. 71. See also, John A. Bowden, 'Reflections on the phenomenographic team research process,' in John A. Bowden and Pam Green (eds), *Doing Developmental Phenomenography* (Melbourne, 2005), p. 12.
[327] Wright, *Critical religious education, multiculturalism,* p. 244.
[328] Marton, 'Phenemenography- A research approach', pp. 30-31. See also, Ference Marton and Wing Yan Pong, 'On the unit of description in phenomenography', *Higher Education Research & Development* 24.4 (2005), p. 335.
[329] Wright, *Critical religious education, multiculturalism,* p. 243.

Methods are deemed to mean techniques or procedures for gathering and analysing data in relation to the research questions.[330] Interview data is frequently used in phenemenographic research. However, Gerlese Akerlind argues that a range of other data types is also acceptable.[331] Within the phenomenographic approach, a survey can be adopted as the data collection method on the basis that it is effective in terms of enabling the researcher to determine the awareness of experiencing a particular phenomenon of multiple participants.[332] To gain insight of the bigger picture about these two subjects in the UK, a survey study is suitable. Thus, this thesis uses a survey.

In taking this research forward a questionnaire with open-ended questions was preferred on the basis that it would be both time-effective and give participants the opportunity to answer the questions alone.[333] It is reasonable to assume that the authenticity of the answers given by participants could be greater when they answer without the pressure of time constraints. Marton notes that asking open-ended questions is important in phenomenography 'in order to let the subjects choose the dimensions of the question they want to answer.'[334] On the basis of this, and the fact that open-ended questions are frequently used in qualitative research, while the questionnaire on religious literacy consisted of three open-ended questions, the questionnaire on the tension involved five open-ended questions.

As a starting point, the first questionnaire addressed whether the teachers were familiar with the term religious literacy, and, if so, in what context they had learned about it. The second question asked what the term religious literacy meant to them, and the third asked what skills children would require in order to become religiously literate.

In the second questionnaire, the notion of social cohesion is used in exploring teachers' perspectives about this tension. In this thesis, mainly the notion of flourishing has been used; but the term social cohesion was found more appropriate for this questionnaire.

The rationale behind this argument, once again, can be explained as follows: while the notion of social cohesion may initially imply instrumental approaches, the study of religion in its own right has the potential to lead to a genuinely cohesive society. Therefore, using the notion of social cohesion does not necessarily reduce RE to an instrumental inquiry. Instead, it can inform us about whether teachers engage with claims of faiths to truth in promoting genuine social cohesion with the option of leaning greatly towards the instrumental side.

The five questions of the second questionnaire are as follows: what does social cohesion mean for you? What can you do, as a teacher, to promote social cohesion? Do you think discussing conflicting truth claims of different faiths matters, or do you aim to steer away from them because they may undermine an agenda for social cohesion? If you discuss competing truth claims in class, how do you address disagreements that might arise between students? Do you feel that disagreements between students over the truth claims of different religions or worldviews undermine social cohesion?

[330] Michael J. Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (London, 1998), p. 11.
[331] Gerlese Akerlind, 'Learning about phenomenography: Interviewing, data analysis and the qualitative research paradigm', in John A. Bowden and Pam Green (eds), *Doing Developmental Phenomenography* (Melbourne, 2005), p. 67.
[332] Mertens, *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology*, p. 237.
[333] Martyn Denscombe, *The good research guide for small-scale research projects* (5thedn, New York, 2014), p. 7.
[334] Marton, 'Phenemenography- A research approach', p. 42.

The first two questions concern the meaning of social cohesion whilst, the last three questions are primarily about the tension between this and contested truth claims of faiths. The first two questions are asked in the hope of helping teachers to make more sense of the tension between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society (social cohesion) based on the answers they gave before moving on to addressing this tension directly in the hope it will facilitate more accurate answers in the light of already thinking about social cohesion as the need to contribute to the flourishing of society.

The last three questions point more specifically to an investigation of the tension between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society. Since this tension is about contested truth claims of faiths towards reality, responding to this tension can be thought of in terms of two ways: valuing truth or avoiding the question of truth. In this context, as stated before, asking questions about the importance of discussing conflicting truth claims of faiths is also an asking whether the question of truth is actually addressed, or an alternative path is adopted. For this reason, within this survey study, the primary focus is learning how this tension is approached in relation to understanding whether conflicting truth claims are taken seriously in schools.

Lawrence Neuman asserts the next step after data collection is to analyse it.[335] In the phenomenographic approach 'data collection and data analysis are inseparable.'[336] In our data analysis, phenomenography is used as an analytic tool.[337] Phenomenography provides a basis from which to identify the data as categories of description of the phenomenon. Categories are the qualitatively different ways that the phenomenon is conceived. These set of categories emerge from the data; they are not predetermined.[338]As Robyn Barnacle argues the key issue is to ensure that categories of description are generated by the transcripts rather than any foremeaning notions.[339] Viewed from this vantage point, the researcher seeks to unveil patterns from the data.

Pam Green draws attention to the point that reading and re-reading is the process on which phenomenographic analysis relies.[340] When reading, Marton says, it is first important to discern utterances or meanings based on criteria of relevance.[341] Moreover, Akerlind argues that reading the transcripts, as a starting point, enables us to find variation in meaning.[342] These different perceptions contain both *what* and *how* aspects, according to Jan Larsson and Inger Holmström.[343] The aspect of *what* tells us what participants talk about, while *how* tells us the way in which they talk about it. Marton states, 'the phenomenon in question is narrowed down to and interpreted in terms of selected quotes from all the data.'[344] Marton points out that through the interpretive work, the researcher brings together the utterances into categories based on their similarities and differentiates categories in terms of their differences.

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[335] W. Lawrence Neuman, *Basics of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (2nd edn, Boston, 2007), p. 10.
[336] Wright, *Critical religious education, multiculturalism,* p. 244.
[337] See, for example, Ucan, *Improving the Pedagogy of Islamic Religious Education in Secondary Schools*, p. 82.
[338] Manjula D. Sharma, Chris Steward, and Michael Prosser, 'On the use of phenomenography in the analysis of qualitative data', *Physics Education Research Conference* 720 (2004), p. 41. See also Gerlese S. Akerlind, 'Variation and commonality in phenomenographic research methods', *Higher education research and development* 31.1 (2012), p. 117.
[339] Robyn Barnacle, 'Interpreting interpretation: A phenomenological perspective on pheneomenography', in John A. Bowden and Pam Green (eds), *Doing Developmental Phenomenography* (Melbourne, 2005), p. 48.
[340] Pam Green, 'A rigorous journey into phenomenography: From a naturalistic inquirer standpoint', in John A. Bowden and Pam Green (eds), *Doing Developmental Phenomenography* (Melbourne, 2005), p. 41.
[341] Marton, 'Phenemenography- A research approach'.
[342] Akerlind, 'Variation and commonality', p. 117.
[343] Jan Larsson and Inger Holmström, 'Phenomenographic or phenomenological analysis: does it matter? Examples from a study on anaesthesiologists' work', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being* 2.1 (2007), p. 56.
[344] Marton, 'Phenemenography- A research approach', p. 42.

The importance of providing holistic meaning, rather than merely concentrating on individual descriptions, is essential.[345] In other words, in order to gain more insight into the data and a broader display of different techniques, holistic meanings are important.[346] John Bowden expounds this through the following analogy:

> *"The development of a smaller number of holistic meanings is more of a mapping process. The whole map from a content analysis perspective may look like a mass of details – highly populated urban centres, small towns, regional centres, rivers, hills, lakes, farms, industrial complexes, parks, etc…the phenomenographic process would look for more holistic meanings in which the patterns of such detail vary and give us different meanings...A smaller urbanised area, perhaps on a river that connects to the state capital with some industrial activity around, but significant farming land as well, might indicate a regional centre."*[347]

Finally, categories of descriptions about the phenomenon can be taken to represent different ways of perceiving the phenomenon, and links between these categories are to be expected, articulate Bowden et al. argue.[348] In this context, the hierarchical relationship between categories of description can be arranged.

In the following analysis, the categories were derived from the data; they were not predetermined by the researcher. Attention was paid to the different ideas that teachers had about the phenomenon. Data were carefully read at different times, and the different comments made by teachers relating to the phenomenon were mapped out manually. This was done by paying attention to what the participants' focus was and how they described their way of understanding.

After initial categories emerged, the positioning of statements into appropriate categories was re-examined. As the next step, the data and categories were systematically revisited until the researcher was confident that the final categories provided a rich description of the data. Holistic meanings were given, which can be interpreted in two ways: in terms of perceiving each category of description holistically, and holistic meaning of the phenomenon under investigation. Teachers pointed to different aspects of a category of description, but the important thing, alongside providing these different aspects, was to ensure that the holistic view given to that category was seen. Similarly, alongside reflecting different ways that are perceived about the phenomenon under investigation, it was interpreted holistically. In order to categorize the variation of religious literacy and this tension, descriptions (names) were created for each category. What is more, a hierarchical relationship between categories was considered.

E) Recruitment and participants

The participants in this study are secondary school RE teachers, working in the UK. The rationale for limiting the survey to secondary school teachers is as follows: some understandings of religious literacy specifically demand abstract thinking. This is articulated

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[345] Ucan, *Improving the Pedagogy of Islamic Religious Education in Secondary Schools*, p. 72. See also, Akerlind, 'Learning about phenomenography', p. 72.
[346] Bowden, 'Reflections on the phenomenographic team research process,' pp. 26, 27.
[347] *Ibid.*
[348] John A. Bowden, et al., 'Academics' ways of understanding success in research activities', in John A. Bowden and Pam Green (eds), *Doing Developmental Phenomenography* (Melbourne, 2005), p. 138.

in Wright's account. When Wright, his colleagues and other parties were putting their work into practice, a set of texts was prepared for Year 7 students as a starting point.[349] Their book, *Critical Religious Education in Practice*, was produced based on those texts and designed for Year 7, 8, and 9 students. The need for abstract thinking skills also holds for discussing the truth claims of faiths. Ronald Goldman has argued that before reaching certain ages, children had considerable intellectual limitations. Understanding abstract texts in religious books, for example, requires an intellectual capacity that does not occur before secondary school; therefore, religion should be studied after taking into account the child's cognitive development.[350] Goldman's approach has been questioned by a number of important names in the field, such as Cooling, but it is viable to suggest that there are more intellectual limitations among primary school children than secondary school pupils.[351] As it appears that secondary school RE teachers would be engaged with abstract thinking required for engaging in religious literacy and the tension between truth claims and social cohesion, the survey focused on this group.

The survey was conducted in early 2022. With respect to the first questionnaire, the questionnaire was shared on various RE teachers' Facebook groups (RE Teachers Forum; REspect: The Subject Community for RE Professionals; Catholic RE UK; and GCSE Religious Studies—Teachers & Resources) as well as other internet platforms, such as RE Today. Participants were not offered any remuneration: participation was voluntary. In total, 107 RE teachers participated in this questionnaire. The majority (82 of 107) worked in schools based across England in areas such as Hertfordshire, Yorkshire, the Midlands, North West England, the South East, the South West, and the West Midlands. A fifth of the participants (22 of 107) worked in Scotland, with the West Central Lowlands, East Scotland, North Ayrshire, Angus, the Western Isles, and the Scottish Borders representing the main regions. From Wales, Ireland, and Northern Ireland only three teachers participated in the study: one teacher from each country.

In order to maximise the ways of viewing the phenomenon, teachers were asked which of two types of settings they worked in—a faith or non-faith school. The aim here was to establish if school type influenced RE teachers regarding their thoughts on the phenomenon. The majority of teachers (70 of 107) were based in non-religious settings, whereas about a third (37 of 107) worked in faith schools. While the teachers from Northern Ireland and Ireland worked in faith schools, the teacher from Wales worked in a non-faith school. In comparing England and Scotland with respect to the percentage of teachers working in faith schools to those working in non-faith schools, it was noted that England had a higher percentage than Scotland with 39% of teachers (32 of 82) working in faith schools compared to 13% (3 of 22).

[349] See, Angela Goodman, 'Critical Religious Education CRE in practice: evaluating the reception of an introductory scheme of work', *British Journal of Religious Education* 40.2 (2018).
[350] Ronald Goldman, *Thinking from childhood to adolescence* (London, 1964). Ronald Goldman, *Readiness for religion: A Basis for Developmental Religious Education* (London, 1965).
[351] For the critical view of Goldman, see, for example, Trevor Cooling and Margaret Cooling, 'Christian Doctrine in Religious Education', *British Journal of Religious Education* 9.3 (1987), pp. 152–159. Cooling, as a response, articulated that doctrines are central in Christianity but there was considerable reluctance to incorporate them into RE at the primary and middle school level, and only the upper part of secondary was seen as appropriate. Cooling showed the then Cambridgeshire Agreed Syllabus as an example of this approach. Such an approach was found wanting by Cooling because, for instance, it did not require the pupils to think deeply about religious issues. In this sense, engaging with Goldman's work, Cooling, as a solution to the developmental issue, pointed out, for example, religious concepts should be translated into terms that could communicate with the thought patterns of the child.

While England and Wales are often considered together with respect to the framework for RE, the Scottish, Irish, and Northern Irish RE programmes are relatively different.[352] One teacher from both Ireland and Northern Ireland participated, and indeed no differences emerged in their answers when compared with teachers from England, Wales, and Scotland. Conroy et al. point out, Scottish RE 'is, as in so many things, both like England and Wales and unlike them. It is like England and Wales inasmuch as it draws on the same intellectual resources for policy making… It is unlike them, however, in that it embeds these intellectual and cultural resources in quite different forms.'[353] Moreover, while the Church of England is based on Anglicanism, the Church of Scotland is rooted in Presbyterianism.[354] Such variations can influence RE teachers with respect to their perspectives of the phenomenon.

Comparing the RE of the four jurisdictions of the UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales), Smith et al. state that 'nevertheless, despite such diversity, it is fair to say that RE in UK schools has, since the early 1970s, emerged increasingly as an educational, rather than a confessional (as was previously the case), presentation of multiple traditions and ideologies.'[355] In line with this, when answers to all the questions were considered, no significant patterns of difference emerged between the teachers of these countries. The only difference to emerge, which can be seen in the findings section, was between school types: while a few teachers in faith schools refer to a specific faith when describing religious literacy as having basic beliefs of religions, teachers in non-faith schools mostly use religious literacy in a wider sense, such as knowing basic beliefs of world religions.

Before moving on to the contents of the first questionnaire, the participants were informed that there would be a second part of this survey study and were kindly asked to provide their phone number or email address for a follow-up invitation. Most of the participants provided their email addresses and a few teachers gave their phone numbers; some gave both. An email containing the survey link, information about the second questionnaire and an explanation regarding the importance of their participation was sent to the teachers who provided their email addresses or who gave both their email addresses and phone numbers. Those teachers were only contacted through email. Although some teachers provided an email address and phone number, contact was made via email as it was considered more appropriate as well as official, and sufficient. For those who only provided a phone number, the same content was sent as a text message, and the phone numbers and messages were deleted afterwards.

The follow-up questionnaire of the survey was conducted shortly after the first one. Despite being two parts of the same survey study, the presentation of the two questionnaires separately was motivated by several factors. Firstly, there was a concern that teachers could be influenced by the context of the second questionnaire and reflect this in their understanding of religious literacy. This, in turn, could prevent understanding the actual current picture of religious literacy among teachers, thereby hindering a comparison of their initial answers to the findings of the second questionnaire. Secondly, it was also recognised that answering more open-ended survey questions could lead to reduced motivation and artificial answers. 45 of the participants

[352] For a comparison see, Smith, Nixon, and Pearce, 'Bad Religion as False Religion', pp, 4-7. More specifically, for England and Whales, see, for example, Conroy et al., *Does religious education work?*, pp. 67-72. L. Philip Barnes, 'The commission on religious education, worldviews and the future of religious education', *British Journal of Educational Studies 70.1* (2022), p. 87. See also, Ros-Stuart Buttle, 'Does religious education matter? What do teachers say?', in Mary Shanahan (ed.), *Does Religious Education Matter?* (London, 2017), p. 52. On the view that there are changes between England and Wales, see The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, *Living with Difference*, pp. 31,32.
[353] Conroy et al., *Does religious education work?,* p. 76.
[354] Benoit, 'An exploration of pupils' and teachers' discursive constructions of religion(s)', p. 42.
[355] Smith, Nixon, and Pearce, 'Bad Religion as False Religion', p. 5.

of the first questionnaire (107 RE teachers) took part in the second. As the second questionnaire was conducted just after the first one, information concerning the names and the locations of schools was not requested for the second questionnaire; this information was obtained by checking the transcripts of the first.

Similar to the first questionnaire, most (34 of 45) of the teachers who participated were in England and 11 were from Scotland. Those who participated from Wales, Ireland, and Northern Ireland did not take part in the second study. Moreover, around three-quarters (36 of 45) of the teachers worked in non-faith schools, while only nine worked in faith schools. All of the nine working in faith schools were based in England. When the answers to all the questions were considered, no significant patterns of difference emerged between the teachers of these two countries or the school types in England.

Finally, it is important to point out that, in the analysis of this study, in order to identify which quotes belonged to which teacher from which country, and to understand if the ideas of the same teachers are used in different contexts, each questionnaire (separately), each teacher was given a number, such as Teacher 1 (T1) and Teacher 2 (T2). Moreover, the letter E was used for teachers participating from England, S for teachers participating from Scotland, and W, I, and NI for the countries Wales, Ireland, and Northern Ireland. Finally, NF was used for those working in non-faith schools, and F for teachers working in faith schools. For example, if a teacher is from England and worked in a non-faith school, and if his/her ideas are presented first, then his/her code will be as follows: T1ENF.

F) Ethical concerns

It is important to obtain ethical approval for educational research. Data collection did not begin until after this was obtained from the Sheffield University Ethics Committee. With the survey questionnaires, the goals of the study were shared with them. The first page of the survey questionnaires contained information about the purposes of the studies. As such, before committing to the studies and answering the questions, participants were informed of the goals of the research. A consent form, requiring a response, was prepared and included as the second page of the survey questionnaires. Thus, in order to answer the questions that followed, the participants had to first give their consent to voluntarily take part in the questionnaires and accept other conditions surrounding the process. Information such as their names and the name of the school they worked in were kept anonymous.

G) Limitations

With respect to the first questionnaire, in total, the survey recruited 107 responses, and while more data is always desirable, this is a substantial cohort to analyse. In other words, although RE teachers can show significant variation and 107 participants could be viewed as a relatively small number, this study can be regarded as a rich indication of RE teachers' perspectives on the idea of religious literacy in the UK.

In addition to this, we have stated that religious literacy has become a widespread idea recently. When I started my thesis, I had an idea that this notion would be of great importance due to its frequent use. Therefore, from the beginning, I thought that an empirical study on religious literacy would make a great contribution to both the thesis and the literature itself. However, when I reflected on this notion in depth in the later stages of the thesis, I came to the conclusion that its only advantage seems to be that it has a practical value, religious literacy implies

bringing to actuality what is learned in the subject. Of course, this is an important idea from a theoretical perspective, because if it is used in the sense implied by this thesis, it can be a discourse that would serve the main purpose of this thesis, and it can also be a call to correct the misuses regarding this notion in the literature. However, it cannot be said that using this term in a somehow dismissive way makes it very meaningful for me to conduct an empirical study on it. Had I obtained insight into this notion at the beginning of the thesis, I might not have done this study on it. Yet, once again, if this notion is to be used, which this thesis sees as an advantage, we can say this empirical study is important.

With respect to the second questionnaire, in total, the survey recruited 45 responses, and while more data is always desirable, similarly this is a substantial cohort to analyse. That is, though 45 participants can be viewed as a small number when investigating the truth of the situation in Great Britain, this number can be taken as a rich *indication* of the bigger picture.

As explained above, the first two questions of the second questionnaire were asked to encourage teachers to gain a better understanding of this tension. However, at the end of the empirical study, I came to the realisation that it may not have been necessary to ask these two questions. In retrospect, I recognised that asking questions regarding the meaning of social cohesion is not directly well related to exploring this tension. Consequently, I now believe it would have been better to include questions that encompass various dimensions of this tension rather than these two questions.

H) Conclusion

It has been stated that centralising the best available approach together with the notion of happiness might be the most reasonable way for RE to adopt regarding the flourishing of society in the face of this tension. In addition, the idea of religious literacy has been found useful because it has practical value in terms of implementing both this best approach and the vision of the notion of happiness.

That reading the current situation regarding this tension and religious literacy in schools together with the theoretical part can be more encouraging for change for the better, this thesis includes an empirical study. This chapter has primarily focused on this empirical work, including reviewing previous empirical studies and articulating methodological considerations.

In the context of religious literacy, it is emphasised that this term is both widely used in schools and that it has been understood in various ways such as having a certain level of knowledge and understanding about beliefs. As for the tension, there is a main basic line suggesting that truth claims of faiths and the possibility that religions can be truthful accounts of the order of things are often ignored in schools, and this is often done in the name of an agenda such as social cohesion; and on the other hand, there is a less common approach of taking religions seriously in terms of truth.

Regarding the methodological considerations, this study is informed by the ontological and epistemological premises of CR. A qualitative research perspective has been adopted, and, in line with this, phenomenography has been used as a specific research approach. A survey study including two questionnaires has been preferred in order to collect data. In data analysis, phenomenography has been used as an analytic tool. The next chapter will present the findings of this empirical study and include a discussion of them.

Chapter 5

Findings and Discussion

A) Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have argued that handling the tension between contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society in the best possible way can be regarded as one of the most important ways, if not the most, that RE can genuinely contribute to the flourishing of society. I have also drawn attention to the point that the advantage of utilizing the notion of religious literacy lies in its practical value, and thus, RE can be empowered to contribute to the flourishing of society if handling this tension in the best available way is reflected via religious literacy. Moreover, it has been stated that the connection of this empirical study to the main aim of the thesis lies in the observation that when the current situation in schools is viewed together with the theoretical part of the thesis, it will be more influential for change about the idea of religious literacy and this tension, which is regarded to represent a significant part of enhancing RE to contribute to the flourishing of society.

In this respect, in this chapter the findings of the survey questionnaires are presented and evaluated in relation to the theoretical part, as well as empirical studies themselves: the findings, discussion, and conclusion of the first questionnaire are set out, followed by those of the second questionnaire. The chapter ends with a discussion and conclusion section connecting these two themes.

B) Findings of RE teachers' thoughts on religious literacy

From a holistic point of view, there are three main findings on religious literacy. Firstly, teachers are widely aware of the notion of religious literacy.

Secondly, four aspects of religious literacy were identified by teachers, drawing attention to different sides of the study of faiths: a) to have a certain degree of knowledge and understanding about faiths; b) to understand languages of religions (gaining insights about the meaning of concepts); c) to make a positive contribution to the flourishing of society; d) to foster critical thinking in relation to the content of truth claims.

Thirdly, it is unclear whether teachers see religious literacy as the product of the study of religion in its own right. We should note, the third point is discussed in the context of the second finding, therefore it is not given as a separate title.

B. a) Familiarity of RE teachers with religious literacy

The majority of RE teachers (86 of 107) are familiar with the term religious literacy, while 18 teachers are not familiar. The answers of three teachers spell out that they are neither familiar nor unfamiliar with religious literacy:

T1ENF: *'unsure'*

T2ENF: *'not totally'*

T3ENF: *'familiar to an extent'*

Of the teachers participating from England, 81% (67 of 82) are familiar with the notion of religious literacy, while 14% of them (12 of 82) are not familiar. It is the three teachers in England that give the answers: 'unsure', 'not totally', and 'familiar to an extent'. While the teachers from Northern Ireland and Wales are not familiar with religious literacy, the teacher from Ireland is familiar.

In Scotland, 81% of the participants (18 of 22) are familiar with the notion of religious literacy, while four teachers are not. It is clear, then, that in both countries (England and Scotland) the majority of the teachers are familiar with the term religious literacy. This finding is consistent with Plater's study in which religious literacy proved to be one of the most popular emphases.[356] Considering the practical value of using the notion of religious literacy, it can then be stated, an important element of attaining the objectives that can be put forward in the context of the study of faiths is already present in many schools.

With respect to school type, of the 86 teachers who are familiar with the concept, 55 are from non-faith schools, while 31 are from faith schools. More than half of the teachers who are familiar with religious literacy are from non-faith schools. However, regarding the fact that the majority of participants (70 of 107) worked in non-faith schools, which reflects the proportion of non-faith schools and faith schools around the UK (faith schools constitute around a third of schools in England for example), this difference does not suggest teachers working in non-faith schools are more familiar with the term.[357] Of the 18 teachers who are not familiar, around 66% are from non-faith schools (12/18), while around 33% are from faith schools (6/18). It follows that the percentage of unfamiliar teachers in non-faith schools to familiar teachers of the same category is 21% (12/55), while it is 19 % (6/31) for faith schools. It becomes apparent that, in terms of the proportion of teachers not familiar with religious literacy to those familiar with the concept in each school-type category, there is not a significant difference between teachers working in faith schools and non-faith schools. Therefore, religious literacy is already used in both school types.

The variation regarding the methods by which teachers (86 of 107) are acquainted with religious literacy included their school context; university environments such as Harvard University Religious Literacy Project, PGDE, and PGCE; seminars and conferences; as a component of Ofsted reviews; Section 48 Inspection, and social media platforms.

The responses to the question of how teachers became acquainted with the term religious literacy were usually very short, but I will interrogate this as far as possible in the next section.

B.a.a) School context

Many of the teachers are familiar with the term religious literacy because it is widely used in their schools, particularly as part of curriculum intentions, in conversations around RE, and during marking and assessment procedures. This resonates with the view expressed by the practising teacher, Rachael Jackson-Royal, who stated that one of the core aims of her school's RE curriculum concerned religious literacy.[358] Below is a selection of the teachers' answers about how they became acquainted with religious literacy:

T4SF: '*Via my daily work and our curriculum'*

[356] Plater, 'What Is Religious Education for?'.
[357] Robert Long and Shadi Danechi*, Faith Schools in England: FAQs (*House of Commons Library, 2019).
[358] Wood, et al., 'How we teach worldviews'.

T5EF: '*Yes, the term is a part of our departmental curriculum intent and therefore is a term we use with both students and their parents. For example, we will highlight their increasing religious literacy as a form of praise. Additionally, our students being 'religiously literate' is a key judgement of our current section 48 inspection framework. This is also sometimes under the heading 'theologically literate*.'

T6EF*: 'Religious literacy is used frequently in teaching and learning. Pupils are taught from KS3 to include religious language and key concepts in their spoken and written work*.'

T7ENF: '*We use the term religious literacy regularly when marking and assessing students and when commenting on their work, either written or spoken. It is one of our core Assessment Criteria as a department. We use it to refer to the use of and accuracy of religious vocabulary used by students*.'

T8EF: '*We discuss it in the department. For us it means two things; firstly, the ability to recognise, understand and appropriately use specialist religious language. It also means the ability to read, understand and contextualise religious texts, such as the Bible, the Torah, the Qur'an.'*

B.a.b) University environment

Although less than the previous category, when compared to others, this is a category for which there is relatively more information. This category indicates that teachers became acquainted with the term religious literacy in relation to the university environment. This can consist of teacher training programs, religious literacy programs, and certain resources that could have been developed in relation to universities such as CoRE report (many scholars took part in producing CoRE report). Below are some of the teachers' answers:

T9SNF: '*During my teacher training we discussed religious literacy and how it was a remarkable poor standard across schools in the 21st century, with most pupils being raised in atheistic homes and therefore not being given any points of reference that previous generations might have been*.'

T10SF: '*Yes, explored at university and aware of the importance in the pedagogy surrounding this term.*'

T11ENF: '*Whilst studying for my degree in Theology Religious studies at Roehampton University*.'

T12ENF: '*Yes, was covered during first year teacher training at Sheffield Hallam*.'

T13SNF: *'Heard of the term some time ago with reference to the Harvard Religious Literacy Project.'*

T14ENF: '*Yes. It is part of intent statement that we develop religious literate students. It is part of the CoRE report and a significant aim of RE.*'

When considered alongside the first category, religious literacy most frequently appears as a topic discussed at school around RE and the university environment. This means, to recap, the notion of religious literacy is relatively widespread not only in the literature but also among the practices of teachers in schools.

It is reasonable to argue that as the term religious literacy has become widely used in the literature, especially in the last two decades, the findings of this study demonstrate that this prevalence in academia has influenced the schools. The fact that the ways of experiencing religious literacy emerging among teachers includes areas like the university environment reflects that the widespread use of this notion in the literature has improved awareness of the term throughout schools and influenced them to include it in their curriculum.

In this context, when we examine the relationship between how teachers became acquainted with religious literacy and their understanding of it, it is seen that the understanding offered by some teachers is compatible with the vision of religious literacy revealed by their referenced sources. To give an example, the religious literacy understanding of the teacher who draws attention to CoRE report is diversity-based. This teacher points out that:

> T14ENF: '*Religious literacy (worldview literacy) is to understand that there is diversity within and between worldviews. That worldviews are shaped by where, when and who you are (culture, period and experience. That worldviews are changing, fluid and dynamic. That worldviews are messy*.'

Diversity is the central theme in CoRE report.[359] Similarly, in the answer of the teacher who gave the Harvard University example, elements such as the changing nature of religion came to the fore. According to this teacher religious literacy:

> T13SNF: '*involves being aware that there can be very wide range of beliefs, practices and moral values among members of the same faith*.'

The Harvard University Religious Literacy program has been developed by Moore. In her conception of religious literacy, faiths are in a state of flux, as discussed in the second chapter.

Yet, based on these examples, the aim of this thesis is not to generalise this reading, but only to underline that the understandings of religious literacy, as demonstrated in these examples, can be similar to the visions of this term in the literature cited as their sources. Once again, we can make a stronger statement – that the widespread use of religious literacy in academia also manifests itself in schools.

Before moving on to what teachers understand from religious literacy, a final note is apposite here. Although teachers were not asked any distinguishing questions other than which country they participated from and in which two types of schools (faith and non-faith) they work, when the survey responses are read in relation to enquiries like the length of service, types of training, and syllabus constraints the following can be pointed out: there is not a difference between the answers in which such information is apparent and the responses in which it is not obvious, in the context of the categories of variation regarding what the term religious literacy means to teachers, which are given below. At this point, a recommendation could be made to conduct a

[359] We should note that Although the term religious literacy, as previously stated, is not used in CoRE report, it was included in a later report on CoRE. Trevor Cooling, Bob Bowie, and Farid Panjwani, *Worldviews in Religious Education* (Theos, 2020).

study wherein the factors influencing teachers' comprehension of religious literacy are directly queried. Such a study would offer us comprehensive insights into these differences.

Concerning the length of service, based on the available data, it is apparent in the answers of a few teachers that they have been working for a relatively long time. In the responses of these teachers, issues like reaching a certain level of knowledge and understanding about faiths and gaining insight into the meaning of religious concepts hold significant importance, as in the answers of teachers where this information is unavailable. For example, a teacher who said that she/he has been teaching RE, philosophy and ethics for 15 years defined religious literacy as follows:

> T15ENF: *'It means to be able to allow for a more broad understanding of how religious traditions are central to society and how it is run.'*

Another teacher has responded that:

> T16ENF: *'Yes, very familiar one, referred to in training 12 years ago. Religious literacy is a skill that students will practice over time. It involves growing confidence in the use of terms relating to religion and non-religion.'*

Types of training generally refer to the university environment, as demonstrated in the quotes above. In the responses of the teachers who draw attention to their training, as well as in those where this information is unavailable, issues such as developing a certain level of knowledge and understanding about faiths and gaining insight into the meaning of religious concepts take an important place. To give an example, the teacher, who stated that she/he was familiar with the term during her education at Roehampton University, defined religious literacy as follows:

> T11ENF: *'Understanding religious concepts and being able to apply them both within and outside a religious context e.g., when reading Shakespeare.'*

Concerning syllabus constraints, religious literacy in the responses of teachers appears to be used as an aim of RE, part of the intent statement, in teaching and learning, and in the process of building and planning a curriculum. Similarly, developing knowledge and understanding, and learning about concepts are central to this. For example, one teacher who became acquainted with religious literacy through planning and discussing curriculum understands religious literacy as follows:

> T17EF: *'Having an understanding of different faiths and their practices.'*

Another teacher stated that:

> T18ENF: *'Yes, I refer to it in lesson and when planning. It means the ability for students expressed themselves within RS lessons and use language that they do not use in other subjects.'*

We can additionally point out that one teacher, who works in a non-faith school and emphasises that pronouncing which faith is true is beyond his remit, defined religious literacy as being familiar with concepts. Here we can at least state that curriculum

constraints in non-faith schools make it difficult to adopt a confessional approach. This teacher's response is as follows:

T19ENF: '*Being familiar with the concepts and terminology of religions*.'

B. b) Teachers' conception of religious literacy: the four categories emerging from teachers' understanding of religious literacy

The second question is concerned with what religious literacy means to teachers. In this context, teachers drew attention to different aspects of the study of faiths. Four ways of seeing religious literacy were identified.

We should note that there is variation regarding the percentage of teachers emphasising each category: the largest percentage sees religious literacy as related to having a certain degree of knowledge and understanding about faiths, and language (concepts), while fewer teachers associate religious literacy with the content of truth claims. Using the hierarchical relationship between categories in terms of numbers, the order of presenting the four categories will be according to the percentage of teachers for each category from highest to lowest. Often more than one category is referenced in respondents' answers, therefore, the percentage or the number of people was determined according to the frequency of recurrence of a category.

B.b.a) Having a certain degree of knowledge and understanding of various faiths

Religious literacy for teachers is primarily concerned with knowing and understanding the core aspects of different faiths: this is the most prevalent category, taking an important place in the majority of responses by teachers. The majority of responses of this category involve knowledge and understanding of the content of some of the main sacred texts, their key ideas and beliefs, the history of faiths, looking at religion in relation to different socio-cultural contexts of the time, unpicking the meaning of incidents, and recognising diversity within and between faiths.

Religious literacy accounts in the literature can be evaluated in terms of knowledge and understanding. In early studies, while for Grafflin religious literacy was concerned with the history and literature of religions in a more confessional form; in Ward, it appeared as knowledge of religion that can take individuals to know and believe in God; and in Lissovoy religious literacy was related to understanding the structure and the function of religious institutions, and having knowledge and understanding of the basic principles of religions.[360] In its contemporary usages, while Wright placed the greatest emphasis on truth claims of faiths concerning ultimate order of things; Prothero and Moore in particular prioritised knowing and understanding the basic beliefs of faiths in relation to other domains of human experience such as the political and social; in Dinham, in the context of encountering variety well, understanding faiths in all their diversity played the central role. Finally, in Conroy, practices, theological truth claims, convolutions, contradictions, and challenges of at least one faith held significant importance.[361]

The teachers' ideas resonate most with approaches like that of Lissovoy, Prothero, Moore and Conroy, as these scholars place great emphasis on knowing and understanding the core aspects of different faiths. It should also be noted, teachers' approaches differ from some of these

[360] See Chapter 2, section B.
[361] See Chapter 2, section C.

accounts in terms of knowledge and understanding. For instance, the confessional approach is not generally expressed, except for a few teachers working in faith schools. This marks that most teachers' approaches greatly differ from the understanding of religious literacy like that of Grafflin and Ward, which is greatly predicated on confessionalism. Moreover, whilst the knowledge and understanding of the basic principles of faiths can be read as including the truth claims of faiths, teachers do not specifically articulate this notion, nor that of pursuing truth in this context. This may amount to saying that they are not particularly concerned with this issue, downplaying the importance of engagement with religions as accounts addressing reality. Because of this, these approaches also somehow differ from Wright's approach. Below are some responses from the teachers:

> T20ENF: *'Knowledge and understanding of history, main beliefs and ethics of 6 main religious traditions.'*
>
> T21EF: *'It means having knowledge and understanding of religions (texts, practices and beliefs) as well as how religion affects and influences social, political and cultural life.'*
>
> T12ENF: *'A person's knowledge and comprehension of religious facts and meaning, e.g. can they name the main world religions, do they know the texts or founders associated and some core beliefs such as teaching on life after death.'*
>
> T22SNF: '*Having an understanding of the historical and social context of religion and its interdependent relationship with wider society. Also being able to grasp the differences within individual religions.'*

We should also underline, while diversity between and within faiths can be construed in the context of having a certain degree of knowledge and understanding of various faiths, what is more important in terms of knowledge and understanding can be taken as the issue of diversity, this does not seem to be a greatly important element for teachers: only around 10 teachers drew attention to knowledge and understanding of diversity. In this context, approaches like Dinham's diversity-centred religious literacy account cannot be said to be very common in schools. Below are two responses from teachers regarding diversity:

> T23ENF: '*I think the term is vague to be honest, religious groups have different beliefs and are in constant state of flux. It suggests that we can be knowledgeable about what people believe, but this is not easy as even doctrines change over time.*'
>
> T24EF: '*Developing students understanding of technical terminology but also their knowledge of the religious diversity of religion within the UK and across the world.*'

Even though only a small number of teachers emphasised diversity, many teachers drew attention to various faiths: several teachers used the terms *a range of religions, world religions, religions followed in British society,* and *religion and non-religion*. Moreover, it can be argued that while the data presents a greater presence of world religions, there is a comparatively lesser focus on Abrahamic religions. In this light, teachers tend to not privilege any religion, except in faith schools. To give an example:

> T25EF: '*Preparing students to enable them to fully understand the context of world faiths. To understand their origins, key texts (scriptures) and to consider historical and cultural influences on the development of the faith. Being able to use key terms associated*

with religions and confidently discuss/handle core beliefs. It's about moving beyond 'learning' or 'memorising' what someone may believe and looking at how the beliefs got to that point/what the basis is.'

The answers of a few teachers from faith schools are similar to Grafflin and Ward's vision of religious literacy being grounded in a confessional approach, the knowledge and understanding of which reflected the faith of their school. For instance, a teacher working in a Catholic school responded that:

T5EF: '*As a teacher in a Catholic school, it means that students speak with confidence about key religious ideas linked to faith. They demonstrate a sound understanding of the foundational beliefs of Catholicism.'*

Further, considering the argument that religious literacy should be thought of as a product of the study of religion in its own right, here most teachers, as seen from their quotes, tend to use the notion of religious literacy in line with this argument. To explain this further we can give another example here:

T26ENF: '*The general understanding/knowledge a person has about religious matters/questions/ concepts/practices both in their own community and elsewhere. This understanding broadens out to wider social/political implications of religious thought and activity.'*

When it is accepted that many of the elements mentioned in this quote and the ones given above, such as having knowledge and understanding of various religions, are among the central aims of RE, then the picture of religious literacy among teachers greatly reflects what essentially the aims of RE should be. That is, in the context of this category, most of the answers above display a picture that what teachers mean by religious literacy could refer to what the study of religion in its own right should be for. In this context, I would like to point out, teachers' views of religious literacy also tend to differ from approaches like that of Grafflin with respect to seeing religious literacy as only one part of the subject.

Finally, to evaluate this category in relation to the existing empirical studies, the findings are similar to the thoughts of teachers in the study by Grant et al., where a key theme was about being knowledgeable about faiths, Abrahamic religions, in particular.[362] However, the present study partially differs from this study: Abrahamic religions are not prioritised as the route to becoming religiously literate. Additionally, this category echoes the hypothesis of Hussain, an RE teacher who dwelled on accurate knowledge and understanding of religions and worldviews, and also with the view expressed by a practising teacher, Rachael Jackson-Royal, who, when considering her RE curriculum, stated, religious literacy contains being knowledgeable of core ideas of different worldviews.[363] Moreover, the emphasis on the relationship of faiths with socio-cultural dimensions in the answers of teachers in the present study echoes the perspective of the teacher who in the APPG report drew attention to the exploration of religious ideas as revealed in literature, theatre, art, and music.[364] This suggests this category is in line with other visions of religious literacy in the literature. What is more, drawing attention to diversity within and between faiths resonates with the perspective of Rachael Jackson-Royal, and the aspiration of teachers in Dinham and Shaw's study in which

[362] Grant, et al., 'Teachers' Perceptions of Religious Literacy in the Development of Civic Participation'.
[363] Hussain, 'Postscript: Purposing RE for a Better Future'; Wood, et al., 'How we teach worldviews'.
[364] APPG, *Improving religious literacy.*

stakeholders wanted RE to teach diversity.[365] However, the fact that only around 10 teachers mention this reflects a similar finding to Peacock's thesis which found that religious literacy as plurality and diversity was not taken on by teachers, community school teachers in particular, in School Linking programme.[366] Reading this together with the fact that more answers are driven by a concern with the knowledge and understanding of the basic principles of faiths suggests teachers tend to prioritise perceiving faiths as having substantial enduring identities.

B.b.b) Understanding the languages of religions

Religions have texts, and thus, language plays a central role in understanding what they claim. Language is of great importance in the literature on religious literacy, and this was observed in the accounts of Wright, Prothero, and Conroy in particular. In Wright, language features as the main means in terms of understanding the truth claims of faiths towards reality; in Prothero, with respect to making sense of the sayings of faiths; in Conroy, in terms of engagement with beliefs of faiths specifically that of theological.[367] There are some crucial differences in their functions. Despite this, language is often used in the matter of *understanding*.

In the survey responses, language is the second most prevalent category, taking an important place in around 50 responses of teachers; and language in many answers, similar to the literature, appears to be functioning as a key to understanding faiths. However, we should also note, generally there is no emphasis on language in terms of understanding the truth claims of faiths thereby being able to pursue truth. Therefore, this category also reflects more understanding-based accounts like that of Prothero whilst, it can be said that it reflects Wright's approach less. Below are some of the teachers' answers:

> T27SNF: '*A person is familiar with the terminology surrounding faith, knows and understands concepts of faith, divine, holy, sacred etc. A person may practice a faith or be familiar with these terms because they have family members or friends who practice faith*.'
>
> T28EF: '*For me, it means being able to use subject specific key terms in explaining religious beliefs and practices. That includes understanding religious texts and scripture and being able to interpret these texts*.'
>
> T7ENF: *'The use, meaning and accuracy of words and phrases used by religious communities. The interpretation of vocabulary in written and spoken form.'*
>
> T6EF*: 'Religious literacy means using language in religious context. For example, God fearing is not afraid of God, but being in awe of him.'*

To give further details of this category of variation, one teacher underlined that learning language should be age appropriate. This echoes the line in the literature, in particular Goldman who argued that RE should be designed according to children's cognitive development. This teacher stated that:

[365] Wood, et al., 'How we teach worldviews'; Dinham and Shaw, 'Religious Literacy through Religious Education'.
[366] Peacock, 'Contact in the classroom'.
[367] See Chapter 1, Section D; Chapter 2, Section C.

T29ENF: '*Having a rich and nuanced (age appropriate) understanding of theological concepts and language, as used by believers and theologians. Knowing the links between different concepts and language. Being able to use this terminology accurately to communicate meaning, or to discern meaning when reading*.'

Moreover, many teachers drew attention to the ability to bring obtained knowledge and understanding into conversation which can be interpreted in the context of language. Below are some of the answers from teachers:

T30EF: *'Someone shows a good knowledge of and understanding of religion and is able to engage in conversation about it in their everyday life.'*

T31ENF: '*Ability to speak knowledgeably about different faiths and viewpoints using correct terminology.'*

T32EF: *'Sufficiently fluency of knowledge and understanding of a faith, in order to engage in conversation about that faith.'*

We should also note, it is not evident in the answers of teachers that understanding religion is coterminous with imparting religious belief. Based on the answers of teachers, it can be reasonably assumed that they think along the same lines as Wright.[368] They seem to say that even though we have different worldviews, we dwell in the same reality and once we learn the meanings of core concepts, we can communicate the meaning of different faiths. For example, one teacher pointed out that:

T33ENF: '*Be able to use correctly and understand key tier 3 religious words and phrases. The ability to enter into a dialogue on religious and worldview issues with others.*'

When we think about the aspects of this category in relation to the argument that religious literacy should be thought of as a product of the study of religion in its own right, the picture here when compared to the previous category, is more complex. In the knowledge and understanding category, religious literacy tends to be used in line with being the product of the study of faiths on their own merits. In the language category of description, some teachers placed the main emphasis on language itself like learning about the meaning of religious concepts, while others drew attention to other elements along with language. To explain this further we can give these two responses from teachers:

T34SNF: '*It means to be able to use subject specific terminology in specific contexts. It means to understand the meaning of terms from and about religion*.'

T25EF: '*Preparing students to enable them to fully understand the context of world faiths. To understand their origins, key texts (scriptures) and to consider historical and cultural influences on the development of the faith. Being able to use key terms associated with religions and confidently discuss/handle core beliefs. It's about moving beyond 'learning' or 'memorising' what someone may believe and looking at how the beliefs got to that point/what the basis is.*'

[368] On Wright's account of language see Chapter 1, Section D.

In the first example, since religious literacy is largely used only in relation to language, it seems religious literacy constitutes only a part of RE if some other tasks besides language are important, such as the flourishing of society. In the second example, religious literacy tends to be considered somehow the total product of the study of religion in its own right, as teachers talk about different elements besides language. With this, the extent to which religious literacy in British schools is in line with what RE should essentially be for becomes ambiguous.

Finally, this category resonates with Hussain's perception of religious literacy in which the confidence to bring knowledge to the conversation was underlined; and with the view expressed by one head of theology who in the APPG report stated that religious literacy involves comprehension and communication of ideas; and with the perspective of the practising teacher, Rachael Jackson-Royal, who, when considering her RE curriculum, pointed out, religious literacy contains an awareness of core concepts.[369] Thus, this suggests this category is also in line with other conceptions of religious literacy in the literature.

B.b.c) Making a positive contribution to the flourishing of society

Central to the notion of religious literacy is its contribution to the flourishing of society. In its early usages, while Grafflin and Ward predominately imagined the flourishing of society in a confessional way, as teaching something as true and desiring to be lived in this direction aims to establish a society within the framework of that faith's worldview; it was also envisioned by placing a great emphasis on similarities between faiths in Lissovoy and Grafflin.[370] In its contemporary interpretations, Wright argues that genuine flourishing hinges on the pursuit of truth profoundly and systematically, leading to truthful living.[371] On the other hand, for Prothero and Moore, paving the way for the flourishing of society was built on the knowledge and understanding of faiths in relation to other domains of the human experience: while Prothero places more emphasis on knowledge and understanding, Moore favours contextual looking.[372] The main basis of Dinham's theory was encountering variety well; while according to Conroy, to avoid the sealed views of individual believers and religious sceptics alike, being open to modification is the path for social benefit, and in doing this religion should be taken seriously as a source for how one ought to live.[373]

The emphasis placed by some teachers on the flourishing of society mirrors this point. Of course, when different forms of knowledge are seen as interrelated, the flourishing of society can be understood in relation to other aspects of religious literacy given here: even if teachers do not mention the flourishing of society *as such*, one may argue that an ultimate point of knowledge and understanding, gaining insight about the meaning of concepts, and questioning our beliefs is to serve the flourishing of society. This is reasonable as pursuing truth, more specifically, can be regarded as serving the flourishing of society. However, the flourishing of society *as such*, in the context of the second question, only takes an important place around 15 responses of teachers. Below are some of the answers:

> T35EF: '*People being aware of some basic tenets of major religions to enable dialogue and sensitivity. And if not aware, have a willingness and openness to learn more. It is*

[369] Hussain, 'Postscript: Purposing RE for a Better Future'; APPG, *Improving religious literacy;* Wood, et al., 'How we teach worldviews'.
[370] Chapter 2, Section B.
[371] Chapter 2, Section C.
[372] *Ibid.*
[373] *Ibid.*

both knowing about religions but being prepared to learn more and humble to know, you can never know it all.'

T36ENF: *'It involves having an appreciation of problems in comparative religion so that they are sensitive to the terms they use. So, they don't say 'a Quran is a Muslim Bible' because they are discrete enough to know that it's a holy book not a Bible'. I think it's part of the cultural capital we want for young people, so that they can recognise references to faith made by others, or in films etc., and to know how to handle those references or be able to link them to something else they know*.'

T37ENF*: 'To me - it means being able to talk confidently and consciously about religion and religious ideas. Being able to listen carefully to people talking about their beliefs, values and identity, and being able to engage in meaningful dialogue.'*

Moreover, a few teachers emphasised understanding the influence of faith in people's lives, which can be evaluated in the context of this category. For example:

T38SNF: '*For me, I think you have to give young people some context. Rather than just teach about beliefs and practices of specific religious beliefs. They need to understand the relevance of religion, and how it affects peoples' lives and to understand some key terms associated with religion.'*

T39EF: *'It is not enough to simply know a word. Students must understand the lived experience of those who use that particular language. In a Catholic school, they must have an opportunity to experience it for themselves. For example, they should know the term "human dignity", they should learn how people of faith and of no faith have ensured all are treated with dignity, they should have an opportunity to contribute to work towards ensuring all have dignity.'*

Even though the flourishing of society emerged as a common task among scholars, considering the distinction between the two camps as the account pursuing truth deeply and systematically and the alternative vision that does not centralise the question of truth, it has been emphasised that two generally different understandings of the flourishing of society could be conceived. One account poses a systematic and deep pursuit of truth as important for a genuinely flourishing society, while the alternative conception having different visions unveils a flourishing society does not pursue truth in a thorough and influential manner. In the context of viewing religious literacy as a contribution to the flourishing of society, knowledge and understanding of faiths are prominent among teachers; and this is largely related to developing good relations among individuals. Since the flourishing of society is based more on knowledge and understanding and does not include elements such as pursuing truth and truthful living, we can argue that such an understanding of religious literacy as a contribution to the flourishing of society primarily reflects accounts like that of Prothero. For example:

T40ENF: '*It means understanding a range of beliefs and practices in order for you to function as a responsible citizen who is compassionate to others*.'

T41SNF: '*Understanding of and ability to describe or explain different world beliefs in enough depth to promote harmony and reduce prejudice and discrimination in society*.'

Previously it has been argued that if the study of religion in its own right depends on the nature of religion, different approaches could be evaluated by their distance to the nature of religion regarding elements such as content and purpose.[374] The flourishing of society in the context of religious literacy to an extent tends to be rooted in reflecting the nature of religion in a non-confessional way: a perspective that sees the study of religions only in terms of a merely instrumental argument and ignores their content, for example, has not come to the fore. This can be also seen in the response of a teacher below:

> T42EF: '*keywords associated with beliefs and practices within religion. Thinking about the origin and meaning of terms and how essential they are to understanding faith and non-faith of others and necessary for interfaith dialogue.*'

In the context of such aspects of this category of variation, I wish to argue that the picture among teachers concerning the connection between religious literacy and the study of religion in its own right can also be accepted as unclear within this category. On the one hand, expressing the flourishing of society in the context of religious literacy can indicate that religious literacy understanding among teachers is intertwined with the study of religion in its own right since the flourishing of society can be accepted as a very important point of what RE can be for. On the other hand, for instance, the fact that only around fifteen teachers understand religious literacy in relation to the flourishing of society *as such* can mean that religious literacy is to an extent not seen as the product of the study of faiths.

In addition to the information provided so far about this category, when the data is analysed with respect to happiness despite not having asked direct questions about it, we can state that viewing the notion of happiness in relation to what we ultimately aim to achieve as a good path of contributing to the flourishing of society is not evident in the context of religious literacy. Rather, teachers' responses, as demonstrated in the examples above, are driven by tasks like having knowledge and understanding of faiths to contribute to the flourishing of society.

Finally, to evaluate this category in relation to the existing empirical studies, the findings resonate with the study by Grant et al., in which one of the three themes was concerned with cultivating civic values in the context of learning about different faiths.[375] The findings of this study also resemble the studies conducted by Sarah Harvey et al. and Dinham and Shaw: a teacher in Harvey's study stated that religious literacy is important to live in modern Britain, i.e., a way to navigate life in order to contribute to the good of society; while similarly, one teacher construed religious literacy in terms of cohesion in Dinham and Shaw's study.[376] Thus, this denotes that this category is also in line with other conceptions of religious literacy in the literature.

B.b.d) Critical thinking, including questioning our beliefs

Another category that emerged from the data relates to critical reflection on faiths. However, this category, in the context of the second question, takes an important place only around 5 responses of teachers. This involves understanding what and why we and other people believe, while at the same time being reasonable with respect to accepting and rejecting a belief. This

[374] See Chapter 3, Section, B.
[375] Grant, et al., 'Teachers' Perceptions of Religious Literacy in the Development of Civic Participation'.
[376] Harvey et al., *Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews in Schools – Fostering Coherency and Diversity Baseline Report* 2. Dinham and Shaw, *RE for REal*.

specifically carries a strong connotation of Wright's approach, which holds that since there are different accounts of the same reality, to live a truthful life depends on taking part in a process of critical reflection that moves towards understanding the truthfulness of these accounts, thereby one can be in the process of rendering informed decisions.[377] Below are some of the teachers' answers:

> T43SNF: *'Someone who is strong at religious literacy understands the beliefs of others. What they believe and why. They can also make decisions and communicate their decisions which relate to their own beliefs and values with others.'*
>
> T44ENF: *'In order to reject a faith one needs to be religiously literate in order to understand their rejection of it.*'
>
> T45ENF: *'Knowing the basics about religion within society and using it to form opinion and critically analyse aspects of religion and it's role in human experience.'*
>
> T46EF: *'Having a clear understanding of the chronology of a religion, understanding the importance and authority of key texts and sacred beliefs. Being able to express a person's beliefs and also being able to critique these against another.'*

From this, we can argue, the fact that only a few teachers express the argument of critical reflection on faiths in the context of religious literacy suggests that, if it is thought that critical reflection should take more place in schools, religious literacy shouldn't be evaluated as being thought of as the product of the study of faiths on their own merits.

To recap our conclusions, teachers, within the context of religious literacy, allude to different aspects of the study of faiths. The percentage of teachers changes according to each category: the largest percentage see religious literacy as related to knowing and understanding basic features, and language, not pursuing truth in a deep and systematic manner.

It is here apposite to underline the point that the purpose of evaluating the ways of seeing the phenomenon by taking into account how widespread each category of description is, is based on the logic of how the situation in the field is in the face of discussions like some categories being found promising need to be more widespread in schools. The prevalence of categories of variation gives us information about how good the situation in the field is. For example, if the pursuit of truth is found to be more powerful, then it can be said that the situation in schools needs to change significantly since this category is not common among teachers.

In light of this, to reiterate, the fact that the largest percentage views religious literacy as referring to having a certain degree of knowledge and understanding about faiths, and language (concepts), while fewer teachers associate religious literacy with the content of truth claims, demonstrates us that religious literacy accounts like that of Prothero is more reflected in British schools, while Wright's account primarily predicated on the question of truth is less common among teachers.

Added to this, to highlight again, although there is significant data that would allow us to think that religious literacy is not seen as only one part of RE, but as the product of what should be understood from RE, there is also great evidence that will make us think that religious literacy

[377] See Chapter 1, Section D.

is not seen as the product of RE. From this, the most accurate interpretation is to say that the situation is not clear not allowing us to evaluate whether religious literacy is understood as the product of the study of faiths on their own merits.

B. c) Religious literacy and skills

Developing skills is important in order to achieve tasks in RE. For example, questioning can be crucial for the pursuit of tasks relating to truth and truthful living. The purpose of asking a question relating to skills was to understand teachers' viewpoints on religious literacy better by shedding light on how they aimed to achieve what they proposed.

The variation of skills that emerged the most included: empathy, critical thinking, reasoning and questioning, open-mindedness, understanding, language (reading, writing, and decoding), analysis and evaluation, and discussion and debate. Other skills were curiosity, listening, dialogue, confidence, humility, memory, observation, and comparison and contrast.

When cross-tabulated with the categories of the second question, although some skills are more prominent than others, for example, while reading, writing and decoding are prominent in the language category, almost all are used in each category. This indeed demonstrates that teachers either take a very general approach in terms of skills or that there is not a distinct theme-specific skills division. Below are some of the teachers' answers:

> T47ENF: *'Emphathy, critical thinking, analytic and evaluation skills*.'
>
> T48SNF: '*Curiosity, discernment, and wisdom.*'
>
> T49EF: *'Analysis, inference, empathy.'*
>
> T43SNF: *'Skills of listening and talking, empathy, decision making, reasoning, evaluation, debating.'*

Some teachers also underlined the importance of knowledge of faiths in the context of this question. In this sense, a few teachers responded that students need knowledge rather than skills in order for them to be religiously literate. One teacher for example responded:

> T19ENF: '*None really. It is more a knowledge thing*.'

This to some extent captures the recent trajectory in the field where in many publications the importance of knowledge is rather clearly highlighted. Two recent examples of this are Richard Kuhn and the 2021 Ofsted report. Relying on Michael Young's powerful knowledge vision, Kuhn, for example, argues that the subject should be driven by knowledge because this is intrinsically valuable to the subject.[378] That some teachers tend to think of religious literacy as knowledge and not a skill, this could lead us to review the relationship between knowledge and skill. Yet, some find this as an unhelpful polarisation because knowledge and skills can be complementary.[379] In Wright's vision of religious literacy, for example, it is underlined, 'one

[378] Richard Kueh, 'Religious Education and the 'knowledge problem'', in Mike Castelli and Mark Chater (eds), *We Need to Talk about Religious Education: Manifestos for the Future of RE*, (London, 2018). Richard Kueh, 'Disciplinary hearing: making the case for the disciplinary in Religion and Worldviews', in Mark Chater (ed.), *Reforming Religious Education: Power and Knowledge in a Worldviews Curriculum* (Melton, 2020).

[379] Tim Oates, 'Skills versus Knowledge: a curriculum debate that matters – and one which we need to reject', *Impact: Journal of the Chartered College of Teaching* (September 2018). See also, Kuhn, ''Disciplinary hearing', p. 167.

cannot make reasonable judgements about the reality in which we live without developing the skills of analysis and evaluation.'[380] That giving different aspects of any category of variation can enhance the way of approaching the phenomenon of interest, we can point out that knowledge and skills should be thought of as the complementary parts of the same process.

B. d) Discussion of religious literacy

This study has investigated the perspectives of RE teachers regarding their thoughts on religious literacy. The findings show that the majority of teachers are aware of the idea of religious literacy. This indicates that the importance of being religiously literate is realised not only in the literature but also in schools.

Added to this, four ways of understanding religious literacy were identified by the RE teachers: a) gaining knowledge and understanding about faiths; b) language; c) the flourishing of society; and d) critical reflection on the value of beliefs. The largest percentage see religious literacy as related to knowing and understanding basic principles of faiths, and language, not the pursuit of religious truth. It is also found that teachers take a very general approach in terms of skills. Moreover, the picture of the teachers' vision of religious literacy as being understood as the product of the study of faiths on their own merits is unclear.

When we consider the fact that the majority of teachers are familiar with the term religious literacy and their thoughts are in line with the perspectives of many teachers in the literature, as emphasised many times above, we can argue, again, by bearing in mind the practical value of using the notion of religious literacy, an important element of attaining the aims put forward in the context of the study of faiths is already present in many schools. However, though the notion of religious literacy should be widespread in schools, it is also very important what kind of religious literacy understanding is enunciated.

In this light, it is reasonable to claim, since it is not clear whether teachers see religious literacy as the product of the study of religion in its own right, the understanding among teachers can be accepted as limited. For example, the fact that only fifteen teachers viewed the flourishing of society *as such* through the lens of religious literacy seems to justify this claim further. Central to this is the issue that the flourishing of society is very important in RE. As the study of religion is concerned with the flourishing of society, the understanding of religious literacy in schools should have reflected this.

Moreover, even if religious literacy is viewed as the product of the study of religion on its own merits, the fact that the most widespread categories of variation concerned having a certain level of knowledge and understanding of the principles of faiths, for example, is tantamount to saying that the understanding and practice of religious literacy in schools is mostly limited to such themes. Based around various reasons such as pursuing truth, this vision of religious literacy can be discussed for its power and appropriateness. This reveals that if a religiously literate society that is deeply concerned with the question of truth is better for the flourishing of society for instance, the current situation in schools is not good enough and therefore it needs to be enhanced.

Yet, other things such as the pursuit of truth can be found important for the study of religion on its own merits, and religious literacy can be construed as a part of this process. As previously

[380] Easton et al., *Critical Religious Education in Practice*, p, 165.

discussed, when religious literacy is regarded as understanding the language of religion for example, it can be considered a key to further tasks.[381] In this case it can be argued that there is no need to think of religious literacy as being the whole product of the study of religion, since religious literacy and other components can complement each other in the study of religion in its own right. However, the fact that many religious literacy theorists envision it as the whole product of the study of religion, thinking of religious literacy as only one part of this process is to limit it to this particular part. Since religious literacy implies the practicability or feasibility of learning about faiths, confining it to a part of RE may put the applicability of other parts into the background. Therefore, this suggests, it may be better for a society to be called profoundly religiously literate when they pursue ultimate reality, for example, than being called religiously literate simply because they know the meaning of the concepts of religion. Similarly, when other things such as pursuing truth are important for the flourishing of society, saying that religiously literate individuals can contribute to this becomes more meaningful since the acquisition of a shared vocabulary, for instance, may not be enough in itself to contribute to the flourishing of society.

The central theme of this thesis is concerned with the tension between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society. If religious literacy should be thought of as the product of the study of religion on its own merits, then the way this tension is handled in the best currently available way in RE should be reflected via religious literacy. The relationship between conflicting truth claims and the need to promote the flourishing of society was not clear in the answers of teachers and mostly seemed to be dependent on knowledge and understanding. In this light, this thesis aims to inform and enhance teachers' religious literacy understanding about how it should be conceived of and what should be included in their religious literacy in relation to the flourishing of society, more specifically to this tension between exclusive truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society.

C) Findings of RE teachers' thoughts on the tension between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society

From a holistic point of view, there are two main findings of this study. First, there is strong evidence in the cohort for the exploration of competing truth claims in the classroom. Second, they do not avoid engagement with the question of truth in order to promote social cohesion; rather the majority of them think genuine social cohesion can occur when conflicting truth claims are discussed.

To give the results in relation to the questions in more detail, with respect to questions on social cohesion two categories have emerged. The first suggests social cohesion means living together in peace and harmony despite differences, while the second category signals a shared vision among people living in the same society. Regarding the questions on the tension between social cohesion and conflicting truth claims three categories of variation have emerged. Firstly, conflicting truth claims of faiths are important for teachers. Secondly, the discussion of truth claims is believed to promote social cohesion. Thirdly, there is a necessity for elements such as a safe classroom environment to handle conflicting truth claims.

[381] See Chapter 2, Section D.

C. a) The meaning of social cohesion

C.a.a) Living together in harmony and peace

Most of the teachers described social cohesion as people of different genders, faiths, races, and socio-economic groups coexisting together in peace and harmony while developing good relations. Below are some of their answers:

T1ENF: '*A happy and fulfilled co-existence of individuals from different races, religions and socio-economic backgrounds within society*.'

T2EF: '*Where people from diverse religious, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds live together in harmony*.'

T3SNF: '*In my opinion, social cohesion is the characteristic of a society that enables it to function without fragmenting, while accommodating a variety of distinct and even contradictory opinions amongst its members*.'

T4ENF: '*Social cohesion means a society that can embrace difference, encourages inclusion and is vibrant with different cultures and religions. It is a society that has been educated to manage difficult conflicts about language, culture, race and religion. I think it also goes beyond legislation like British values which I think is simply paying lip service to cohesion, and actually lives and breathes tolerance and respect and celebrates differences and similarities between people. If our society is actually cohesive it can then better react to global situations like mass refugee issues because we are open to change and have empathy for others.'*

T5EF*: 'perhaps easier to start with what it doesn't mean: social homogenisation. It's not about people becoming the same but about recognising similarities and accepting and embracing differences. Social cohesion is when people can live together and appreciate cultural, ethic, faith (not an exhaustive list!) differences. Social cohesion is more than tolerating differences, it's about dialogue and learning from one another.'*

C.a.b) A shared task

Although issues such as accepting differences are emphasised by teachers, there is a second category driven by a concern to have a shared vision throughout society. In other words, they expressed the need to be as one despite their differences. Below are some of their answers:

T6EF: '*Social cohesion is the notion that there is a bond which connects all members of society, regardless of class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, disability etc*.'

T7SNF: '*Social cohesion, for me, in terms of education, refers to a learning environment where all members of the school community respect one another and work together towards achieving a shared goal. This can be in the classroom context or in terms of the whole school community*.'

T8ENF: '*A society in which difference is celebrated and welcomed, where communication between different groups and traditions is open and fluid and there is a shared and united overarching identity/goal/aspiration*.'

T9ENF: *'Social cohesion means when people in society are able to come together in a shared framework of values and common concerns. It means positive relationships that value the diversity that is present in any given society, respecting and seeking the contributions of all members.'*

T10SNF: *'How society functions as a whole/unit, for it to be cohesive it needs to understand individuals, and differing communities within it and to work as a whole.'*

DCSF published guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion, in which community cohesion is defined as follows:

> *"Working towards a society in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities; a society in which the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued; a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all; and a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community."*[382]

Similar to this, in the *Integrated Communities Strategy*, published by the British Government in 2019, the term *Integrated Communities* is characterised as a society where 'people—whatever their background—live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities.'[383] Many RE publications, such as *Living With Difference,* similarly emphasise variation together with a single nation's common shared values.[384] These definitions capture the two categories of this question of what teachers understand the concept social cohesion to mean. In other words, the statements of the teachers regarding their willingness to live together with differences, as well as their thoughts about a common vision despite these differences, are similar to the perception of community cohesion promulgated in these documents.

In this light, it can also be reasonably argued that the perspectives of teachers align with the vision among scholars in the literature in the sense that they emphasise the importance of embracing a similar basis for society. Despite the fact that many scholars, as argued previously, recognise faith differences, they embrace another unity. This occurs as humanisation in Grimmitt for instance: a certain characteristic of being human pertains to meaning; despite our differences, we are all humans giving meaning to our lives. In the context of CRE, this affirms that: despite being committed to epistemic relativity, pursuing truth can be accepted as an overarching framework. Indeed in a similar way, one teacher responded:

T11ENF: '*I think, in a classroom context, social cohesion means that everyone is on the 'same page' – as in, there is a shared, common purpose – which is to appreciate and explore different perspectives – to interrogate each other's assumptions, and to enjoy diverse interpretations and opinions, whilst asking hard, and ultimate questions. This does not mean everyone has to agree, or to like each other but that the class Works well together and there is an atmosphere of respect and mutual appreciation.'*

[382] Department for Children, Schools and Families, *Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion* (2007), p. 3.
[383] HM Government, *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper: Summary of consultation responses and Government response* (2019), p. 7.
[384] The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, *Living with Difference*, p. 20.

I would also like to point out, though most of the teachers embrace differences, the fact that they are also in favour of a shared vision suggests they are somehow aware that there is a tension between the existence of differences and the need to promote the flourishing of society. One teacher for instance responded that:

> T12ENF: '*Social cohesion is an umbrella term which refers to many different ideas, but to me it means everyone in a group, getting along together, despite differences in belief, culture or religious faith outlook (this could be referred to under the heading of 'different worldviews'), which could potentially (but not necessarily) cause tensions between members of the group for various reasons, be these cultural, social, political, theological amongst others.'*

To this end, it can be stated that these two questions provided a basis for the teachers to make a better sense of the tension between social cohesion and conflicting truth claims, which is part of the next four questions.

C. b) Social cohesion and conflicting truth claims of faiths

C.b.a) Conflicting truth claims of faiths are important for teachers

To a greater or lesser degree, the majority of the participants (41 of 45) experience the discussion of competing truth claims as positive. There is evidence in the cohort for the exploration of faiths as accounts purchasing on reality: teachers tend to think that responding to worldviews is important in terms of truth. Below are some of their answers:

> T11ENF: '*Yes, it absolutely matters- it is the whole purpose of studying faith in an academic environment! Those who espouse a certain belief should be encouraged to interrogate them as much as those who do not. We are disingenuous when we pretend, we all think the same. My classes thrive on debate. Young people love arguing. The key is to ensure there is genuine dialectic. If our concern is truth, then post-modern 'there is no truth' really won't cut it. Students see through this vacuous attempt to please everyone for the appearance of a cohesion which doesn't exist. It really matters if Jesus is God incarnate, or never existed, or just a nice chap, or was a prophet, or a demon etc. Students know this matters. They want to be able to discuss what happens when they die and to be able to make up their own minds, rather than parroting their parents' views*.'
>
> T13ENF: '*I am happy to discuss conflicting truth claims. I have been teaching RE, Philosophy and Ethics for 15 years now so I am very practiced at controlling debates, introducing an opposing argument and allowing students to debate in a safe space*.'
>
> T14ENF: '*I think finding the truth is important, even if it's uncomfortable-there's no point in social cohesion if it's based on lies or half truths*.'
>
> T15ENF: *'Yes we discuss them – if we don't then when will students get the chance to understand that these claims are out there? e.g. did Jesus die or not? Islam, Christianity say something different- so we discuss these together!'*
>
> T16ENF: *'Pupils are smart enough to have various truth claims discussed. They will feel illserved later on otherwise. Life's diversity of opportunities and options is nothing if not interesting.*

T17ENF: *'I think it is [discussing conflicting truth claims] very important and the latest GCSE asks students to look at different groups within religions and reflect on their different approaches to interpreting sacred texts.'*

T18ENF: *'Very important to understand conflict and how this can be handled well particularly as truth claims are an essential part of most religions' belief. Can also foster cohesion if done well as students learn to disagree productively.'*

T19ENF: *'As an RE teacher it's impossible to avoid this! I think it's important because issues should be addressed head on, not swept carpet under the carpet or ignored and left to fester.'*

T20EF: *'I don't think they undermine an agenda for social cohesion. Discussing conflicting truth claims helps to enhance social cohesion as different communities learn about views of those different from themselves. Students learn to respect these different beliefs.'*

All four remaining teachers are not against engagement with conflicting truth claims of faiths. Two of the four teachers gave unclear answers. Of the two, one teacher responded that:

T21ENF: '*We discuss anything on the curriculum or that is relevant*.'

Accepting that there are various views of faiths, the other teacher pointed out that she/he was not familiar with the terminology:

T22SNF: '*I do look at different views of religious and non-religious people on issues, but I don't see it as dealing with conflicting truth claims. That's not an expression I have heard before. When we look at different views it is within the context that we all have different opinions and that is ok*.'

Mentioning a possible constraint, the third teacher talked about the capacity of children:

T23ENF: '*I think there is a balance, and it does depend upon the age of the children too*.'

The fourth teacher emphasised that it is important to focus on similarities rather than differences as if stating that she/he does not want to take up conflicting truth claims of faiths: the third and fifth questions are answered as follows by this teacher:

T24ENF: '*I try and point out what similarities each faith has and how they try to promote to peace.' 'No, I'm a believer that we can learn from each other and that we need to try to work to solve our differences*.'

It is, however, also important to note, although most teachers made positive statements about taking truth claims of faiths seriously, there is evidence that this is not being done deeply and systematically in schools. In this light, a few teachers emphasised that they had not experienced disagreements between students over truth claims. For instance, one teacher who thought that engaging with truth claims of faiths is important responded that:

T20EF: '*I have never had a disagreement between students when discussing this-despite working in faith and community schools, a school in a mono-cultural area and two schools in a diverse community.*'

This may mean that there is no genuine classroom environment that motivates children to engage with truth claims in a deep and systematic way. This is also evident in the statement of another teacher who responded that:

T25SNF: '*I don't steer away from them, but would affirm this is what Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, non-religious people believe*.'

Similarly, another teacher's response implies that conflicting truth claims of faiths are recognised and explained why people believe those beliefs, but there is not a sufficient manner of exploring truth claims of faiths in depth. This teacher points out that:

T26ENF: '*I am not in a faith school. It is outside my remit to pronounce on which faiths are true, or which aspects of which faiths. We do teach contradictory things, e.g. Christian and Islamic beliefs about Jesus, but we have to say why the Christians and the Muslims believe what they do*.'

Added to this, though one teacher was willing to take up truth claims of faiths, she/he stated, this is difficult to achieve in practice. This teacher pointed out that:

T3SNF: '*As a teacher, I would love to get into discussions of conflicting truth-claims. In practice, I generally found that the most I could achieve was a reasonable accurate understanding of what those truth-claims were, with the result that I seldom came anywhere near discussing how to deal with conflict between claims*.'

To give more details about the data, while the majority of teachers think they should engage with contested claims of faiths to truth, many teachers widely recognise faiths as having contested truth claims. Considering how religion is understood is an important reason why scholars differ in their accounts, teachers' acceptance of faiths as having controversial truth claims may be an indication that they do not want to avoid the question of truth. Moreover, this can also be read as an indication of the great evidence that teachers, similar to their ideas about faiths in the context of religious literacy, tend to see religions as having a substantial enduring identity. Below are two examples:

T4ENF: '*I think that avoiding them only prompts later on. Religions have conflicting truth. That is a fact*.'

T27ENF: *'I think it is important to address that there are a variety of conflicting truth matters out there and encourage students to discuss these openly and honestly but without attacking the belief/believer.'*

Moreover, a conclusion can be deduced from the data that, in the process of engaging with understanding the truth claims of faiths, elements such as questioning and justification hold significant importance, implying the weight of language as a means instead of things like religious experience. Below are two responses from teachers:

T18ENF: '*Allow space for challenge and discussion but ensure structure around understanding of basic facts i.e., we need to know what others believe even if we don't agree.*'

T28ENF: '*Everyone should have a chance to share their opinions and their justifications. Questioning is very useful in unpicking different viewpoints and using justification is also important*.'

We can also note that although teachers placed great emphasis on differences, in some contexts, a few expressed that there should be more focus on similarities. A teacher working in a faith school stated, truth claims of faiths can be challenged, and said, the idea that all opinions are correct is not the case. Yet, in the context of the fourth question, which was concerned with how teachers address disagreements that might arise between students, she/he responded:

T6EF: '*If possible, take the 'heat' out of the discussion and meet with the students. Try to unpick their opinions and perhaps try to find commonalities rather than focus on differences*.'

Such aspects of the data are conducive to considering various components of the subject; as this teacher is willing to take up truth claims of faiths, but this can be constrained by events, pointing to the importance of teacher training on how to utilise the right methods for such an approach.

Finally, one teacher stated, engagement with truth claims of faiths, specifically regarding beliefs about ultimate reality is now easier, but students may care more about issues regarding family, for example. Below is the answer from this teacher:

T12ENF: '*At the beginning of my teaching career, in 2014, I recall that it was far more difficult to discuss competing truth claims around the existence of God or the Trinity, due to some pupils believing that the consideration of opposing viewpoints was itself an insult to their religion. In 2022, pupils tend not to be as bothered about whether others believe in God or the Trinity, but may care more about topics which come under the Family and Life unit, such as divorce or the nature of the marriage*.'

Since this tension relates to truth claims of faiths including the ontological propositions of ultimate reality, this highlights the need for truth claims to be understood not only with respect to the socio-political issues, but also ontological truth claims of faiths such as the existence of God, even though it is more difficult to arrive at a solution.

Overall, though it cannot be claimed that most teachers take truth claims of faiths in a deep and systematic way, the vast majority advocate engagement with conflicting truth claims. They recommended that conflicting truth claims should be given due consideration and not downplayed.

C.b.b) Discussion over truth claims can yield genuine social cohesion

The majority of the teachers believe, not engaging with truth claims will not lead to genuine social cohesion. This indicates teachers are inclined to favour handling the tension between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society by valuing contested truth claims of faiths. There are two sides to this: when read with the former category,

teachers, in the face of contested truth claims of faiths, are inclined to imagine the flourishing of society not only via engagement with contested truth claims of faiths in the sense that this may increase our stock of reality, whereby we may adopt a more truthful account; but also, through knowing about each other's differences in the hope of navigating our lives accordingly in a multifaith society. Though these two sides can be understood as related, while the former implies more the pursuit of truth and truthful living, the latter denotes more developing awareness of different beliefs. As such teachers' ideas of this tension to some extent differ from their thoughts expressed in the context of religious literacy: while the flourishing of society in the context of religious literacy is more about understanding our faith differences in order to live in harmony in a multicultural society, it is also concerned more with the question of truth in the context of this tension. Below are some of their answers:

T5EF: '*I think discussing points of conflict is essential. Social cohesion doesn't happen by pretending differences aren't there, when they clearly are! People aren't the same! They don't agree! But that doesn't mean there can't be dialogue grounded in mutual respect*.'

T29SNF: '*To not teach conflicting claims will actually undermine social cohesion. We would not be properly representing the differing groups. We would be presenting a distorted vision. Students will either know that there are significant differences or learn them later, undermining their confidence in everything else that they learned from you. Including the conflicting truths helps to see what differentiates us all but, if taught properly, lets students see that these need not be barriers to social cohesion. It leads to an attitude of acceptance that not all will agree on significant matters but we need to allow others to have their views*.'

T30ENF: '*I think that pretending they don't exist and not giving students the tools to appropriately discuss and challenge differences is a greater threat to social cohesion*.'

T28ENF: '*I don't think that disagreements about truth claims necessarily undermine social cohesion. It is possible for people to discuss conflicting truth claims, for example about the nature of God, without undermining social cohesion. I think that advocating these discussions is what would undermine social cohesion and work against it*.'

T31EF: *'We use a trichotomy of pedagogical aims: Social Harmony, Critical Realism and Moral Development. I find that the tension between these three, particularly, creates the perfect conditions for the most conducive RS learning environment. The moral development addition, when considering the conflict of SH and CR, means that a moral integrity highlights the discussion which makes it amicable. Remember, the point isn't to arrive at a conclusion in the lesson.'*

T12ENF: *'I think engagement with different truth claims is more useful than pretending they do not exist, for the purposes of social cohesion. Arguably, if we don't engage with the truth claims, then we cannot understand anything which follows, undermining social cohesion.'*

T1ENF: *'Discussion promotes wider understanding. It challenges perceptions. This is long term serves social cohesion better and promotes tolerance.'*

T32SNF: *'They [Children] should be exposed to different claims so that they can learn to accept that others have alternative points of view, while being able to express their own.'*

In this respect, we can argue, non-confessional RE, as previously stated, might be instrumentalized to external ends, but this does not mean that the integrity of teaching religion in its own terms cannot be preserved. Similar to the findings on religious literacy, in approaching the tension between the exclusive truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society, teachers' answers, as demonstrated in the quotes above, suggest RE should not be largely instrumental. In other words, it can be said that according to teachers RE can be non-confessional and reflect the nature of religion as accurately as possible. At this point, we should point out, in the context of religious literacy, the purpose of the study of faiths regarding the flourishing of society can be considered more instrumental as it is primarily concerned with navigating our lives in a multicultural society and the content is less instrumental because it is grounded in knowledge and understanding about faiths; such elements, in the context of this tension, can be accepted as less distant from the nature of faiths, if the pursuit of truth is conducive to take seriously the self-understanding of faiths in terms of also purpose, for instance. Below is another example:

T33ENF: *'There can be no social cohesion without conversation of difficult topics! To avoid truth claim discussions simply ends with RE as tokenism, and a society which sees other faiths as simplistic compared to their own system.'*

To provide more details about the data, teachers underline that the existence of contested truth claims should not be seen as something to be scared of for the aim of social cohesion, but actually as real, a positive thing, and as something that should be accepted. This can be interpreted as the process of engaging with contested truth claims of faiths should refer to an ongoing process, rather than a naïve epistemic closure. Below are some responses from the teachers:

T34SNF: *'It is important to recognise differences between religious beliefs so as not to give the impression that all religions believe the same thing. Although there is a danger that social cohesion may be undermined, teaching about differences helps students to understand that living together in a society and recognising differences is a positive thing.'*

T7SNF: '*Discussion of areas of controversy is essential to promote social cohesion. We live in a pluralistic world and teachers should not shelter their pupils from controversial viewpoints and questions*.'

T30ENF: '*Social cohesion doesn't mean everyone thinking the same. The dream is that people can recognise difference and accept it*.'

T28ENF: '*People should be able to evaluate the truth claims academically and reflect upon them without seeing it as a conflict between different social groups*.'

Moreover, in the context of this category we can underline that teachers, along with accepting that faiths have conflicting truth claims, draw attention to the importance of understanding the diversity of faiths for social cohesion in the matter of understanding that people can have various beliefs. For example:

T9ENF: '*I don't steer away from them – I think to do so would mean not teaching the fulness of religious belief and understanding. I would rather teach that each believer of a faith comes from a background that has influenced their worldview, and that within a religion there will be a huge diversity of opinions on those claims. I would emphasise too that whilst believers may hold these truths, there are strong examples of interfaith work that demonstrate that these claims do not have to create an us/them agenda.*'

T12ENF: '*In RE, we discuss competing truth claims regularly, and so I usually remind pupils that there are different beliefs about these different topics*.'

Added to this, similar to the idea expressed in the context of social cohesion, while the need to engage with contested truth claims is expressed, an idea of unity in something else such as pursuing truth and being human has emerged. Below are two examples:

T11ENF: '*Indeed, through the process of dialectic, most students come to see that discerning truth is a life-long task and that we are all in the same boat together: the epistemological trauma of the human condition is that we do not know. We are all in the cave*.'

T35ENF: '*I think you need to explore issues and be critical when necessary. Otherwise, you give a false view of religion, however, as part of this you need to teach them about how to deal with issues of conflict in an appropriate way. Social cohesion for me is not real if we do not acknowledge the issues and endeavour, no matter how diffucult, to embrace the humanity of the other person*.'

We can also note, a few teachers, who emphasised the importance of engaging with the contested truth claims of faiths, noted in the context of the last question, which was concerned with whether teachers feel that disagreements between students over truth claims of different faiths undermine social cohesion, that it is not necessarily the truth claims that may undermine social cohesion, but rather how these truth claims are portrayed and understood in family, culture, and media. This is in line with the Ofsted 2013 report and the study conducted by Smith et al., which show that the nature of religion is seen as positive.[385] This actually points to the importance of engaging with the original and authentic sources of faiths. In this way, individuals can be more likely to feel that they are on the path to truly understanding the truth value of faiths by knowing what the truth claims are. Below are the responses from teachers:

T36ENF: '*No, I feel that it usually stems from social media or from society – school groups are generally far more supportive of each other especially when they know that history or background behind a situation. Often it is changing mindsets that have been ingrained due to family beliefs that is the hardest, but even those can be altered with some conversations and time*.'

T19ENF: '*To some extent. But in my experience kids mostly get along fine. It's the rubbish they see on the media (e.g., portrayals of Islam as an extremist faith) that cause the issues. In my experience most children can separate the classmate from the religion.*'

[385] Ofsted*, Religious education*. Smith, Nixon, and Pearce, 'Bad Religion as False Religion'.

T33ENF: '*What may undermine social cohesion is not the truth claims themselves but the cultural expressions.*'

Finally, we can state that when the data is analysed in relation to the notion of happiness despite not having asked direct questions about it, similar to religious literacy, it is not evident in the answers of teachers that centralising the notion of happiness as what we ultimately aim to achieve is a good response to resolving the tension between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote social cohesion. Rather, teachers' responses, as demonstrated in the examples given so far, are driven by tasks like pursuing truth to contribute to the flourishing of society.

When this and the previous category are read together, it can be argued that contrary to the confessional approach predominantly taken in the past, teachers attach great importance to engagement with conflicting truth claims of faiths. Moreover, the tendency to focus mainly on similarities between faiths seen specifically in early periods of the subject does not align with the findings of this study as the majority of the teachers, while recognising similarities also value differences. In comparison with early approaches of non-confessional RE, teachers accept that traditions have exclusive truth claims and they are not equal parts of the same reality. This contrasts with the effort to see faiths united in the same essence seen in the works of Hull and Hay.[386] Teachers' views are consistent with Grimmitt's human development approach with respect to the emphasis on engagement with truth claims of faiths. However, in Grimmitt, personal choice tends to be prior to any other concern, reducing the value of faiths as in themselves.[387] Teachers are also inclined to adhere to the idea that these contested accounts can be truthful, speaking to the value of the study of religion in itself.

Compared to the more contemporary approaches, the account that has the most distance from the perspectives of teachers is Erricker and Erricker's deconstructive model. While teachers tend to take the meaning of reality seriously, Erricker and Erricker embrace a postmodern thoroughgoing relativism, undermining the possibility of any religious account of reality to be actually the case vis-a-vis the nature of reality.[388] In Jackson's approach, engagement with contested accounts of traditions is vaguely present: while Jackson recognises the importance of truth in RE, he places the greatest attention on reflecting diversity.[389] Teachers' approaches reflect Jackson's approach concerning diversity but are also to an extent different from this account in terms of engaging with conflicting truth claims of faiths as accounts purchasing on reality.

On a larger scale, teachers' perspective of this tension resonates with the approaches of Smart, Cooling, and Barnes.[390] It can be argued that Wright's approach, which provides the deepest and the most systematic account for engaging with the truth claims of faiths as pursuing truth and truthful living, is the most compatible account with the perspectives of teachers.[391]

To evaluate these two categories in relation to the empiric strain of RE practice, the findings of the survey differ substantially from the main trajectory in the field. Previous reports have shown that the question of truth is generally avoided, and this is often done to encourage social

[386] See Chapter 1, Section C.
[387] *Ibid.*
[388] For Erricker and Erricker, see Chapter 1, Section, D.
[389] For Jackson, see *ibid.*
[390] For Smart, see Chapter 1, Section C. For Barnes and Cooling, see Chapter 3, Section C.
[391] For Wright, see Chapter 1, Section, D.

cohesion amongst students.[392] Teachers in the present study think that discussing conflicting truth claims of faiths can genuinely contribute to social cohesion instead of avoiding them with thoughts like they will generate problems or focusing only on subjects which may generate less conflict.

Despite this widespread tendency in the literature, there is also, as previously explained, evidence that teachers engage with conflicting truth claims of faiths. For example, one practising teacher in England, Robert Orme, stated that he brought uncomfortable issues and provocative texts into conversation, which he says help children to make informed decisions.[393] The findings of this study, based on teacher responses, are in line with this strain, as the majority of the teachers are in favour of engagement with conflicting truth claims of faiths.

C.b.c) Classroom expectations for handling conflicting truth claims

Many teachers in this present study pointed out, there should be a proper classroom climate for engaging with conflicting truth claims. Moreover, like Miller's study, where teachers underlined that developing the values of tolerance and respect are important for living harmoniously together, most teachers stated that this environment should include aspects of mutual respect and tolerance, the idea that it is okay to disagree, empathy, British values, treating students equally, and valuing their ideas.[394] Teachers also emphasised the importance of unbiased teaching and underlined the value of listening, questioning, critical thinking, and giving evidence. Below are some of the answers:

> T10SNF: '*Allowing each student the time to put forward their claims and counter claims in a respectful manner which opens the debate further but does allow for students to politely disagree.*'
>
> T5EF: '*I think creative imaging is really helpful here, fostering skills of empathy to imagine oneself walking in the shoes of the other. Also, setting clear expectations for respectful language and behaviour is class discussion*.'
>
> T2EF: '*Allow students to consider the facts that support each claim and discuss where disagreements lie between the two claims, they both support. Encourage students to respectfully listen to each point and let them know it is fine to disagree as long as they listen to each other point of view*.'
>
> T36ENF: *'I use the ROCK – Respect- treat each other with respect, Openness- sharing what you feel and think because it helps others to learn different viewpoints, confidentially – we don't go blabbing about what someone has shared because sometimes it takes courage, Kindness – always be kind to others- empathy and support is very important.'*
>
> T27ENF: *'I aim to be like a referee of sorts and remind students of our duty to respect each other's views…so long as we then accept that we may need to agree to disagree in some areas, my classroom should be a safe haven for open and frank discussion.'*

[392] See Chapter 4, Section C
[393] *Ibid.*
[394] Miller, 'Raising humanities teachers' understanding of their pupils' religious and cultural backgrounds'.

T37SNF: *'Make sure there is mutual respect, proper listening and a willingness to learn in the room. This may need the students to engage in tasks, or games where they get to know each other, foster team skills and trust before looking at any potentially divisive material.'*

To give further details about the data, in the literature it is argued that because it gives an expectation to avoid conflict, the notion of safe space can undermine critical thinking. Robert Boost Rom speaks to us that the terms 'classroom agora' or 'classroom congress' should be used instead.[395] Alternatively, while Betty J. Barrett advises the use of the term classroom civility, Brian Aroa and Kristi Clements go beyond this and offer the term 'brave space'.[396] Recently, Lars L. Iversen advocated the concept of 'communities of disagreement'.[397] In this study, teachers do not imply that the term safe space prohibited an engagement with conflicting truth claims or undermine critical thinking. This is reasonable because a safe space can mean a healthy atmosphere where conflicting issues can be critically discussed. As Phil Champain puts it, RE 'can be a safe space for discussing unsafe ideas.'[398] One teacher for example stated that:

T38EF: *'I ensure that the classroom is a safe space for discussion and set out my expectations – e.g., keep the discussion on the topic and not the people.'*

Added to this, it can be underlined that contrary to restraining the voices of students like in the narrative of *epoche* (bracketing), it is evident that teachers acknowledge children's assumptions as a part of learning. Below are two examples from teachers:

T39SNF: '*All students from the outset understand there may be differences of opinion between individuals, but they should respect that individual's thinking and reflect on why it may be different to their own thinking. There has to be a climate of openness within the classroom environment for all to feel valued and that their viewpoint is taken seriously even although not all students may agree with that viewpoint.*'

T32SNF: *'They are encouraged to listen respectfully to the other students' point of view and are allowed time to express their own opinion. P4C discussions are particularly helpful for facilitating this exchange.'*

It is also noteworthy to mention that a few teachers stated, disagreements over truth could undermine social cohesion if not handled correctly. This again indicates the importance of proper classroom settings for such a task. Below are the answers of two teachers:

T9ENF: *'I think there is a possibility of this being the case, depending on how it is handled by the teacher. If the environment is not one of mutual respect, which has to be set as the classroom culture and expected norm of behaviour, then there may be situations where disagreements could lead to conflict, which can then be taken outside*

[395] Robert Boost Rom, 'Safe Spaces: Reflections on an Educational Metaphor', *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 30.4 (1998), p. 397.
[396] Betty J. Barrett, 'Is "Safety" Dangerous? A Critical Examination of the Classroom as Safe Space', *Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 1.1 (2010). Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens, 'From Safe Spaces to Brave Space: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice', in Lisa M. Landreman (ed.), *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators* (Sterling, 2013).
[397] Lars Laird Iversen, 'From safe spaces to communities of disagreement', *British Journal of Religious Education* 41.3 (2019).
[398] Phil Champain, 'Facing the strange', in Mike Castelli and Mark Chater (eds), *We Need to Talk about Religious Education: Manifestos for the Future of RE*, (London, 2018), p. 155.

the classroom. I think that not allowing discussion of these truth claims however can also undermine social cohesion though, as it is indirectly suggesting that there is no place for people to be able to share and openly discuss values.'

T31EF '*It certainly can do if not mediated correctly, but that is why the teacher is essential to be placed as a subject expert, moral guide and 'fellow searcher'.*

Further, similar to Barnes's argument, some teachers argued that respecting and valuing individuals should take priority, whereas for others respecting and valuing beliefs seems to be of equal value.[399] Below are some of the answers:

T8ENF: '*Encourage respect between students and distinguish between the person and the worldview. So you can disagree with a worldview without disagree with the person (Respect for the person-challenge the idea).*'

T17ENF: '*Student discussions are all directed via the teacher – they are able to safely make their point and know that it is ok to agree or disagree with each other through me and not make it personal.'*

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the following point here, as seen in T17ENF, the idea of 'agree to disagree' has emerged among some teachers. If Wright's approach is to inform teachers' engagement with truth claims of faiths, then this notion of 'agree to disagree' can be challenged among teachers, because it is lacking in regard to tolerance according to the premises of CRE. The main reason for this has to do with its implication 'that we do not need to engage with the person with whom we disagree.'[400] Whereas, tolerance should be understood as 'allowing other people to hold their beliefs…whilst being willing to voice reasons for why you think that they are wrong.'[401]

C. c) Discussion of the tension between contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society

The three categories of variation of this tension spell out that there is significant interest from RE teachers in the engagement with conflicting truth claims of faiths, though they acknowledge that there are several elements such as creating a proper and safe classroom environment to be considered if they are to be engaged effectively. This tells us that when expectations for handling conflicting truth claims are met, teachers do not see significant barriers to engagement with exclusive truth claims in British RE on a practical basis. Drawing on the topic of inter-religious dialogue in 2004, Douglas V. Porpora asks whether people in different religions should come together and argue over their rival truth claims.[402] From a philosophical point of view, Porpora believes this can be done in principle, but in terms of specific political or social atmosphere should not be done. From a holistic point of view, if the teachers represent the intellectual and socio-cultural status of the society in which they live, it can be said that British RE *on the level of teachers* is ready to be an example of how the task of pursuing the truth can be initiated.

[399] For Barnes's argument see Chapter 3, Section C.
[400] Easton et al., *Critical Religious Education in Practice*, P. 11
[401] *Ibid.*
[402] Douglas Porpora, 'A propaedeutic to a propaedeutic on inter-religious dialogue', in Margaret S. Archer, et al., (eds), *Transcendence: Critical Realism and God* (London, 2004).

D) Reading the findings of two questionnaires together

We have investigated the perspectives of RE teachers working in British schools about the notion of religious literacy and the tension between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society. The categories of variation show that the majority of the teachers perceive religious literacy as the knowledge and understanding of faiths and language acquisition. The least common categories were related to the flourishing of society as such, and the question of religious truth. Added to this, the picture concerning whether teachers perceive religious literacy as referring to what the study of religions should essentially be for is unclear. Therefore, considering the argument of this thesis that using the term religious literacy can be fruitful when it is thought of as the product of the study of faiths in their own rights, the understanding among teachers can be accepted as limited. This can be supported by other findings of this study. Even if religious literacy could be understood in relation to the study of faiths in their own rights, the fact that religious literacy is mainly understood in relation to knowledge and understanding and language can mean that it is not promising. This is specifically true when another approach that religious literacy should predicate on such as pursuing truth can be more powerful in terms of various factors such as the flourishing of society.

Given these arguments, when we view the categories of variation of this study together with the theoretical part of the thesis, the argument of this thesis on the notion of religious literacy is expected to reinforce change now. We now know the existing situation in schools, and in light of the arguments put forward by this thesis, saying that this understanding is limited and needs to change is expected to be more impressive in terms of establishing a better understanding of religious literacy in schools. Therefore, it can be said, the empirical study and the theoretical part play a more important role together in achieving the aim of this thesis, which is concerned with the flourishing of society.

The second study was done with the same teachers and the great majority of them wanted to engage with truth claims of faiths in the face of this tension. There is an overwhelming consensus that engaging with truth claims of faiths can yield genuine social cohesion.

When the relationship between the answers given to the two empirical questions of the thesis is examined differences emerge between them regarding elements like the question of truth. For instance, the majority of the teachers who participated in the second study did not favour engagement with truth claims of faiths in the context of religious literacy in the first study. While in the second study those teachers, to reiterate, stated that it is important to engage with different truth claims and the question of truth, specifically in terms of the flourishing of society.

The relationship between these two studies can be interpreted in two ways. First, teachers seem to view religious literacy as a separate idea in itself. Understood this way, if, for example, teachers believe that engaging with truth claims of religions should form an important part of the study of faiths, independently of the findings of the second study, then it means religious literacy could have been understood in schools as something distinct-but could be-related to such tasks. Indeed, the fact that some teachers in the second study emphasised the importance of engagement with the question of truth by referring to their real classroom environment testifies to this fact. They stated that truth is important and that they already favour such a task. More openly, the fact that some teachers somehow engage with such tasks but do not mention

this in the context of religious literacy means that they don't see religious literacy as the whole product of the study of faiths.

If religious literacy is interpreted as a distinct-yet could be-related idea from other tasks that RE can focus on, then the differences between teachers' answers to the two themes of this survey study can be more understandable. Teachers' ideas on the notion of religious literacy can be evaluated as seeing religious literacy as only one part of the subject such as learning about the meaning of the concepts, while there can be other tasks like pursuing truth; and these tasks can be seen as complementary in the study of faiths.

Second, what some teachers could have thought of by the study of faiths could refer to what they indicated in the context of religious literacy such as having a certain degree of knowledge and understanding about various faiths. But, if the understanding they articulated in the context of religious literacy stands for what RE should essentially be for, then how should their thoughts about the importance of engagement with the question of truth in the second study be understood? The situation suggests that perhaps the questions asked in the second study encouraged them in a different direction. Here we can think of this encouragement as a guide, prompting some teachers to consider new possibilities beyond their current classroom practice. I have referred to some teachers here because in the second study, some other teachers, as stated above, underlined the importance of the engagement with truth claims of faiths by referring to the real classroom environment. In fact, this can also be regarded as a kind of guide, because guidance can also be used to refer to a reminder of what they already value. Therefore, while in the first sense of guidance, the connection that religious literacy should be the product of the study of faiths is more easily established in a positive sense (this is because religious literacy can be seen as the product of the existing accounts as well as, in an expanded sense, the product of the new tasks); in the second sense of direction, this remains weaker because teachers, despite they emphasise taking truth claims of faiths seriously by referring to the real classroom environment in the second study, did not express the task of engaging with the question of truth when asked questions about religious literacy.

Added to this, if we are talking about guidance in the first sense, then this more specifically shows the importance of informing teachers about the approaches that should pervade schools. If we are talking about guidance in the second sense, then this more explicitly demonstrates how important it is to ask the right relevant questions in the context of research to understand the real situation.

With these analyses the connection between the two studies of this survey can be explained, in short, as follows: either religious literacy is seen as something separate from other tasks, or what some teachers indicate by the notion of religious literacy actually refers to what they see the purpose of RE to be, that is, religious literacy could have been used in relation to the study of faiths in their own rights. Moreover, asking questions about the truth claims of faiths could have encouraged teachers to a different direction. In either case, this suggests teachers are in favour of engaging with truth claims of faiths.

Considering the theoretical argument of this thesis that religious literacy should be thought of as the product of the study of faiths on their own merits, we can then, once again, point out that the understanding of religious literacy among teachers is limited. Since handling the tension between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society can be accepted as the most important point that RE can genuinely contribute to the flourishing of society, we can claim that religious literacy understanding when we draw on the appeal of

teachers for handling this tension should be greatly informed by engaging with contested truth claims of faiths.

At this point, we should be reminded, despite the fact that teachers attach great importance to engaging with conflicting truth claims of faiths, the variation within categories also showed that there is evidence that this is not being done thoroughly and sufficiently in schools. Now one reasonable argument we can posit is that since teachers are in favour of engaging with truth claims of faiths in the face of this tension, teachers could be supported by Wright's approach to do this in a more systematic and profound way, as Wright offers the most promising account of engaging with claims of faiths to truth. That is to say, better informing teachers of Wright's approach could support them. It follows that religious literacy understanding when we draw on the appeal of teachers for handling this tension, should greatly predicate the premises of CRE.

However, while how religious literacy should be conceived of was partially discussed before the empirical study of the present thesis as it has been argued that this notion should be seen as the product of the account that it predicates on; the discussion of which is the best approach of handling this tension has been left until after the analysis of the empirical study. The reason for this is that presenting the best approach together with the notion of happiness towards the final could be more together and might attract more attention in terms of what this thesis actually wants to say.

This means that we will be able to express only in the next chapter what role the empirical study and the theoretical part of this tension can play together in reaching the main purpose of this thesis. But since it is shown in the third chapter that some paths such as the confessional approach and mainly focusing on similarities are irrefutably problematic concerning the flourishing of society, this does not prevent us from commenting here that the picture among teachers, when compared to these problematic accounts, can at least be accepted as a way that can have more potential for society. Yet, at this stage, we can't simply say CRE should pervade schools by only drawing on the perspectives of teachers. This obviously would undermine pursuing the best approach to handling this tension, as there exist different accounts of engaging with this tension. All this directs us to compare various existing approaches regarding their power for the flourishing of society in the face of this tension.

For this reason, the question remaining, which could also be deemed an important implication of the survey for the subsequent shape of the thesis, concerns whether engagement with truth claims of faiths as accounts with an ontological grounding in reality – simply put CRE – is convincing in terms of its potential to lead to a flourishing society. It follows that, if Wright's approach possesses more potential than other prominent approaches, then a claim can be made that the trajectory among teachers should continue but it should be informed by the principles of CRE for it to be perpetuated in a deep and systematic way.

E) Conclusion

The main argument of this thesis is based on the idea that RE can lead to a truly flourishing society when the best existing approach and the notion of happiness play a central role in the face of this tension. The idea of religious literacy has been found fruitful, as is thought to have practical value in terms of implementing the principles of these components.

In this context, this tension, because pursuing the best approach together with the notion of happiness related to it, and the idea of religious literacy are important, and because reading the

current situation about these issues in schools together with the theoretical part can play a role in instigating change for the better, this thesis includes an empirical study on these two topics.

This chapter presented the findings of the empirical study on these two issues and also included a discussion of them. The following main conclusions have been reached regarding religious literacy: this term, similar to academia, is common in schools. Although religious literacy is generally understood as having a certain level of knowledge and understanding about various faiths, it is associated with language, such as knowing the meaning of concepts. In addition, contributing to the flourishing of society and critical thinking about beliefs are also emerging categories, although they are not very common.

The basic discourses of this thesis regarding religious literacy are included in the second chapter. The idea presented in the second chapter that religious literacy should be seen as the product of the study of faiths is unclear among teachers. For such reasons, it has been concluded that the idea of religious literacy in schools is limited. While we can reach this conclusion about religious literacy regarding how it should be conceived of based on the arguments of the second chapter, we can only argue about the underlying account of religious literacy, as the way that should pervade schools in the face of this tension, after the next chapter.

The findings about this tension revealed that teachers are willing to take truth claims of faiths and the question of truth seriously. Once again, the discussion of how religious literacy should be understood took place before presenting the findings of the empirical study, but the discussion of finding the way as the best response to this tension is included in the sixth chapter. Therefore, we will only be able to say what the situation about this tension in schools means when we consider these findings together with the theoretical discussion that will appear in the next chapter.

Finally, let me point out that despite not having asked direct questions about happiness, the issue that reading the findings of this survey study together with the theoretical part regarding the notion of happiness can play an important role in change for the better can also be expressed. This is articulated towards the end of the next chapter, where the discussion on the notion of happiness is concluded.

Chapter 6

How to approach this tension in the best way?: the flourishing of society

A) Introduction

I have argued that handling the tension between conflicting truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society in the best possible way can be regarded as one of the most important ways, if not the most, that RE can genuinely contribute to the flourishing of society. Informed by the appeal of teachers, it has been stated in the previous chapter that this tension can be approached by embracing the question of truth. But the existence of various accounts in the literature directs us to consider their power in regard to handling this tension in the best possible way, so that we may be able to make a better judgement about the path teachers desire to follow. Since teachers' perspectives are most in line with Wright's approach, or teachers could be supported by CRE to do their appeal in a more systematic and profound way, in this chapter CRE is compared to other paths.

At this point, we should note that the rationale for this comparison is not just about understanding the power of the appeal of teachers for handling this tension but is also informed by the distinction made between Wright's approach as holding out the best approach of what it means to pursue truth in RE and the alternative vision that does not engage with the question of truth as deeply and systematically. For this reason, we do not only act on the opinions of the teachers and say how good these opinions are, but also how strong their perspectives are in light of the evaluation of these two paths that have already emerged in the field. The difference is that while the former may be argued to impose some limitations in only postulating a distinction from the field, the latter implies a wider spectrum as it also proceeds from the already existing situation in the literature in relation to the question of truth and reality.

In order to proceed with the argument some further points are important to underline. Alongside CRE focusing on more promising accounts can be more effective and selective. Since this tension relates to the question of reality and truth, different accounts offered have been divided into two lines, pursuing truth and the alternative vision. There are different paths in these two camps: confessional teaching; focusing mainly on similarities; concentrating on similarities and differences; seeing faiths as relative parts of the same reality; placing individuals and diversity at the centre; embracing thoroughgoing relativism; developing knowledge and understanding; developing positive attitudes such as respect and tolerance; contextual looking (multiple lenses); and unity.

Some of these paths have been found ineffective by solid arguments as discussed in chapter three and therefore it is unnecessary to reflect on those arguments again. For instance, universal monotheism, the idea that different religious traditions rotate around the same reality, was criticised by Cooling and Barnes in regard to being fair to religious traditions having conflicting truth claims, and its shortcomings in respect and tolerance for these beliefs and their adherents; in the same vein focusing on similarities at the expense of differences was found wanting by Barnes and Prothero.[403] Moreover, some of these strains such as the confessional account cannot be said to be inappropriate for all school types (it can be accepted as a reasonable path in faith schools for example), or that they pave the way for intolerance. However, at least, alongside other perils, for instance, there is no consensus in a multifaith society, and consequently pursuing particular ends in publicly funded schools is inappropriate, the

[403] See Chapter 3, Section C.

confessional approach was found problematic particularly because it occludes adapting a more truthful worldview which can lead to a better society.[404]

Added to this, though some ways such as concentrating on similarities and differences and developing positive attitudes, respect and tolerance for instance (when taken as the means to some greater end), are important ways to be mentioned, they are not considered separate titles here because their meaning, generally speaking, tends to depend more on the other centralised elements such as pursuing truth, and knowledge and understanding. That is, we can take them to be standing less alone but are imagined more as the result of something else. Of course, once again, not dealing with these precepts as separate titles here has also to do with the issue that establishing them as an end in themselves has already been found problematic. The main problem was that treating them as the final point tends to occlude greater possibilities.[405] Moreover, the last path unity, which is in something else rather than faiths such as being human, is reasonable, and what should also be used in terms of such unity will be the subject of section two; therefore, it is not taken up in the first part.

We should also note that in pursuing the most powerful account vis-a-vis the flourishing of society, Wright's approach is not given a separate title but is reflected within other approaches because it is compared to the alternative vision offering different accounts.

There are some ways, which are the main contentions in a variety of publications, centralised in this alternative camp, and focusing on them, once again, will be more effective and selective in discussing the most promising way of handling this tension. Along with CRE, it can be discussed, three other approaches come to the fore: knowledge and understanding, contextual perspective (multiple lenses), and diversity and individuality.

Each of these four ways is central in different scholars and publications, for example, pursuing truth is central in Wright; knowledge and understanding in the works of most scholars such as Smart, Grimmitt, Prothero, and Conroy; contextual looking more prominently in Moore and Jackson; diversity and individuality in Jackson, Erricker and Erricker, and Dinham. There is fluidity between these scholars in the sense that an account can cover various paths, albeit with different emphases and functions. This is not of great concern since the purpose of this grouping is to show simply the central and important emerging theories of handling this tension. Since the works of those scholars have been explained in the first two chapters, they are only briefly referenced here.

Overall, this part aims to discuss which approach, among existing accounts, should pervade in schools in the matter of offering the most convincing path in handling this tension, thereby having greater potential in leading to the flourishing of society.

This chapter, however, is not limited to this part. Alongside this, it further aims to argue that RE can be enhanced if the notion of happiness is centralised in relation to what humans ultimately strive for. The connection between these two parts is that first the most ideal approach will be discussed, and then it will be emphasised that the way of approaching this tension can be more promising if the most ideal approach relates to the notion of happiness. Thus, considering the argument that centralising the most available powerful account together with the notion of happiness can indeed be the best response to this tension, thereby RE can have the greatest potential to contribute to the flourishing of society, it can be stated that this

[404] *Ibid.*
[405] *Ibid.*

chapter involves the most two core elements of this thesis. In this respect, the chapter is divided into two parts section one and section two: while section one concerns the former, section two is about the latter.

B) Section one: CRE versus three other influential paths

In section one, it is discussed that indeed CRE, in the face of conflicting truth claims of faiths, has greater potential to lead to a genuinely flourishing society than the visions given by the approaches that do not engage with the question of truth in a thorough and influential way. To do this, I attempt to display that these ways are limited in their capacity to contribute to the flourishing of society; and, to a great extent, Wright's approach both overcomes the shortcomings and fulfils the merits of these central ways. Of course, since different elements such as the question of truth form the basis of the grouping of these two camps as CRE and the alternative vision, they serve as a kind of criteria for understanding which account has greater potential in contributing to the flourishing of society. However, it is important to note here that in this evaluation process made in terms of the flourishing of society, different accounts in relation to these elements are not evaluated with respect to any specific area. That is, no specific realms against which these accounts could be evaluated in terms of the flourishing of society have been applied systematically. For instance, it could be argued that because CRE places great emphasis on the question of truth it has greater potential to develop individuals' spirituality, which can be accepted as an important dimension for society to flourish. In this case, different accounts, in relation to the elements such as the question of truth, are considered concerning a certain realm which is spirituality. Instead, the argument proceeds by thinking about what kind of society can be formed with the principles of different approaches in relation to different areas and what such a society can mean in terms of human flourishing.

To this end, it is concluded that teachers' desire to engage with the question of truth has great potential to contribute to the flourishing of society, and therefore CRE should be reflected via religious literacy which should be thought of as the product of this process.

B. a) Knowledge and understanding

There is an increasing interest in this argument, as in a recent PhD thesis, Christopher plainly argues that there should be one single and clear aim of the subject 'understanding'.[406] Cooling et al., who find this suggestion attractive and straightforward, summarise it well: 'seeking to offer clarity, RE Adviser Kate Christopher has recently suggested that there is one single and straightforward aim in teaching Religion and Worldviews that should have sovereignty: namely, understanding.'[407] Similar to this, the aim of the 2021 Ofsted report *Research review series: religious education* rotates around the factors that can yield high-quality RE. The most important factor in the process of attaining high-quality RE is considered knowledge: it is stated, knowledge is vital in the RE curriculum and people in this field should be aware of this. The motto of this report is to 'know more and remember more'.[408] Such arguments like that of Christopher and Ofsted all suggest we should think of RE as supplying knowledge and understanding for the flourishing of society.

[406] Christopher, 'RE as liberal education'. Even though she gives room to critical engagement with worldviews, what is of central importance is concerned with understanding.
[407] Cooling, Bowie, and Panjwani, *Worldviews in Religious Education,* p. 52.
[408] Ofsted, *Research review series*, p. 9.

This is a main view that scholars given in the first two chapters embrace. Smart privileged objective knowledge and understanding whilst Grimmitt focused on gaining knowledge and understanding of various worldviews for comprehension of what exists as accounts in the humanisation process of children.[409] Prothero is one of the scholars, who offers a substantial account of this path. Lamenting the religious illiteracy of most Americans, Prothero persists that 'given a problem like ignorance, the solution is obviously going to be knowledge.'[410] His actual definition of religious literacy is driven by an 'ability to understand and use in one's day-to-day life the basic building blocks of religious traditions.'[411] Similarly, what is of central importance in Conroy's approach relates to knowledge about faiths including their historical background, practices, and complexities for example, and understanding that specifically may come with knowledge.[412]

It can be reasonably claimed that comprehension of and deliberately contributing to the flourishing of society is only possible if we admit to there being knowledge and understanding. In Aldridge's words, 'understanding always precedes purposive action.'[413] However, in responding to this tension and the flourishing of society, centralising knowledge and understanding as the main vision is likely to be limited for at least two reasons when compared to the notions of the pursuit of truth and truthful living. The first is that centralising knowledge and understanding without giving due attention to the question of truth tends to be limited in terms of being transformative in the face of conflicting truth claims of various worldviews. Transformation is supposed to be something good for a flourishing society to exist because, for example, there have been many interventions in human history about the world we dwell in, and some of them are likely to be problematic. In this respect, this transformation can be thought of in two ways: to absent bad by making something better present, and to only negate what is bad. While the former refers to the notion of presence the latter resides in the idea of absence.[414] In light of this, essentially the point is that knowledge and understanding may not be convincing for transformation from bad to good and negating the bad.

A similar view was pointed out by Biesta and Hannam: 'understanding does not automatically translate into emphatic action, if that phrase is useful here, a point brought home pretty well when Homer Simpson, in an episode of The Simpsons, said to his children: 'just because I don't care, doesn't mean I don't understand.''[415] This was also expressed by Prothero as he pointed out, people sometimes can develop hatred and cause damage to others not because they do not understand them and know about their beliefs but precisely because they do.[416] Nevertheless, Prothero, relying on knowledge and understanding, is optimistic as he responded that still, understanding a bit better our own religious traditions and those of others is necessary if we are to avoid problems related to faiths.

In a classroom, children's understanding of what is right or wrong is likely to be not adequate on its own. It also needs to contain what deeds should and should not be committed. CRE presupposes knowledge and understanding and places a great emphasis on this second element, as CRE is concerned with empowering children 'to grapple with disputed claims about ultimate

[409] See, Chapter 1, Section C.
[410] Prothero, *Religious Literacy*, p. 11.
[411] *Ibid.*
[412] See, Chapter 2, Section C.
[413] Aldridge, *A Hermeneutics of Religious Education*, p. 72.
[414] See, Bhaskar, *Dialectic.*
[415] Patricia Hannam and Gert Biesta, 'Religious education, a matter of understanding? reflections on the final report of the Commission on Religious Education', *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 40.1 (2019), p. 58.
[416] Prothero, *Religious Literacy*, p. 18.

order of things and orientate their lives appropriately in response to their emerged understanding.'[417] In this light, the argument, more clearly, can be put as follows: there is more possibility of being transformed with CRE than being at the stage of knowledge and understanding because knowledge and understanding tend to affirm what is good or bad, being committed to truth arises request to adopt what is good, or negating the bad. A simple example can illustrate what is meant. Assume two cases: in the first, we are learning that torturing animals is wrong considering the reason that animals also suffer; in the second case, we additionally seek to adopt a lifestyle of not torturing animals. There is a degree of difference between knowledge and understanding and the awareness of the necessity to apply something to our lives. John L. Elias's point that 'the ancient Greeks viewed philosophy as more than theoretical discourses or systems of thought; and that 'they were interested in philosophical modes of life, and spiritual phenomena', allows us to put the point well: an understanding obtained in line with CRE possesses more potential of demand from people for a modification of lifestyle and a desire for the right way of living. [418]

Pursuing the most appropriate account for approaching this tension can be regarded as important for the flourishing of society not only in terms of the horizons and opportunities that may come with how to do things but also in terms of a method concerning how to do things. If the first reason why knowledge and understanding are lacking is primarily attributed to the former on the basis that it is more about the sense of a distance from adopting truthful beliefs and negating the bad; the second reason can mainly be associated with the latter in the belief that it refers more the benefits of the process itself.

There is a growing body of literature on the importance of seeing RE as a place of practice. Using the concept of worldview literacy, Shaw's recent work points to that literacy should be achieved through practice, or the act of learning by regularly performing a task, that is, it should be achieved while individuals are in action. Referring to Biesta, she says, 'rather than preparation for engagement with diversity, worldview literacy should, as in the case of Biesta's notion of wider "civic learning", be conceived of as *recursive* and *cumulative.*'[419] To put it in other terms, instead of considering how people may become religiously literate as the result of the knowledge they gain from RE, we should focus on how practically to achieve religious literacy, which for Shaw means actively and repetitively engaging with diversity. In this

[417] Wright, *Critical religious education,* p. 200.

[418] John L. Elias, 'Ancient Philosophy and Religious Education: Education as Initiation into a Way of Life', in M. de Souza, K. Engebretson, G. Durka, R. Jackson, and A. McGrady (eds), *International Handbook of the Religious, Spiritual and Moral Dimensions of Education* (Dordrecht, 2006), p. 11.

[419] Martha Shaw, 'Worldview literacy as intercultural citizenship education: A framework for critical, reflexive engagement in plural democracy', *Education, citizenship and social justice* 18.2 (2022), pp. 9-10. Similar to Shaw, drawing on Arendt, Biesta in his article, 'How to exist politically and learn from it', published in 2010 argues that education should not be seen as a place preparing children for their future contribution to the flourishing of society but create opportunities for a kind of existence that contributes to the good of society. (Gert Biesta, 'How to exist politically and learn from it: Hannah Arendt and the problem of democratic education', *Teachers College Record* 112.2 (2010). For Biesta, as a result of obtaining knowledge for example, thinking about contributing to social flourishing is no better than learning how to live together peacefully by experience. Pondering the connections between education, lifelong learning, citizenship, and democracy, in his book, *Learning Democracy in School and Society*, Biesta expresses, 'there is a need to shift the focus of research, policy and practice from the teaching of citizenship towards the different ways in which young people 'learn democracy' through their participation in the contexts and practices that make up their everyday lives, in school, college and university, and in society at large.' (Gert Biesta, *Learning Democracy in School and Society: Education, Lifelong Learning, and the Politics of Citizenship* (Leiden, 2011), p. 6. See also, Hannam et al., 'Religious literacy: a way forward for religious education*?'*). Shaw and Biesta, of course, are not alone in this regard. In the Ofsted report, *Religious education: realising the potential*, it is stated, many students leave school with a scant level of knowledge and understanding. (Ofsted, *Religious Education: realising the potential*, p. 8). One of the challenges mentioned with respect to weaknesses in teaching, inhibiting the use of inquiry in enhancing pupils' learning was that of 'focusing too much on the product of the enquiry rather than the process.' (*Ibid.,* p. 11). The report sheds light on the point that 'teachers drew attention to the way in which the pupils presented what they had found out rather than extending the enquiry into more challenging areas of evaluation and reflection.' (*Ibid.*).

context, a second limitation of knowledge and understanding pertains to being the final product of RE, whereas CRE tends to be also an ongoing practice. By inviting students to take active participation including evaluation and reflection, CRE has the potential to develop prepared individuals: children could benefit more as they become more ready to contribute to society.

In this light, I take knowledge and understanding to imply less collaborative work than CRE, which can be taken as an important way that help young people with different worldviews get used to and get closer to each other. However, imagine, some people think that Abrahamic religions, for example, actually value people and contribute to human flourishing. They then learn about these religions with their adherents in more detail, and they realise that some moral precepts are actually very contrary to their ethical commitments. Indeed, some have drawn attention to the point that presenting children with the details of faiths can be harmful and counter-productive: any child learning about such doctrines, 'in such countries is at risk developing a profound feeling of negativity towards the followers of the religion which espouses them.'[420] Imagine, they learned about the issue that, in the Bible, a rebellious and stubborn child should be put to death by stoning.[421] For this reason, suppose, there was a shake in their feelings about religions. That they even developed a hatred for these religions, and their adherents because they hold fast to their beliefs. There are three things to consider here.

First, since England is a multifaith country, and we live in a time when communication has the potential to be nuanced and sophisticated, and it's likely to be somehow informed about the precepts of any faith that doesn't match our worldview; schools can provide a proper space where students can collaboratively learn about such beliefs and develop reasons for what they believe to be false and true, and this in turn can pave the way for better social harmony. As Mary Earl points out, 'if we want young people to access and engage with critically live debates about religions publicly (i.e., in schools), then we must show them how to do so safely, productively – and with support.'[422] Second, this collaborative task is conducive to bring relief to individuals who gather around the same purpose of pursuing truth because instead of developing hatred towards those beliefs that they find wrong and those who hold those beliefs, they have the opportunity to explain why they think these beliefs are more likely to be wrong with their reasons. That said, individuals whose beliefs are tested by debate are more likely to get used to such educational discussion, which has great potential to prevent extreme reactions in future when their beliefs are brought into discussion. Mike Castelli draws attention to a similar issue, stating that dialogue between students in RE possesses the potential to complement and contradict their experiences of confrontation.[423] In this light, individuals who have not interiorised critical reflection with the possibility that their beliefs can be truthful or wrong are less likely to contribute to the flourishing of society. Aristotle's point on moderate individuals can help us understand the issue better. Aristotle in his *Politics* argues*,* moderate group people, rather than rich and poor, are most ready to follow rational principles. Considering the rich and poor, he wants us to see that 'of these two the one sort grows into violent and great criminals, the others into rogues and petty rascals.'[424] Moreover, those who have riches 'are neither willing nor able to submit to authority. The evil begins at home; for when they are boys, by reason of the luxury in which they are brought up, they never learn, even at school, the habit of obedience.'[425] And those who are very poor 'are in the opposite

[420] Sharpe, 'Religion and worldviews in 1944 and 2021', p. 338.
[421] Bible, Deuteronomy 21: 18-21.
[422] Earl, 'Teaching faith', p. 164.
[423] Mike Castelli, 'Principles and procedures for classroom dialogue', in Mike Castelli and Mark Chater (eds), *We Need to Talk about Religious Education: Manifestos for the Future of RE*, (London, 2018), p. 152.
[424] Aristotle, *Politics,* trans. Benjamin Jowett (Infomotions, 2000), book 4:11.
[425] *Ibid.*

extreme, are too degraded. So that the one class cannot obey, and can only rule despotically; the other knows not how to command and must be ruled like slaves.'[426] One thing that Aristotle wanted to say is that people who are rich and powerful are always inclined to rule and impose their beliefs to others, and people who are very poor and have not learned to use their will lack the confidence to make an argument with other people. By way of analogy, individuals who interiorise critical reflection, and are willing to pursue truth can be classed as moderate people who have enough ability to be able to shift their beliefs if there are good reasons to do so and who tell others why they think their beliefs are more likely to be wrong. Third, in collaborative work in which precepts such as respect are important to develop, CRE emerges as a more promising approach for genuinely developing these precepts. For instance, if we think that the ideas of others are wrong and listen to them in silence only for the sake of respect, it means genuine respect for other people is less likely to develop. Margaret S. Archer et al., in line with CR, specify real respect is not listening to others in silence but is a 'Socratic openness that takes the other's viewpoint seriously enough to allow it the possibility of altering our own.'[427] Moreover, CRE aims to teach that we should first respect each other as human beings. Wright et al. state that 'we would encourage you to teach students to be able to say that they disagree (if they do) and that they think that a viewpoint is wrong, but to be able to do so politely and non-dismissively.'[428] This is important for it values individuals and allows critical engagement with our belief systems.

I think that the two main criticisms made here, which are concerned with the shortcomings in terms of transformation from bad to good and negating the bad, and preparing students to contribute to society, are sufficient for us to see that centralising knowledge and understanding in the works of many has less potential for the flourishing of society when compared to the notions of pursuing truth and truthful living. In this respect, since CRE overcomes the limits of knowledge and understanding path, and fulfils its merits, it is more promising in leading to genuine societal flourishing.

B. b) Contextual looking - A Multiple lenses approach

In handling this tension, the contextual approach is another path holding significant importance in the field. Moore and Jackson are two scholars offering a substantive account of this. Though they believe that the basic tenets and the structures of the world's religious traditions can be identified, their primary point is to learn that religions are internally diverse, that they continue to change rather than remain static, and that religions are interwoven with other areas of the human experience. From this standpoint, the way of approaching religion should be greatly and chiefly concerned with looking at it contextually, or through multiple lenses.

This is spurred in Moore's work with the argument that 'the study of any religious tradition will necessarily remain superficial if the question of the legitimacy of belief itself remains paramount'.[429] Gilles Beauchamp reflects this as follows: 'on this conception of religious literacy, it would be unhelpful to characterize what a typical Buddhist would do, believe or look like because it recognizes that there is no such thing as a typical member of a uniform and unchanging religion.'[430] To an extent, the same, it can be claimed, goes to Jackson's approach. Wright brings this out as follows: in Jackson's contextual approach

[426] *Ibid.*
[427] Margaret S. Archer et al., *Transcendence: Critical Realism and God* (London, 2004), p. 11.
[428] Easton et al., *Critical Religious Education in Practice,* p. 10.
[429] Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy*: *A Cultural Studies Approach,* p. 152.
[430] Gilles Beauchamp, 'Epistemic injustice as a ground for religious education in public schools', *Religious Education* ahead-of-print (2023), p. 11.

'religious traditions do not enjoy any substantial formal or structural identity: as merely the accidental sum of individual spiritualities, they are human constructs existing 'in name only', and 'consequently, the representation of religions in the classroom is a useful activity only insofar that it sheds light on the contextual lives of their adherents.'[431]

A reflection on Protagoras and Heraclitus can be illustrative here. Protagoras was one of the sophists in the fifth century BC. Cultural relativism was important rhetoric among sophists, and in this light, he contended that 'man is the measure of all things; of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not.'[432] Heraclitus believed that everything was in a constant state of change.[433] The contextual approach carries the implication that the truth claims of faiths to be truthful in themselves are defective, but the value of their truth owes to the meaning ascribed to them in particular contexts. That is, the contextual approach comes close to the idea that man is the measure of truth claims of worldviews.[434] This can be clarified further with the passage from Panjwani and Revell, who, in line with Moore and Jackson, subscribe to a similar perspective. They point out, students should learn that contextual looking is necessary because this is:

> *"a necessary feature of the way humans operate, make meaning and form traditions… We do not read the same text twice just like we do not put our hand twice in the same river. The text and its context as well as the reader and her context have both changed and upon re-reading the novel you may now react and respond very differently, or not."*[435]

In comparison with CRE, this approach also is less convincing in two ways with respect to the flourishing of society. The first one is that, though critical reflection can be given a place in contextual looking; since the truth value of a worldview is to an extent replaced with how it should be understood in relation to various conditions surrounding it, multiple lenses as the central element tends to make pursuing truth meaningless. That is since the priority is frequently given to how different meanings can be produced about something, arguing over the truthfulness of a worldview and adapting it is likely to be diluted. It follows that if truthful living is promising for the flourishing of society, then the contextual approach falls short of this. Just as centralising knowledge and understanding while not giving enough room to the question of the pursuit of truth is limited in the matter of making something good present and negating the bad, so too does centralising the contextual approach while diluting pursuing truth and truthful living in the sense of adopting what is good and absenting the bad. Although in the former the question of pursuing truth is passed over in silence and in the latter the question of truth loses its meaning, both are wanting in relation to occluding the question of truth in a deep and systematic manner that can lead to a flourishing society. Therefore, indeed, any approach that does not place sufficient emphasis on the question of truth is open to criticism in terms of

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[431] Wright, 'Contextual religious education', p. 5.
[432] Alasdair MacIntyre, *A short history of ethics* (London, 1967), pp. 14-15.
[433] Heraclitus, Fragments, trans. Brooks Haxton (London, 2001).
[434] Yet, despite this implication, it should be remembered that in Moore's account, for example, it is important to know how religion and other fields interact with each other. Therefore, for instance, because there is the idea of slavery in the basic belief system of religion, the fact that slavery is practised in a particular context arises. However, the emphasis on claims to truth to be particular assertions justifies the notion that this implication is privileged in this pattern. Wright articulates a similar idea for Jackson's approach: 'the religiosity of individuals constitutes the default position against which all holistic representations are to be measured.' (Wright, 'Contextual religious education', p. 5).
[435] Gert Biesta, Farid Panjwani, and Lynn Revell, 'Teaching about Islam: From Essentialism to Hermeneutics. An Interview with Farid Panjwani and Lynn Revell by Gert Biesta', in Gert Biesta and Patricia Hannam (eds.), *Religion and Education: The Forgotten Dimensions of Religious Education?* (Leiden, 2021), pp. 90-93. See also, Farid Panjwani and Lynn Revell, 'Religious education and hermeneutics: the case of teaching about Islam', *British Journal of Religious Education* 40.3 (2018).

the flourishing of society when the notions of pursuing truth and truthful living are accepted as necessary and important for it.

This, however, does not mean that understanding something in its specific context, such as its socio-historical situation, is not important. Understanding something without its background would be a shallow insight, and often would engender misunderstanding. CRE advocates such a task, but it is also committed to pursuing truth and truthful living. Thus, it is reasonable to claim that students are empowered more in CRE when compared with centralising contextual looking to contribute to the flourishing of society.

A sense of meaning and purpose is commonly deemed important for a flourishing life: meaning and purpose are necessary for individuals to know their place in life, to know what they are living for, and eventually to flourish.[436] In this light, a second limitation of the contextual approach is that it is likely to minimise the meaning and purpose that centralising to see a worldview as a whole can give to our lives since the main emphasis is placed on proliferation. To put it another way, in a contextual approach, a worldview, to an extent, loses its meaning as constituting a purposeful whole, and this diminishes the possibility of seeing a worldview as a meaningful explanation of the universe, which in turn tends to impoverish the possibility of the meaning and purpose that can come to our lives. CRE is more powerful in terms of having a more meaningful and purposeful life because, alongside contextual looking, it places a great emphasis on worldviews as meaningful wholes.

Similar to the path of centralising knowledge and understanding, two main criticisms made here, which are concerned with the shortcomings in terms of truthful living and minimising the meaning and purpose that can contribute to the flourishing of individuals, are sufficient for us to see that placing the greatest emphasis on the contextual looking seems to be deficient for the flourishing of society when compared to the principles of CRE. We can conclude that, once again, since Wright's vision of RE fulfils the merits of contextual understanding and overcomes the problems of being confined to it, it has more potential to lead to the flourishing of society.

B. c) Individuality and diversity

Individuality and diversity are connected to contextual looking because, for instance, the latter implies the former. Despite this, due to the different shortcomings arising in two separate categories, and it is believed that presenting these under two headings will draw more attention to the subject, there was a perceived necessity to address them as separate titles. However, since these two paths are closely intertwined, the different criticisms expressed under each title can be directed at both paths. Because the purpose here is to show that these ways are deficient through some criticisms, it is not considered necessary to do this here.

In the works of many scholars and publications individuality and diversity take a very central role. This is apparent in studies by Jackson, Erricker and Erricker, and Dinham. Jackson endorses reflecting religious traditions through individuals' lives in membership groups, such as family, peers, and denominations, and, in a wider sense, in their cumulative religious traditions, Erricker and Erricker argue that the narratives of children should dominate RE.[437]

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[436] See, for example, Kristján Kristjánsson, *Flourishing as the Aim of Education: A Neo-Aristotelian View* (London, 2020), p. 33. See also, David Streight, 'The Purpose Project: Fostering Adolescent Spiritual Growth and Flourishing', in Scherto Gill and Garrett Thomson (eds), *Redefining Religious Education: Spirituality for Human Flourishing* (Palgrave, 2014).

[437] See Chapter 1, Section D.

In the context of religious literacy, to encounter variety well, according to Dinham, requires RE to reflect the variety of faiths in society as the main theme.[438] In addition to these scholars, indeed, similar to the knowledge and understanding path, there is a growing interest in this argument, as for example in CoRE, which is expected to bring a paradigm shift in RE. In CoRE, individuality and diversity are put forward while faiths as having substantial enduring identities and engagement with the question of truth are in the background. This clearly emerges in this passage of the report that 'the shift in language from 'religion' to 'worldview' signifies the greater attention that needs to be paid to individual lived experience, the complex, plural and diverse nature of worldviews at both institutional and individual levels.'[439] Barnes spells this out as follows: 'CoRE wants attention given to high-levels of internal diversity' whereby 'the concept of institutional worldviews collapses into personal worldviews, undermining the study of institutional worldviews such as Christianity.'[440] In fact, Cooling, as the chair of the REC, in a later article written as a response to Barnes, acknowledges that CoRE makes a similar sort of move to that of Jackson and Dinham, for example.[441]

In comparison with CRE, it can be stated that placing the greatest emphasis on individuality and diversity as the main central point is problematic again in two ways. First, such an approach, in the face of the existence of different worldviews, tends to fall short of a general system change. A general system here denotes the dominant or hegemonic construction that prevails in a society concerning how we are directed to live. For instance, if the dominant paradigm predicates capitalism or neoliberalism, then the general system is capitalism or neoliberalism. When a hegemonic system is not the ideal one leading to societal problems, then schools should be sides countering against this rather than reproducing it. As Bhaskar asks: 'how can we move in the direction of a society, which…will at least be better than the one we currently have?'[442]

In this light, the study of religion on its own merits can be more promising in achieving the flourishing of society if it, in favour of the flourishing of society, minimises or removes the inconsistency between what is said in RE such as to be just, develop trust, respect others, and caring for the environment, and some actual messages given, perhaps implicitly, in the general system such as that being just, developing trust, respect others, and caring for the environment are not important to attain a 'good life'. It becomes less possible to live a truthful life for example, when this is less credible in the general system in the face of the 'positive results' of deception, for instance. In other words, if the general system encourages contrary things to what is emphasised in RE then the study of religion for the flourishing of society is likely to fall short. It can be claimed that these precepts such as caring for the environment and developing trust can be more meaningful and realistic if they are discussed in relation to the value of the precepts of the general system. This is because, discussion over the general system can direct students more to reflect on the problems of the general system, and to the desire to shift it.

Concentrating on individuality and diversity and making this the main object of knowledge is likely to minimise the discussion on a general system as having a substantial identity. On the

[438] See Chapter 2, Section C.
[439] The Commission on Religious Education, *Religion and Worldviews*, p. 30. We should underline that although Cooling, then the chair of the REC, in his earlier writings such as *A Christian Vision for State Education,* puts more emphasis on pursuing truth, in CoRE there is less emphasis on the question of truth. Priority is given to reflecting individuality and diversity.
[440] Barnes, 'The commission on religious education', p. 96.
[441] Trevor Cooling, 'The commission on religious education – a response to L. Philip Barnes', *British Journal of Religious Education* 70.1 (2022), p. 112.
[442] Roy Bhaskar, 'Critical realism and the ontology of persons', *Journal of Critical Realism* 19.2 (2020), p. 118.

other hand, CRE encourages the examination of existing worldviews and inspires truthful living. This is more conducive to putting the issue forward and will keep alive the idea that a bad dominant system needs to be altered.

However, can it mean that lending the greatest importance to individuality and diversity is indeed a very effective way to deconstruct grand narratives of worldviews? This would lean towards a postmodern tradition as seen in Erricker and Erricker, for instance. Modernity, it is typically argued, provided foundations entailing major societal problems.[443] Postmodernity, in particular, was a reaction against modernity's grand narratives leading to universal truth claims and hegemonic powers.[444] That is, the postmodern worldview countered the notion of universal truth claims, and so underlined that individuals should have subjective ways of life.[445] This steers people to avoid the comparison of worldviews, and in turn, opens the door to embracing widespread epistemic relativism. Indeed, centralising individuality and diversity is very much in relation to the tradition of widespread epistemic relativism. In fact, drawing on CoRE report, some scholars like Roger Trigg and Wright and Elina Hella pointed out that it reflects a postmodern worldview: Trigg expressed this, saying that it 'coheres with the wider claims of post-modernist philosophy, decrying the notion of universal rationality'; Wright and Hella stated, 'the Commission's stress on epistemic relativism at the expense of ontological realism and judgemental rationality resonates with much postmodern philosophy.'[446] A widespread epistemic relativism is, as previously discussed, is wanting for the flourishing of society. One main reason was concerned with occluding to take a truthful account seriously. Therefore, embracing thoroughgoing epistemic relativism is not a good response to the possible perils of a general system.

Indeed, we should think of the possibility of avoiding a general system in society. Grimmitt underlines that humans seek order and avoid chaos because this is a human given.[447] It seems very difficult to live a life without having a determinate conception of human good as a general system. Otherwise, everybody would do what they desire to do, which can lead to chaos. It follows that it is better and more possible to discuss the value of different general systems rather than avoiding having one. Therefore, again, centralising individuality and diversity is not a good response to discussing the merits of the general system. CRE has more potential to lead to the flourishing of society because the comparison of different worldviews is supported, which can lead to change, at least partially, in the general system for the better.

Second, where religious traditions are accepted as having a substantial identity, then focusing on these traditions as a whole would be required. In this case, centralising individuality and diversity while casting belief systems into shadow is not very promising, as it may mean disrespect to both these beliefs and people who believe in them. Added to this, it is open to question whether adherents want their religious tradition to be greatly reflected in relation to their own lives, and their lives to be centrally subjected to RE. Barnes speaks to us that 'people

[443] See, for example, Paul Gillen and Devleena Ghosh, *Colonialism and Modernity* (Sydney, 2007), p. 86. For totalitarianism see, Andrew Wright, *Religion, Education and Post-Modernity* (London, 2004), pp. 12-13.
[444] Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism*, p. 22. See also, David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 8-9.
[445] For postmodern subjectivity, see Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry* 8.4 (1982), p. 785. In this context, Zygmunt Bauman interprets postmodernity as 'a state of mind' that 'does not seek to substitute one truth for another, one standard of beauty for another, one life ideal for another.' (Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London, 1992), p. ix).
[446] Roger Trigg, 'The philosophy of 'worldviews' in L. Philip Barnes (ed.), *Religion and Worldviews: The Triumph of the Secular in Religious Education* (London, 2023), p. 128. Andrew Wright and Elina Hella, 'Religious education and worldview theory', *British Journal of Religious Education* (2023), p. 2.
[447] Grimmitt, *Religious education and human development.*

are often not reflective or consistent in their beliefs.'[448] Similar to this, in *Living with Difference* it is stated, 'two people may have similar beliefs but perform different actions.'[449]A person can believe in God based on their religion and she can do things that are viewed as sin in their faith. Thus, representing religious traditions through individual lives may not be very acceptable to individuals, and in such a case, it cannot be said that it pleases people.

Though Wright's approach affirms the importance of individuality and diversity, it is not the most important component. Ontological realism, epistemic relativity, and judgemental rationally run together. The relationship between these three components is as follows: ontological realism precedes epistemic relativity, and epistemic relativity allows for different accounts of the same ontological reality. Since this is so, people employ judgemental rationality so as to be in the process of making informed and reasonable decisions between those accounts. Moreover, in CRE both the horizons of faith systems and the horizons of students are respected. Thus, neither the possibility that religions have substantial identities is ignored, nor individual voices. As a result, we can say CRE has more potential to pave the way for a genuinely flourishing society than centralising diversity and individuality in RE.

Overall, pursuing truth in a deep and systematic way is more convincing for the flourishing of society than the alternative vision that does not give due attention to the question of truth but centralises other ways.

We should, however, note that in this thesis specifically the importance of knowledge and understanding, contextual looking, and diversity and individuality has been recognised. These components must be included in RE. The point here, to reiterate, is that the pursuit of truth approach that contains the other three elements is more promising than *centralising* any of these three ways as the primary element of RE. Moreover, the saying that CRE should pervade in schools is deliberate. In this thesis, it is not endorsed that CRE should be alone and always be the account of how to teach RE. Although other ways such as universal monotheism are found problematic in this thesis, they also should be given place in RE.[450] What is underlined is that since CRE has greater potential in handling this tension in the best available way, it should pervade in schools.

We are now in a position to discuss the merits of the role that empirical and theoretical parts can play together, regarding this tension in terms of the flourishing of society. The existing situation in schools tells us teachers are in favour of engagement with truth claims of faiths, and they tend to take the nature of reality seriously; and the theoretical argument shows us that pursuing truth by taking various worldviews into account has great potential for a flourishing society to exist. The conclusion is that the implication that the appeal of teachers for handling this tension seems to have great potential in leading to a genuinely flourishing society.

We have argued that reading empirical and theoretical parts together is likely to reinforce change for the better. If teachers already follow the reasonable path that the theoretical part is in favour of, then how should we understand this call?

We should emphasise, because engaging with contested claims of faiths to truth is the best available approach to handling this tension regarding the flourishing of society, the situation in schools is very promising and therefore it should continue in this direction. Added to this, to

[448] For England and Whales, see, for example, Barnes, 'The Commission on religious education, worldviews', p. 90.
[449] The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, *Living with Difference*, p. 26.
[450] See also, Wright, *Critical religious education*, p. 144.

recap, because teachers are in favour of engaging with truth claims of faiths in the face of this tension despite data emerged such a path is not followed profoundly, teachers, to do this more systematically and deeply, could be supported by Wright's approach, as Wright offers the best account of what it means to pursue truth in RE.

Thus, the present thesis not only reveals the existing situation and states that it should continue, but it also emphasises the necessity for refinement regarding this existing situation. It can be said that this argument is likely to change RE for the better because the current situation is considered together with the theoretical argument. Because expressing that the good situation existing in schools should be maintained with refinements is to support the spread of the best approach to this tension in schools, we can now say that the empirical study and the theoretical part play a more important role together in achieving the aim of this thesis, which is concerned with the flourishing of society in relation to this tension.

Relating this to religious literacy, this indicates that schools have a limited understanding of religious literacy, as teachers focus more on developing basic knowledge and understanding about faiths rather than encouraging critical engagement with them. In other words, religious literacy in schools is limited since the most common categories of religious literacy have not been found as the best ways with regard to the flourishing of society here, while the least common category in terms of numbers is found as the most promising way. As a result, we can argue that religious literacy in schools should be thought of as greatly predicated on the premises of CRE.

C) Section two: CRE and happiness can together lead to a more genuinely flourishing society

In the previous section, it was argued that CRE, in the face of conflicting truth claims of different worldviews, has greater potential to lead to a genuinely flourishing society than the vision that does not take up the question of truth in a thorough and influential way, but centralises knowledge and understanding, contextual looking, and individuality and diversity. This suggests, among the existing accounts, the premises of CRE are necessary most for RE to genuinely contribute to the flourishing of society. This second section further argues, if Wright's approach is coupled with a view of happiness in relation to what we ultimately aim to achieve, they have more power in handling this tension; and therefore, are more likely to lead to a better society. The basic connection between these two sections is based on the logic that, as emphasised earlier, after revealing the most powerful account, it is to say that it should go hand in hand with another promising argument.

In doing this, this section first continues with a critique of CRE on the grounds that it lacks the notion of happiness. Next, the section, after drawing attention to the importance of happiness for society, argues that CRE and happiness should go hand in hand. The section concludes with some possible objections to centralising happiness in RE.

C. a) A critique of CRE

In this part, I find CRE as lacking since, despite its premises that involve the notions of pursuing truth, truthful living, knowledge and understanding, contextual looking, and developing the horizons of students for example, it does not develop any account of the notion of happiness as what human beings aspire to. The basic meaning of this criticism has to do with the lack of something promising. For example, an approach concerned with understanding faiths does not

give attention to the horizons of children can be found lacking if involving this dimension can result in better understanding. For this principal reason, any approach, even if it is promising, may be found to be incomplete because it does not contain a different important element. This can perhaps be viewed as a sympathetic criticism that values the thrust of CRE's educational vision but offers refinements and alternative ways of thinking.[451]

Throughout this thesis, it has been said that the notion of happiness in relation to what we ultimately strive for is greatly bypassed in RE and religious literacy. However, we should highlight, this does not mean some may have been, though mainly tentatively, referred to this relationship. A primary example of this is Wright himself. In expounding the intimate connection between pursuing truth and truthful living as a dual task through Plato's philosophy, Wright writes:

> "*Plato recognizes the presence of a deeply rooted emotional or spiritual motivation driving the pursuit of truth… The desire to apprehend and possess God, or the Good, motivates the search for that which we once knew but cannot now properly recall…This pursuit of truth is both an end in itself, and a path to personal and social well-being. Human beings seek happiness, and find it in a virtuous life lived in the light of the reality of God."*[452]

Wright here touches on the notion of happiness in the context of the Platonic account of RE, that is because the context of happiness takes up a central place in Plato. Yet, this may suggest Wright is somehow aware of the idea of happiness in relation to what humans seek to achieve. Indeed, this is also evident in an article where Wright and Hella mention the notion of *the good life* as what we desire to live and say RE should be driven by pursuing truth and truthful living since there are contested accounts of reality and good life.[453] Despite this realisation of the relationship between *the good life* and what humans seek to achieve, Wright and Hella, however, do not develop this relationship any further. This is also clearly seen in the book where CRE is translated into practice to be guidance for teachers, and which is expected to include important components that could guide teachers to pave the way for the flourishing of society. What takes central place as a general theme is truthful living which is connected to the question of truth: students should ask the implications of something being true. They state that, for example:

> *"As always, CRE is concerned not just with questions of truth, but looking at the implications of different purported truths for how we should behave. This will often involve thinking about questions of purpose. CRE encourages students to ask: 'If X is the truth, what does that mean for me?' 'What are the implications of X for how I should behave?' For this scheme of work, examples of such questions are as follows: If there is no pre-designated purpose for creation, does this mean I can behave in any way that I feel like? If it is true that humanity results from a godless process of evolution, what implications does this have for whether we should care for weaker members of society? If God created humans by a process of evolution, how should I treat nonhuman animals?"*[454]

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[451] This language is borrowed from Trevor Cooling [review], 'Kevin O'Grady, *Conceptualising Religion and Worldviews for the School: Opportunities, Challenges, and Complexities of a Transition from Religious Education in England and Beyond* (New York, 2023)', *International Journal of Christianity and Education* 27.2 (2023).
[452] Wright, *Critical religious education,* p. 71.
[453] Hella and Wright, 'Learning 'about' and 'from' religion'.
[454] *Ibid*., p. 78.

The concern as the main central notion is further evident in a story Wright tells us about two pigs.[455] These two pigs, Wright describes, were living in a sty where there was everything that a pig would want, such as shelter, food, water, and a huge puddle of mud. One night after a terrible storm, one side of the sty collapsed, and despite his friend's efforts to persuade him not to go out, one pig decided to explore the outside world. In his travel, he witnessed different events such as a family weeping over the body of a young child, a father and his son playing a game together, and a fox being beaten up by a badger. These incidents put the pig in different moods: upset, happy, and angry. With the confusion of feelings, the pig decided to rest under a tree in which there was an owl. These two had a conversation, and the pig asked the owl about the meaning of life. The pig said he was confused. The owl replied that she could not tell him, but if he returned home, he would be a contented pig, or if he stayed, he could be a discontented philosopher.[456] Pursuing truth and truthful living are often associated with the notion of wisdom. In this case, being a discontented philosopher is connected to being wise.

There is an impression in this story as if the pig staying in the sty prefers a life away from adventures, a happy life. At this point, we can ask questions like whether the pig exploring the outside world also aspires to happiness and what is the relationship between pursuing truth and our ultimate aspiration to happiness. From this we can argue, where we can aim for happiness and at the same time wisdom, Wright's story, even though wisdom can demand sense and sensibility, can be read as incomplete because it does not establish and develop this connection: the pig showed courage to explore the outside world, can also want to attain happiness for example.

In addition to this central concern of CRE, precepts of respect and tolerance are of great importance. Here, as stated previously, respecting individuals and engaging critically with beliefs are underlined, and tolerance is defined as 'allowing other people to hold their beliefs…whilst being willing to voice reasons for why you think that they are wrong.'[457]

Indeed, even though scholars, including Wright, can be aware of the importance of the flourishing of society as an important aim of the subject, they typically think of flourishing as a state that RE can contribute or help in achieving as a result of doing some tasks. Such tasks can be related to the virtues of respect and tolerance, obtaining knowledge and understanding, pursuing truth and truthful living, or enhancement of democratic values. To give an example, O'Grady has recently discussed that 'enhancement of democratic values should be the criterion by which to judge anything that happens in a school.'[458] Arguing against competition culture in schools, he thinks that RE, even if it is faith-based, can contribute to democracy when difference is recognised, pupils are enabled to develop their own worldviews, and alternative visions of the good life are considered. Thus, while a main aim of the subject is regarded as attaining a flourishing life by scholars including Wright and they offer tasks in achieving this, what I want to contend is that the issue that RE can contribute to the flourishing of society through understanding the importance of happiness in relation to what we ultimately aim to achieve is ignored in RE.

CRE, once again, has great potential to contribute to the flourishing of society. It follows that, while the premises of CRE are necessary if RE is going to contribute to society, it is lacking the common aspiration for happiness that holds all human beings together. Therefore, it will

[455] It is important to note that Wright also refers to animal sheep rather than pigs.
[456] Easton et al., *Critical Religious Education in Practice*, p. 1.
[457] *Ibid.,* p. 11.
[458] O'Grady, *Conceptualising Religion and Worldviews for the School,* p. 142.

be argued that CRE should go hand in hand with the notion of happiness if RE is to make a great contribution to society. This will be addressed at the end of part B of this section. However, before coming to this point I will first, at the beginning of the same part, argue that centralising happiness, in relation to this tension, has great potential to contribute to society.

Before proceeding, I think it is important to note that the vision of bringing the notion of happiness to attention in relation to what humans seek to achieve is, as previously noted, informed by the account of Aristotle. As previously mentioned, the term '*eudaimonia*' is translated as *the flourishing of society* as well as *happiness*.[459] Using these terms together in this thesis needs more clarification as the relationship between these two can be built in different ways. For example, they tend not to be taken together by some scholars such as Stern. In his book where the notion of happiness only takes one paragraph space, Stern embarks from the observation that happiness can be an obvious objective for RE.[460] He then draws attention to the idea that happiness can be sacrificed for the sake of freedom which seems to be given a higher value. This is exacerbated by the discussion that happiness if taken as entertainment and current and temporary, is not a proper aim for RE. He concludes by using the term human flourishing, which indicates living a virtuous life, instead of happiness. The main question, again, here is concerned with the relationship between flourishing and happiness. In this regard, one can state that these two do not mean the same thing by asking questions such as whether one has to be happy to flourish or vice versa. This can be regarded as a reasonable argument, as, for instance, a philosopher may be very successful and therefore may be seen as having, to an extent, a flourishing life despite being unhappy.

But what does such an argument about flourishing and happiness imply? To reiterate, because flourishing seems to evoke more of a process, it is more meaningful to interpret it as something that can lead to happiness, while using happiness as referring to what human beings ultimately strive for that can also come with having a flourishing life seems to be more apposite. The argument that a process of living a flourishing life with a family as a consequence of a desired marriage can lead to happiness seems to be convincing.

Therefore, in responding to such questions, we should think of flourishing as not necessarily separate from being happy. In fact, flourishing is more meaningful when it involves happiness. Moreover, this does not change the fact that we pursue happiness even if we would have a flourishing life in a limited sense. Having a flourishing life involving happiness is preferable to having only a flourishing life without being happy. The opposite seems also to be greatly true, having a happy life involving flourishing is preferable to only feeling happy. Therefore, the happiness of the pig who preferred to stay at home in Wright's story is perhaps limited. In this light, flourishing and happiness are together more meaningful. It is in this sense that these terms are seen as greatly interrelated in this thesis. Thus, since what we ultimately aim to achieve is happiness including also flourishing, centralising the notion of happiness in RE has great potential in handling this tension in the best way. At this point, once again, I would like to point out that although in this thesis terms such as the flourishing of society have been often used in relation to this tension for instance (the tension between exclusive truth claims of faiths and the need to promote *the flourishing of society*), they allude to similar ideas (flourishing/happiness) articulated here.

[459] See, for example, Julian Stern, *Schools and Religions: Imagining the Real* (London, 2007), p. 81.
[460] *Ibid.,* p. 80.

C. b) The contribution of RE to the flourishing of society via centralising the notion of happiness as what humans ultimately aspire to: reflecting on Aristotle's account

The central contention of this part is that bringing the notion of happiness to attention in relation to what humans ultimately seek to achieve has a great potential in handling this tension in the best way, whereby to contribute to the flourishing of society better. Therefore, it should go hand in hand with CRE which is necessary for RE to contribute to the flourishing of society.

Why happiness should be central in RE in relation to what we ultimately aim to achieve is informed by the account of Aristotle, explained in his book *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle (384- 322 B.C.) was born in Stagira which belongs to the Chalcidice peninsula.[461] He studied at Athens in Plato's school. David Ross states, we 'need to suppose that it was any attraction to the life of philosophy that drew him into Academy.'[462] Often referenced in the works of many scholars, Aristotle is accepted as one of the greatest philosophers. It is often believed that Aristotle's ethics is developed in most detail *in Nicomachean ethics*.[463] Since it is concerned with ethics, this book can be said to have great insights specifically for the flourishing of society.

In this book, Aristotle points out, there can be various ends as there are many actions, arts, and sciences. Moreover, in every art and inquiry, our actions are directed at some good: good is that at which these things aim. This being the case, there are various goods: in medicine it is health, in architecture it is a house, for instance. End and good are often used as equivalents.[464]

Aristotle argues that goods can be spoken about in two ways: a supreme good that is good in itself; and some others that can be loved for themselves but are also chosen for something else. However, the good is not a shared element determining everything that is good. The source of what makes something good, such as wisdom and pleasure, are different: 'therefore, good is not a general term corresponding to a single Idea.'[465]

In this light, Aristotle argues, there is one main end around which subordinate ends rotate: in order to reach the main end, it is aimed to reach other ends. If our end is for something for its own sake and not for the sake of other things, it is the end of the things we are seeking for. This is the chief good. Aristotle's own words provide a better explanation:

> "*Now there do appear to be several ends at which our actions aim; but as we choose some of them—for instance wealth, or flutes, and instruments generally—as a means to something else, it is clear that not all of them are final ends; whereas the Supreme Good seems to be something final. Consequently, if there be some one thing which alone is a final end, this thing—or if there be several final ends, the one among them which is the most final—will be the Good which we are seeking."*[466]

At this point, Aristotle envisions an end point because the opposite will be empty and vain. He thinks that at that rate the contrary 'would obviously result in a process ad infinitum, so that all

[461] David Ross, *Aristotle* (6thedn, London, 1995), p. 1.
[462] *Ibid.*
[463] Otfried Höffe, 'Introduction', in Otfried Höffe (ed.), *Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics",* trans. David Fernbach (Leiden, 2010), p. 3.
[464] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[465] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book one, VI: p. 23. For a detailed discussion see also, Hellmut Flashar, 'The critique of Plato', in Otfried Höffe (ed.), *Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics",* trans. David Fernbach (Leiden, 2010).
[466] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book one, VII: p. 27.

desire would be futile and vain.'[467] The chief good is happiness that is sufficient in itself. What is envisioned to be said here is that, for example, generally speaking, one aims for money for the sake of happiness, but one is not happy for the sake of money. To use Carlotta Capuccino's expression, 'the pursuit of happiness, for Aristotle, is the ultimate end of human action, the chief good, the best thing.'[468] More profoundly in Aristotle's own words:

> *"Now happiness above all else appears to be absolutely final in this sense, since we always choose it for its own sake and never as a means to something else; whereas honour, pleasure, intelligence, and excellence in its various forms, we choose indeed for their own sakes (since we should be glad to have each of them although no extraneous advantage resulted from it), but we also choose them for the sake of happiness, in the belief that they will be a means to our securing it. But no one chooses happiness for the sake of honour, pleasure, etc., nor as a means to anything whatever other than itself."*[469]

When we accept Aristotle's argument, we can consider human beings, once again, as striving for a flourishing happy existence. This perhaps can be characterised as a human given. In this light, understanding the connection of the wisdom of Aristotle to RE, I find the structure of Grimmitt's vision of RE useful here, predicated on the answer to the question of what it means to be human.[470] One feature that is given, defining humans resides in meaning-making. We, humans, give meaning to our lives, this is our given; and therefore, RE should rotate around our very nature. RE should serve humanisation. Regarding Aristotle's argument, happiness is what we ultimately aim for, hence RE should centralise this notion.

In this light, considering happiness as a central notion or bringing it to attention in relation to what humans seek offers a new look at RE in terms of RE's contribution to the flourishing of society in particular. In other words, placing this ultimate aspiration deriving from our very nature at the centre of RE can enhance the subject. The main reason for this is to become more aware of something that originates from the structure of our existence, to recognise it more accurately, and as a result, to follow, in light of this driving force, reasonable paths to attain it.

In this context, focusing on happiness aims for the expansion of consciousness: where it is argued that individuals are more capable of contributing to the flourishing of society when the notion of happiness is brought to their attention, we should recognise the significance of the notion of awareness or reflection as a central dimension of this process. We have to be aware of what we are aiming to achieve prior to asking how best to attain it. We cannot necessarily assume that the direction necessary for effectively contributing to society is automatically in place and put all of our efforts into the tasks in the belief perfecting such tasks will contribute to the flourishing of society. Instead, we should proceed by making students aware of the notion of happiness as what we ultimately aim for: students should be motivated to develop appropriate levels of awareness and reflection. If awareness of happiness has somehow priority over contributing to the flourishing of society in the belief of inspiring it, then centralising the notion of happiness in relation to what we ultimately aim to achieve appears to have great value in contributing to the flourishing of society.

In other words, it can be reasonably claimed that deliberately contributing to the flourishing of society is less likely unless the value of happiness is comprehended. Generally speaking, if

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[467] *Ibid*., book one, I: p. 5.
[468] Carlotta Capuccino, 'Happiness and Aristotle's Definition of Eudaimonia', *Philosophical topics* 41.1 (2013), p. 5.
[469] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book one, VII: pp, 27, 29.
[470] See Chapter 1, Section C.

children learn and are made aware that our purpose is to attain happiness, then within the intrinsic and logical force of happiness, in the face of the attraction of happiness and aversion to pain they can contribute to things needed to have flourishing lives. Another way of characterizing this line of thought is to say that the goal of goodness will be more likely reached by virtue of love and passion directed by the awareness of what we as humans ultimately aim to reach. We can assume that when children interiorise happiness as an aim of our actions, then it is more viable to expect them to be respectful and tolerable, for instance, if these two are for the sake of a flourishing happy existence. As such, happiness can give a certain route to these sayings. Therefore, happiness should be a direct object of our quest for the flourishing of society.

Concentrating on the notion of happiness and realising that we ultimately aim for happiness can play a very important role in handling this tension between exclusive truth claims and the need to promote the flourishing of society in the best way. Different aspects of this can be construed. Before giving examples, to understand their reference point, it is important to note that happiness can be considered in different contexts. It can be thought of in terms of the worldviews of faiths, whether religious or non-religious: different worldviews can be evaluated in relation to the notion of happiness. It also, more specifically, can be construed in relation to the precepts such as respect, tolerance, empathy, trust, harmony, and peaceful coexistence. In fact, at the centre of RE, as seen in the works of many given in the previous chapters, lie the concepts of respect, tolerance, and empathy, for instance. These are reasonable terms to be used and developed, but centralising happiness can make these usages more meaningful. Added to this, since unity in being human for example is important to approach this tension, happiness can be seen as providing a substantial ground of unity.

First, the desire to take various worldviews seriously and adopt truthful beliefs is more likely to happen if this is seen as a necessary process serving happiness as something that we ultimately aim to attain. This is, within the awareness of happiness as our ultimate goal, driven by the possibility that a different worldview can lead to better flourishing lives; and in this context, it is about the opportunities and horizons that can come by taking different worldviews seriously. As a result of the desire and impulse brought about by the belief of reaching happiness, we would be more likely to take different worldviews seriously and consequently be willing to adopt truthful beliefs in the sense that this would likely lead to the flourishing of society. In this sense, considering CR's argument that reality is pluriform and Hirst's theory of knowledge, conflicting truth claims of worldviews can concern a wide range of issues such as ultimate reality, environment, and morals.[471] If RE is to contribute to the flourishing of society, truth claims about various areas can be taken into play, as different worldviews may have different visions about the environment, for instance. Nel Noddings notes that 'the biophilia hypothesis holds that human beings have a genetically based need to affiliate with nature… an intimate connection with the natural world is a continuing source of happiness for many people, and it is possible that the biophilia hypothesis is right – that we are genetically disposed to need this connection.'[472] Given our relationship to nature, if for example, a mostly concrete city and a well-protected city concerning nature may have different effects on human happiness, then approaching the environment most reasonably can be embraced more willingly, which requires a serious engagement with truth claims of various worldviews. Thus, the tension is likely to be handled in the best way since the most appropriate account in terms of the flourishing of society is pursued.

[471] For more information see Chapter 3, Section B.
[472] Nel Noddings, *Happiness and Education* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 124, 129.

At this point, one might argue that centralising happiness has the potential to make the study of faiths instrumental in serving the end of happiness. As previously discussed, for RE to become a means to other ends is not problematic insofar as the subject reflects the nature of religion truthfully in terms of elements such as content and purpose.[473] A merely instrumental RE has been criticised in the belief that it undermines the study of religion in its own right in terms of such elements. In this respect, since happiness is taken in relation to the content and purpose of faiths it is compatible with the study of religion on its own merits.

Second, within the awareness of happiness as what we ultimately aim to achieve, if believing in different faiths contributes to people's happiness, it may become more understandable why people believe in these beliefs, which can generate more genuine tolerance and respect, for instance. Moreover, since any other worldview, that can have more potential to lead to flourishing lives, can be regarded as more truthful than ours; then this possibility can again generate more genuine tolerance and respect. Again, this is not to say the value of religion is reduced to human happiness, but that involving happiness as what we ultimately aim to achieve can generate more sincere respect and tolerance for people and their beliefs.

It has been argued that although some scholars recognise faith differences, they find unity in something else. For example, Grimmitt applies a type of unity marked by being human or humanisation: despite our faith differences, we are all human giving meaning to our lives. Focusing on unity in something else rather than in religions as universal monotheism is reasonable because finding out common grounds e.g., in values, in perceived virtues, in the sense of being human, in the matter of truth, in caring for nature or others etc. can make engagement with differences more meaningful and sustainable. It follows that if focusing on some similar basis is important in handling this tension, this, by virtue of its importance, should involve happiness. What is meant by this is that when people see each other as individuals aiming to attain happiness, they may serve each other's happiness in the best way because, for example, they may think their happiness depends on this. This at the same time can contribute to friendship among people, which might pave the way for a flourishing society. Stern argues that friendship can function as an equaliser between old and young people, for example: despite differences friendship can establish the ground of equality.[474] Stern's suggestion can be read as follows: it is difficult to establish friendships between people of 'different classes' in a society where the idea of class division is alive. Aristotle draws attention to this idea in the eighth book of *Nichomachean ethics*. Mentioning different forms of the constitution such as Kingship, Aristocracy, and Timocracy, and the corruptions of these forms, which are Tyranny, Oligarchy, and Democracy in turn; Aristotle, for example, argues that a tyrant always pursues his good while ignoring the others and this, in turn, can lead to master-slave relationship. It is difficult to establish friendship between the master and slave, as friendship is limited between rulers and subjects in a tyranny. In Timocracy and Democracy, there is the idea of equality, and therefore friendship is easy to establish. It can be claimed that even in a democratic society if the idea of class division is still alive it is difficult to establish genuine friendships between people who are thought to belong to different classes and worldviews. For example, people living in countries such as England can classify themselves as Westerners and white, while categorising other people as Easterners and not white. Since there appears to be a human propensity to see themselves as superior to others, it will be difficult to establish genuine friendships with other people. As a third note, if the notion of happiness is taken as what everyone is trying to achieve, it has the potential to unite people on the same ground and eradicate this class division. In other

[473] For more information see Chapter 3, Section B.
[474] Stern, 'The personal world of schooling', p. 732.

words, happiness can develop a more equal understanding and unity among people in the context of their search for the same thing.

A good theory can be more desirable when it is contributed to or complemented with some other good.[475] We are now in a position to argue that CRE together with happiness as our aspiration can lead to a better flourishing society. The premises of CRE are necessary if RE is going to contribute to the flourishing of society. We need to specifically underline the importance of the notions of pursuing truth and truthful living, knowledge and understanding, and contextual looking, and we need to listen to diversity; however, we need to remember that we are all in the same boat in the sense of having an aspiration for happiness. RE can reconfigure itself as not just the study of religious and non-religious worldviews in terms of these elements such as pursuing truth and truthful living but also as pursuing happiness as a common human aspiration.

To elaborate on this, the three contexts given above can be considered in the interplay between CRE and happiness. In the first example, we said one reason we might take different beliefs seriously was that they would offer more promising accounts in leading to flourishing happy lives. Of course, once again, the use of the concepts of truth and truthfulness one after the other not only tells us that Wright sees truth as important in itself and therefore, we need to pursue it; but also, it is important to pursue truth because truthful living, which can come with the knowledge of reality, is regarded as momentous in leading to flourishing lives. However, we should point out that placing happiness at the centre of RE as what we ultimately strive for is more conducive to yielding the acceptance of these premises of CRE. More informatively, this points out the difference between saying that we should pursue truth because it is important in itself and is likely to generate a flourishing society and saying that happiness is what we ultimately aim to achieve and therefore in order to attain this we need to pursue truth and strive for having truthful lives. There is a degree of difference between the two; that is, the latter tends to serve a more directing, inspiring, and energizing task. Though Wright's approach can raise a request to adopt what is truthful, good, or negating the bad; since happiness is that at which we aim, why we should pursue truth and live truthfully has a meaning in regard to getting us to what we desire to achieve: happiness.

Secondly, we said that in CRE, alongside the centrality of pursuing truth and truthful living, some precepts such as respect and tolerance are deemed important in the context of the flourishing of the society. These principles are not treated as an end in themselves, but rather as means that can lead to a greater end. Added to this, the development of these precepts for people is given priority, and there is respect and tolerance for beliefs as well as critical engagement with them. In the process of pursuing truth and truthful living, when we see happiness as what we ultimately strive for, we may genuinely develop respect and tolerance for people and their beliefs in the belief that they can add meaning to their lives, serving their happiness. In addition, we may think that it is necessary to develop genuine respect and tolerance for people and, alongside critical engagement, for their beliefs, in the sense that the opposite can undermine the process of finding a more promising account that can genuinely lead to a flourishing happy society.

Third, we saw that it is important to focus on similarities and the concept of unity in this sense in the literature. Although this was mostly based around the unity of different belief systems as rotating around the idea of the same Sacred in the past, it is common today to seek unity in

[475] A similar idea was drawn attention to in *Nichomachean Ethics* book 10. Here I only take this idea in the sense that two good things can be more desirable.

something else rather than in religions. In Wright, this is greatly put forward around the question of truth: the aim to pursue truth and truthful living is regarded as a foundation that can unite people on the same ground. I think this may be more meaningful with the notion of happiness. Considering people as they ultimately strive for happiness can provide a common foundation among us. In this context, when unity is developed on the basis of happiness, then individuals can take the question of truth more seriously for the sake of everybody.

In addition to these three arguments, we can highlight that indeed pursuing truth and happiness necessarily hang together in an ongoing journey. In explaining Aristotle's points of *eudaimonia* John L. Ackrill states, 'you cannot say of eudaimonia that you seek it for the sake of anything else, you can say of anything else that you seek it for the sake of eudaimonia; you cannot say you would prefer eudaimonia plus something extra to eudaimonia.'[476] In this light, we can claim that although truth can be deemed as important in itself, the main point of it can essentially be regarded as serving happiness, and we can say that only after having the truth of the totality of reality, we may totally and supremely feel happy, fulfilled, and satisfied. Indeed, the first sentences of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* suggest the same thing: Aristotle, as previously given, argues, 'all men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight.'[477] In this quest to reach the truth, Aristotle's giving a special place to the sense of sight is a good example serving as a further illustration of what we are saying. Although different senses can be accepted as complementary to each other, we can understand what Aristotle means by asking whether we would be more satisfied if we understood the life existing on a planet outside the world through the sense of hearing, for example, or the sense of sight. Aristotle recommends us to see that obtaining truth can make us happy. Thus, once again, CRE is necessary for RE to contribute to the flourishing of society, but if it goes hand in hand with centralising happiness as what we ultimately strive for, together they become more powerful and meaningful in achieving the flourishing of society.

Now we should point out that happiness may be conceived to be the supreme good, but it is surrounded by confusion. In order to spell out the justification of the argument of happiness as a central point in RE in relation to what we ultimately aim to achieve, it is necessary to touch on, albeit briefly, some possible objections.

D) Some possible objections to centralising the notion of happiness in RE

First of all, one may attack the idea of centralising happiness, holding that arguments similar to those are meaningless because what makes individuals happy is relative. In arguing against compulsory RE as a subject in its own right, John White, for example, has questioned the affirmation of critical engagement with truth claims of faiths as having an intrinsic value.[478] For White, listening to Mozart, running marathons, and eating out can be deemed as an end in themselves by different people. As such, in Wright's words, 'we are free to choose for ourselves that which we consider to be intrinsic worth.'[479] Though White and Wright miss the point of discussing this in relation to happiness as the chief good in itself; if this argument is read in the sense that what makes people happy is regarded as different, and therefore what motivates one individual can be meaningless to another, then would not happiness be regarded as a weak

[476] John L. Ackrill, 'Aristotle on Eudaimonia', in Otfried Höffe (ed.), *Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics",* trans. David Fernbach (Leiden, 2010), p. 40.
[477] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, p. 3.
[478] John White, 'Reply to Andrew Wright', *British Journal of Religious Education* 27.1 (2005), p. 22.
[479] Wright, *Critical religious education,* p. 125.

stimulus? Against such questions, it is reasonable to argue that though happiness may vary according to people's needs, in general, certain things seem to pave the way to attain happiness. It is more comprehensive to say humans seek the same things than they pursue different things. A green environment would be the thing to make those who live in a concrete city happy; and wealth for those who are poor. What can make people happy is likely to be less relative; abnormality of them may make the attainment of happiness more relative. The issue that individuals, when compared to other people, desire the things that they do not possess testifies to this fact. As such, one is more likely to flourish and be happy if different parts of their life are in a desirable state than one who lacks important things. It is important to emphasise this point in RE, because, once again, perceiving everything as relative may loosen the meaning of focusing on the notion of happiness.

If, however, abnormality of what can make us happy is the case, then does not this suggest that some people may not attain happiness at the same level as others? Aristotle states that a man of a very ugly appearance is not likely to be happy.[480] If there is an aesthetic nature of reality and we naturally pursue beautiful things, then a beautiful person will feel luckier than a person who has some deficiency in their body. When being happy is to be centralised, and if some people have more possibility to attain happiness than others, then does not this also tell us that it will pave the way for a division between people?

In fact, this can be extended with some other similar questions and objections. For example, one can question if attaining things that are for the sake of happiness can make us happier, does not the loss of them make us upset more? Added to this, assertions that real happiness is unattainable in this world and that happiness may not be a steady presence partly because of external factors can be attributed as that centralising happiness in RE tends to fall short in motivating individuals to contribute to the flourishing of society more willingly.[481] One can also argue that it is more reasonable to avoid making happiness as the direct purpose of our life, and rather focus on things that can lead to happiness. John Stuart Mill's perspective explains the point well:

> *"I now thought that this end [happiness] was only to be attained by not making it the direct end. Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way … Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so. The only chance is to treat, not happiness, but some end external to it, as the purpose of life … This theory now became the basis of my philosophy of life*."[482]

There is truth in such conditions and statements. However, this does not change the fact that we want to attain happiness and that we can achieve it. Moreover, just because something isn't permanent doesn't mean it isn't valuable, for instance. It may not be eliminating some suffering, no one deserves to avoid the notion of happiness. Focusing on happiness can contribute to the flourishing of society more than ignoring it. Therefore, it should be explained in RE that happiness is attainable, and we should develop an understanding that will serve everyone's happiness as much as possible. In addition, concentrating on means can be valuable but, again,

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[480] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book one, VIII: p. 43.
[481] For the idea that real happiness is unattainable in this world, see for example, Augustine, *Concerning the city of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London, 1984).
[482] John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, ed. John M. Robson (London, 1989), pp. 117-118.

the idea of happiness as a trigger and comprehensive notion should not be lost, because happiness has the potential to impulse people and inspire them as an integrating idea that renders other things more meaningful. Not placing concepts such as tolerance in the context of happiness and expecting each to be meaningful on its own, for example, is like expecting a ship with an uncertain route to sail to a good destination.

Second, can keeping the notion of happiness in the foreground motivate bad actions to attain it? Since happiness is deemed very important, some people may aim for a good life by doing bad deeds. For instance, some capitalists would like to ruin other people and nature for their own happiness. Such possibilities do not necessitate avoiding the notion of happiness in relation to what we ultimately aim to achieve; on the contrary, since our nature somehow directs us to things that will make us happy even though we are not fully aware of it, and attainment of many things may not come in the right way; it needs to be handled correctly, and this is an important reason why it should be central in RE. In this light, it should be emphasised that the ways to attain happiness are important: children should be taught that happiness should be attained in the right way, as Jigme Khesar has remarked, 'for individuals, pursuing true happiness implies striving towards a certain purity, a nobility of goal— some sort of perfection. It cannot arise from wrongful, harmful, or contrived circumstances.'[483] If it is handled correctly then RE can be very helpful in solving problems that exist in society today. To this end, the more well-educated children are in this regard, the more they can contribute to the flourishing of society. Of course, different views can be developed in RE such as that our happiness actually depends on the happiness of other people: in a society in which only some can be happy is no safer than living in a society where most people are happy. Moreover, it can be underlined that affiliating with nature, for example, brings happiness to many people. Children need to understand how we can be happy in the best possible way with the resources at hand that should be used in the right way. We can destroy forests to build beautiful houses to be happy, but we should stay away from things that will make us unhappy in the long term. In doing this, they should also think not only during their own lives but also for generations to come after them in light of the arguments like if previous generations did not think about next generations, their possibility of having happy lives would be impoverished.

Third, one may ask whether focusing on happiness entails not understanding the tensions and contradictions in reality. Kierkegaard wanted us to think that tensions and contradictions of life should be understood; aiming happiness without these means limiting human freedom, entailing ignorance of them.[484] He says 'whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate.'[485] In the same vein Nietzsche believed that suffering is important in order to understand how reality is actually is.[486] A similar idea was expressed by Grimmitt in RE, stating that strengthening behaviour 'by reducing or removing what pupils do not 'like' is not only to foster unrealistic expectations of life for these pupils, it is to fail to encourage the acquisition of those skills, attitudes and values upon which their capacities to meet future difficulties in their lives will depend.'[487] The central questions here are concerned with whether understanding the nature of reality that involves tensions and contradictions is more valuable than happiness, and whether focusing on happiness can preclude understanding reality.

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[483] Jigme Khesar, *Foreword*, in Susan David, Ilona Boniwell, and Amanda Conley Ayers (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Happiness* (Oxford, 2013).
[484] Soren Kierkegaard, *The concept of anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton, 1980). See also Emy Van Deurzen, 'Continental contributions to our understanding of happiness and suffering', in Susan David, Ilona Boniwell, and Amanda Conley Ayers (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Happiness* (Oxford, 2013), p. 281.
[485] Kierkegaard, *The concept of anxiety*, p. 155.
[486] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, 1961).
[487] Grimmitt, *Religious education and human development,* p. 64.

These arguments indeed raise questions like whether wisdom is better than concentrating on happiness, and whether pursuing truth should be connected to happiness. Understanding the nature of reality that can involve tensions, contradictions, and suffering can be seen as valuable in itself, people, for instance, can gain insight into the meaning of life by witnessing or experiencing certain events that can include some suffering such as starvation, but this is not contrary to the issue that humans ultimately strive for a flourishing happy existence. When we ask questions like whether understanding the nature of reality should be the only thing in our lives, and whether this should be the last thing we should possess, probably most people will prefer that this neither be the only thing in their lives nor should it be the last thing. We would be more likely to prefer to also have a flourishing happy life and choose a flourishing happy life as what we are ultimately looking for. Thus, understanding the nature of reality cannot be considered an argument beyond a flourishing happy existence. As argued above, wisdom becomes more meaningful, when it is connected to the notion of happiness. Indeed, once again, wisdom is necessary to be happy, and this is also the case in Aristotle: his vision of happiness does not only pass through theoretical activity (contemplation) as Aristotle says for example 'the life of the intellect is the best and the pleasantest life for man, inasmuch as the intellect more than anything else is man; therefore this life will be the happiest'; but also secondly through moral activity, as Jerome Moran puts it, 'a good man is a man who reasons well and behaves well morally.'[488] More than this, while wisdom can help us understand the world involving tension and contradiction, the notion of happiness can help us strive for a happy society. Therefore, tensions and contradictions can make more sense when they are understood in relation to the notion of happiness. This again affirms that happiness and Wright's CRE should be centralised together in RE.

In relation to this, focusing on happiness is not contrary to the notion of asceticism or suffering in religions. It is indeed momentous in understanding the vast majority of religious traditions. Influenced by John Hick, Teece proposed that religions should be studied with respect to their soteriological dimension, relating to the transcendent.[489] Religions conceive an unsatisfactory dimension of the human condition and offer soteriology for liberation and transformation of an inadequate existence. Why the vast majority of religions promise emancipation can be understood in the context of happiness so that their messages can be understood better. This is again in line with the pursuing truth argument because the accounts of salvation can be evaluated in relation to the notion of happiness.

Finally, a devout person can regard some notions such as 'being blessed by God' in their religious tradition as the final aim of human life, and therefore more valuable than focusing on the notion of happiness. However, as soon as we reflect on the point of being blessed for instance, we again realise that it is perhaps an approval of having a flourishing happy existence under the light of the presence of God. Therefore, again, it is reasonable to join Aristotle's philosophy that a flourishing happy existence is what we ultimately strive for.

To comprehend this argument alongside the preceding parts of the thesis, it has been stated that CRE represents the most viable solution currently accessible to this tension concerning the

[488] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 10, VII: p. 619. Jerome Moran, 'Aristotle on Eudaimonia ('Happiness')', *Think: philosophy for everyone* 17.48 (2018), p. 93. However, we should note that the latter is of secondary importance because moral activities are purely human, while the former is related to the divine.

[489] Geoff Teece, 'Learning from religions as 'Skilful Means': a contribution to the debate about the identity of religious education', *British Journal of Religious Education* 30. 3 (2008). See also, John Hick, *An interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, 1989).

flourishing of society; and we see that among teachers, the picture that emerges regarding this tension, truth claims of faiths, and the question of truth are taken seriously, although evidence suggests this consideration is not deep and systematic. Based on the theoretical and empirical parts, it is concluded that the current situation in schools should be maintained, but with an emphasis on deepening and systematising it by acquainting teachers with the principles of Wright's approach. Moreover, despite not specifically addressing the notion of happiness, it has been stated that when the findings of the empirical study are read with respect to happiness, it is not evident in the answers of teachers that centralising the notion of happiness as what we ultimately aim to achieve is a good response to contributing to the flourishing of society. Consequently, we can also now state that since we know the existing situation in schools about centralising the notion of happiness and the theoretical part of this thesis, these two parts can be expected to reinforce change for the better regarding also the notion of happiness. That on the one hand the findings of the survey study, when the data is analysed with respect to happiness, show that concentrating on happiness as what we ultimately aim for is not evident in the responses of teachers, but on the other, the theoretical part taken place in this section shows that developing an awareness of happiness in relation to what we ultimately strive for has great potential in achieving the flourishing of society, the need to centralise the notion of happiness along with CRE in schools is now expected to be seen more clearly and embraced more willingly: the pervasion of CRE and happiness as what we ultimately strive for should be seen as the best available answer to this tension in term of the flourishing of society. Thus, the understanding of religious literacy, which should be thought of as the product of the study of faiths on their own merits, should greatly predicate the principles of CRE and happiness.

E) Conclusion

In this chapter, a comparison was drawn between already existing approaches and it is concluded that CRE is the best answer to this tension in terms of the flourishing of society. By reading this theoretical discussion and empirical findings together, the following issue has been expressed. The situation arising in schools, despite there being important evidence that it is not deep and systematic, pertains to taking contested truth claims of faiths and the question of truth seriously, the path among teachers, for it to be perpetuated more profoundly, should continue and be informed by the principals of CRE.

Although CRE is found to be the account that is likely to have the highest potential to achieve the flourishing of society amongst already existing paths, it is found lacking because it does not concentrate on the notion of happiness as what human beings ultimately aim to achieve. Such a trajectory is the same among teachers in the empirical study: centralising happiness as the ultimate end is not evident among teachers. For this reason, it has been stated, centralising CRE and happiness can enhance RE to be able to reach a very high potential in terms of the flourishing of society in the face of this tension.

The theoretical argument made about religious literacy refers to conceiving religious literacy as being the product of the study of faiths in their rights. Drawing on this, in this chapter it was concluded that religious literacy should predicate on the principles of CRE and happiness as what we ultimately strive for.

A vision of religious literacy reflecting the principles of CRE and happiness can be enhanced in achieving the flourishing of society. The next chapter is concerned with this. It aims to contribute to such an understanding of religious literacy by aiming to contribute to the truth indicators of CRE.

Chapter 7

Truth Criteria in CRE: pursuing truth and truthful living

A) Introduction

So far it has been argued, centralising CRE together with the notion of happiness as what human beings ultimately aspire to can be really the best way of handling this tension, thereby RE can have great potential in achieving the flourishing of society. This chapter further aims to enhance the way of approaching this tension, by aiming to develop, in relation to the notion of happiness, a taxonomy of truth criteria of CRE for teachers to use in the field.

To further elaborate on this, it has been discussed that Wright's CRE is the best account of what it means to pursue truth in RE. CRE is committed to judgemental rationality. One reason why Wright's approach is best account of pursuing truth is that it, in the context of judgemental rationality, offers the following five general criteria (or epistemic indicators): congruence, coherence, fertility, simplicity and depth.[490] At the beginning of the chapter of his book *Critical Religious Education, multiculturalism and the Pursuit of Truth,* in which Wright proffers these truth criteria, he argues that though scholars such as Grimmitt and Jackson acknowledge the importance of evaluating truth claims, this vision 'has not been realized in any systematic or sustained manner and a major reason for this is, I suggest, epistemological: the absence of any coherent understanding of the epistemic basis of religion and of the relationship between faith and reason.'[491] There are different aspects of the epistemic basis of religion and this relationship occurring in Wright's work. One important feature of these refers to epistemic indicators: by subjecting competing truth claims to such indicators, informed critical judgements can be made. I agree with Wright as for example Grimmitt values encouraging pupils to explore knowledge for themselves and arrive at their own conclusions, yet his approach, as previously stated, lacks an account of making informed judgements between competing knowledge accounts we hold. These criteria for adjudicating between worldviews, therefore, are important for fulfilling the promises of CRE. In Whately's words, 'it is by reference to these five [criteria] that pupils are to make their judgements between the differing and competing truth claims made by the various religious (and secular) traditions that they may study.'[492] As also Teece pays attention to the point that 'merely to present them [students] with different and possible claims to truth is to give them no criteria from which to operate their critical faculties.'[493]

Another feature of the epistemic basis of religion and this relationship between faith and reason is driven by the notion of 'faith seeking understanding' instead of 'seeking faith understanding': Wright holds that we proceed from our understanding of the world that we inherit by the society and tradition we live in, rather than trying to build a cartesian fresh point, from the first principles, aiming at absolute certainty. Faith seeking understanding, however, does not mean renouncing realism, since absolute certainty is not to be opposed to merely epistemically arbitrary choice. In this sense, Wright, indeed wants to say that it is not unreasonable to hold beliefs about which we are not sure along with other beliefs that we hold with relatively more epistemic confidence. In this context, it is important to note that, what these different truth criteria do in terms of their function is not to establish the truth and a foundation for a worldview. Rather they offer a way of exploring or of interrogating a

[490] Wright, *Critical religious education,* p. 220. Wright, Christianity and Critical Realism, p. 229.
[491] Wright, *Critical religious education*, p. 207.
[492] Hugo Whately [review - 'Wrestling with Andrew Wright's Truth'], 'Andrew Wright, *Critical religious education, multiculturalism and the pursuit of truth* (Cardiff, 2007)', *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 30 .1 (2009), p. 82.
[493] Teece, 'A religious approach to religious education', p. 9.

worldview in greater depth and detail in relation to understanding its potential truth value. Wright's CRE offers a 'progressive move from less differentiated and less complex to more differentiated and more complex insight.'[494] Saying that truth criteria are important for CRE does not for so much imply that philosophy should dominate the subject at the expense of other disciplines (such as theology).[495] CRE, once again, only tells us that these criteria are tools that can help enhance our understanding of the ultimate order of things, the pursuit of truth and truthful living.

Despite their role, little space is devoted to discussing these five criteria in Wright's work. And in fact, there are doubts about how exactly this might work. In this context, some have expressed the opinion that CRE can only be an abstract fruitless philosophical position.[496] Similar to this, implying the uniqueness of the religious domain concerning metaphysical matters, Erricker points out that:

> *"More difficult still are the justifications and premises provided for both knowledge and truth, which bear no similarity to scientific claims for justifying the same concepts… A further problem ensues when one is aware that no religious claim to truth is in any way verifiable or falsifiable because there are no bases on which this could be judged. All natural laws are suspended in this fanciful land in which everything is possible if you can claim it happened and there is sufficient support for such a claim from believers."*[497]

Moreover, stating that Wright often uses the words of knowledge and truth interchangeably, Erricker criticises Wright, claiming that 'there is a serious problem in the way in which quests for meaning are translated into quests for truth.'[498] This is understandable since Erricker greatly views knowledge as merely constructed, as previously explained, meaning that knowledge cannot reflect some objective reality because it is unknowable, that is, any truth of the relationship between reality and knowledge of reality tends to be ruled out. Another scholar Anna Strhan criticises Wright's work with the observation that RE has come to such a point that rational answers can be given to questions such as whether God exists.[499] This is found to be particularly problematic because of its insistence on seeing the nature of religion as a matter open to straightforward evaluation. Relying on Emmanuel Levinas and Slavoj Žižek, Strhan is convinced that God is beyond rational justification, as it is beyond articulation, and that the existence of God can only be understood with an intuition through ethical order: when we are aware of ethical demands and behave accordingly, it is in that moment that God's existence can be perceived. Furthermore, though agreeing with Wright on the importance of pursuing truth, Olof Franck states, questions of truth should be highlighted in RE, but this should not be taking the form of an argument for or against the tenability of truth claims, or that 'pupils are going to engage in a practical investigation, using criteria such as those mentioned by Wright, to strive for 'rational judgments' when it comes to decide if this or that worldview would pass or not'; rather truth claims of faiths should be discussed by subjecting them to diverse

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[494] Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism, p. 216.*

[495] It is also important to note that, Critical judgement should be subservient to ontological realities, which implies that seeking secure, fixed epistemic criteria means forcing 'reality to conform to our established ways of knowing.' (Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism*, p. 234). Truth criteria are also to be dependent on the nature of the discipline: 'any criteria for truth must flow from the nature of the object under investigation: we cannot measure social, moral, aesthetic or theological truth in the same way we measure the weight of a physical object.' (Ibid, pp. 56, 24). However, this does not preclude these precepts from being generic epistemic indicators.

[496] Conroy et al., *Does Religious Education Work?,* p. 108.

[497] Clive Erricker, 'Discourse and dissonance in contemporary paradigms of RE', in Mark Chater and Clive Erricker, *Does Religious Education Have a Future?: Pedagogical and Policy Prospects* (London, 2013), pp. 83-84.

[498] *Ibid.*

[499] Strhan, 'A Religious Education Otherwise?'.

'criteriologic options, aiming for a more compound and complex picture of what it means to claim that this or that belief, religious or non-religious, is true.'[500] One main reason is that, similar to Erricker and Strhan, it is difficult to arrive at a conclusion in religious domain. Finally, similar to these criticisms, Jackson directs the charge of heavy rationalism as well as the doubt, as explained earlier, of how CRE can in fact work in practice.[501]

Whether those scholars misjudge Wright's work is one side of the argument because, despite the implication of strong rationality on very rare occasions, Wright does not say children should make, or can make, rational choices, the existence of God can be conceived of merely on rational grounds, and demonstrate that a worldview passes or fails; and instead to a great extent what he offers is that children should be in the process of making reasonable choices. Nonetheless, their critiques carry some weight for reasons like in this field it is difficult to arrive at a rational conclusion.

Since these truth indicators are of great importance in pursuing truth but they are not given enough attention in CRE and there are such doubts and criticism specifically about judgemental rationality, contributing to these indicators, which is the aim of this chapter, can be regarded as enhancing approaching this tension in the best possible way. Another way of expressing this point is to say that this chapter aims to contribute to approaching this tension in the best available way whereby to enhance the flourishing of society by aiming to elevate the epistemic indicators in CRE which is found to be the most convincing available account of handling this tension in the best way. Thus, centralising the concept of happiness with a more enhanced CRE will have greater potential to lead to the flourishing of society. The contribution falls into three parts. The first is to underline and draw attention to the issue that if we want to benefit from the power of these criteria, they have to be considered together as a part of an ongoing process. The second point, which can be regarded as the most important contribution of this chapter, is to state that although the notion of happiness is not argued as a truth criterion, when Wright's truth indicators are associated with the idea of happiness it can help us make more sense about the truthfulness of different beliefs. Third, the chapter aims to direct some criticism to these indicators, from which some further studies, by drawing on these points, can contribute to this domain.

B) Epistemic indicators for the truthfulness of faiths

The main subject of this chapter is the five truth indicators presented by Wright. Of course, some other truth criteria such as correspondence or consensus, which are not among Wright's indicators and can be said to be discussed widely in the literature, could have been subjected to this chapter. For example, an argument on why Wright defends these five indicators and not some others could have taken place. It could have also been argued that in addition to Wright's criteria, the inclusion of some of the other criteria widely discussed in the literature could enhance CRE. Such discussions are beyond the scope of this chapter and therefore this chapter is limited to Wright's truth indicators. This however does not mean that RE should be limited to these indicators. When we draw on Wright's insights, it is only to argue that if children are to follow CRE they should be able to approach truth claims of faiths by specifically using these five truth indicators. In this light, since these indicators are seen as important by Wright, this

[500] Olof Franck, 'Critical religious education: highlighting religious truth-claims in non-confessional educational contexts', *British Journal of Religious Education* 37.3 (2015), pp. 235, 237. Thus, rather than saying that a worldview is more truthful, it is more reasonable to shift our attention to what it means to say a belief in a worldview, for example, is true in relation to criteria used in different disciplines.
[501] Jackson, *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality,* pp. 84,85.

chapter aims to contribute to judgmental rationality in CRE by engaging with Wright's truth indicators in themselves. However, besides this, since happiness is a central theme in this thesis and discussed in the previous chapter, it is also argued that happiness can contribute to these criteria even though it is not considered a truth criterion in itself.

B. a) Congruence

Congruence is the quality described by the belief that what is claimed to be true is more likely to be so if it coheres with our life experience. Wright points out, 'the crucial issue is whether the patterns of meaning that inform our lives are congruent with our experience of the way the world really is.'[502] For example, congruence suggests that the proposition 'fire does not burn our hands' is false if when we put our hands into the fire they do burn.

It should be, however, noted that congruence does not mean reality should be reduced to our experiences, but that, as we perceive reality according to our senses, our experience of reality is taken as a benchmark. In *A Realist Theory of Science* Bhaskar argues that it is possible to think of the world without men.[503] In this light, Bhaskar makes a distinction between intransitive and transitive realms: while the former refers to reality as in itself or all that is and with Bhaskar's own words ontology as such, the latter pertains to our knowledge of reality such as our existing theories explaining the nature of reality. The crucial point in CR is that these two domains can align (our knowledge can express/describe reality), that is, we can, though this can be limited, contingent, provisional, and fallible, possess the knowledge of reality. Considering this in relation to congruence, we can conclude that we have some knowledge of reality since we dwell in the world and experience it, and we can choose a truthful account based on our experiences. However, in the context of CR, it seems that both the saying that epistemic accounts are to be subservient to ontological reality, and the fact that our individual experiences are deemed as benchmarks, set up tension: focusing on what people experience to be, shifts the direction from external reality to epistemology. Yet, following Kant, for example, this sounds like it is the only option, since we don't have any other substantial alternative way to test the truthfulness of a belief if it is not a priori true (i.e. a truth which reason, although it can stand in connection with experience, can reveal); and reference to our experiences, that is a posteriori.[504] Otherwise, if we were able to penetrate totally ontology as such, we would not need such truth criteria.

One important point to make here is that though our experiences are important in understanding the nature of reality since they should be subservient to the ultimate order of things about which we do not have comprehensive knowledge and experience, congruence is limited. This is not only related to the fact that some beliefs in various worldviews pertain to domains that exceed our direct experiences but also, we relatively know little with some great confidence about the ultimate nature of things even when they are somehow within the reach of our experiences.

It can be reasonably argued that associating congruence with the notion of happiness can help us make more sense of the truthfulness of different beliefs. The core reason for this is that it can increase the possibilities of making sense of the truth value of a worldview. There are two interrelated elements of this: the first is that the space of the question of truth can expand (the question of truth can specifically be considered in relation to the area of happiness), and second although the notion of happiness is not regarded as a truth criterion in itself, when we accept

[502] Wright, *Critical religious education*, p. 220.
[503] Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science,* p. 37.
[504] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of pure reason,* trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Reissued edn, Palgrave, 2007).

that we have relatively some certainty about happiness as something that human beings strive for, the evaluation of truth claims of worldviews in relation to this can be considered. More clearly, the saying that the area of the question of truth can expand is to claim that a worldview can be understood in more detail and in a variety of ways. This implies richening the horizons of thought about that worldview. Using an analogy of the sun can help make the point. The actual nature of the sun can be attempted to be understood in relation to the area of the light. However, if the sun is also subjected to the notion of heat, this can give rise to a variety of ways of understanding the sun. Concerning the second element, if a flourishing happy existence is that at which we aim is the case, then we can interrogate worldviews in relation to this fact. These two components, to underline again and firmly, can increase the possibilities of making sense of the truth value of worldviews. An example can put the point well. In the context of congruence, if a worldview claims that human beings don't aspire to happiness but rather their attention is directed to suffering as what they ultimately aim to achieve, it is not congruent with the way people who aim to attain a flourishing life perceive reality and is probably wrong. Thus, in this example not only a worldview is read in relation to the notion of happiness (the expansion of the area of the question of truth), but also its truth claims are regarded in relation to happiness about which we have some epistemic certainty (claims to truth can be evaluated in relation to the notion of happiness as what we ultimately strive for).

Overall, first, congruence is somehow limited in understanding the nature of reality, and therefore we can reasonably think that making sense of the truth value of our beliefs can be improved when congruence goes hand in hand with other indicators. Second, associating congruence with the notion of happiness can enhance and enrich the process of pursuing truth.

B. b) Coherence

The basic meaning of 'coherence' is that we do not hold contradictory beliefs.[505] Wright in some places of his work views coherence as a weak criterion for truth on two grounds: the first one is that the nature of reality is complex, stratified, and emergent: reality is closed to coherent comprehensive explanation.[506] This affirms that coherence, when taken as the coherence of something with external reality, is limited because of the complexity of external reality and because we don't know the totality of reality.

In addition to external reality, I read Wright as using coherence, pertaining to self-consistency: a worldview is coherent if the propositions of it are consistent with each other. For example, he states, 'the suggestion that Christianity was the product of a deliberate fraud perpetuated by Jesus' disciples following his execution is inconsistent with the ethical stance adopted by the first Christians and their willingness to suffer martyrdom rather than recant their faith.'[507]

However, even if the propositions in question are not actually true, as Bertrand Russell wants us to see, they can be consistent with each other without for so much being true. Russell writes that:

> *"There is no reason to suppose that only one coherent body of beliefs is possible. It may be that, with sufficient imagination, a novelist might invent a past for the world that would perfectly fit on to what we know, and yet be quite different from the real past. In*

[505] Ralph C. S. Walker, 'The Coherence Theory of Truth', in Michael Glanzberg (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Truth* (Oxford, 2018), p. 219.
[506] Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism*, p. 228.
[507] Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism,* p. 255.

more scientific matters, it is certain that there are often two or more hypotheses which account for all the known facts on some subject, and although, in such cases, men of science endeavour to find facts which will rule out all the hypotheses except one, there is no reason why they should always succeed."[508]

Wright is also aware of this, and therefore coherence, as a second ground, seems to be played out as a weak criterion for truth. Viewing idealism's commitment to rationality involving coherence, he writes that 'if logical coherence is the basic criterion for truth, one is faced with the illogical possibility of affirming the equal truth of two equally coherent, yet ontologically incommensurate, idealist systems.'[509]

One possible way to strengthen this indicator is to first accept some beliefs as true. Indeed, it is frequently discussed that in coherence, the truth of a proposition owes to a set of privileged beliefs.[510] Ralph C.S. Walker puts it this way 'actually we cannot really decide what is to constitute coherence until we decide which system of beliefs is appropriate, for the two questions go together.'[511] Scholars have often said that in understanding the truthfulness of a proposition in relation to other beliefs, a set of beliefs is not arbitrary. The use of logical laws is indispensable to our thinking, or principles of scientific inference.[512] For example, if we see a donkey with dog ears, we will say there is an incoherence in our taxonomy of animals. We will say this based around our previous life experiences. However, this also suggests that we should note, without first accepting some beliefs as true coherence seems to be limited considering the self-consistency of a worldview.

Nevertheless, coherence for example between the emphasis on equality and at the same time no group or gender is privileged within that worldview; or coherence between the belief that there is heaven as an ultimate reward to people where they will find happiness as a result of good deeds they have done in this world and the insight that people ultimately aim to attain happiness can be indicative of that worldview's truthfulness, and therefore can be helpful to be in the process of pursuing truth. In this light, for our possibility of making sense of the truth value of a worldview is increased as not only the question of truth is taken in relation to the notion of happiness but also the evaluation of truth claims of worldviews in relation to this is considered we can again underline that associating coherence with the notion of happiness can enhance and enrich these truth indicators. Yet, some of these observations tell us to highlight that coherence is a limited criterion alone. It should be deemed together with other criteria such as congruence.

B. c) Fertility

Fertility has been drawn little attention to in the philosophical literature by comparison to other criteria.[513] Fertility is the power to accept new beliefs that are considered ideals that do not impair central tenets.[514] Insofar a worldview takes a fruitful approach to accepting alien beliefs that are held to be true, the more that worldview embraces life in a wider range; or, conversely, the more a worldview is barren, the less its connections with life are bifurcated. Taking such a

[508] Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford, 1973), p. 71.
[509] Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism,* p. 11.
[510] Ralph C.S. Walker, *The Coherence Theory of Truth: realism, anti-realism, idealism* (London, 1989), pp, 4-6. See also, Nicholas Rescher, The Coherence Theory of Truth (Oxford, 1973), p. 24.
[511] Walker, *The Coherence Theory of Truth,* p. 5.
[512] See, for example, *Ibid.,* pp, 4-6. Rescher, *The Coherence Theory of Truth*, p. 50.
[513] Seen for example, Robert Segall, 'The fertility of theories', PhD thesis (University of Cape Town, 2009), p. 2.
[514] Wright, *Critical religious education*, p. 222.

case in the Christian context, Bruce D. Marshall states, the inclusive power of the church's worldview is its capacity to allow the acceptance of foreign beliefs when their believers are faced with plausible arguments to hold them true.[515]

Considering this together with other criteria, if a worldview is congruent and coherent for example, it can be more truthful if it can also accept things held truthful by a given group of people. Assume in a religion it is said that the moon relative to the sun flows in an orbit, but it does not specifically mention that the Earth is round, and it revolves and moves around the sun. If this religion can absorb this, then, based on our cumulative knowledge about the universe, it is more truthful with respect to this criterion. Let's call this a positive sense of fertility since it accepts something, or something is added to the belief system. There are two things, however, to consider here. First, although the fruitfulness of a worldview may be desirable and can be deemed a sign of its truthfulness, even if a worldview is not fertile, it may not lose any of its truthfulness. Containing fewer beliefs and being less relevant to the foreign beliefs held factual by a given group of people does not mean that this worldview is not true. As an illustration, a religion may not mention that the world is spherical or that it rotates around its own axis, while it might express beliefs like there is only one God. Its adherents may not want to deal with these issues at all because they may think they seem irrelevant; however, this does not take anything away from the truthfulness of this religion, if it is true. Second, in relation to other indicators, fertility is more useful for understanding the truthfulness of a worldview when alien beliefs are at odds with central convictions. If foreign beliefs are known to be law-like truths and impinge on central beliefs, then it is difficult for that worldview to absorb those foreign beliefs, meaning it is more likely to be wrong. If a worldview does not say the world is spherical, but rather implies that somebody moving continually east will eventually face a wall-like end that cannot be crossed, then this worldview is more likely to be wrong. Considering the argument that associating these truth indicators with the notion of happiness can enhance and enrich pursuing truth, we can give an example in relation to this: if a worldview asserts that individuals should spend a large part of their lives in ultimate solitude in order to attain a flourishing happy life, and therefore can't allow the acceptance of the belief held reasonably that a flourishing happy existence greatly owes to spending time with our loved ones, then this worldview is highly open to question. In relation to the first one, let's call this a neutral sense of fertility since nothing is added, but what is important is to not be at odds with law-like foreign beliefs. What is important to note is that in accepting something as true, a neutral sense of fertility is more important than being fertile in a positive sense.

If we think about what has been discussed, it cannot be said that a worldview that is not fertile has lost something from its truthfulness if it does not contradict law-like foreign beliefs. Therefore, this in fact presents a challenge for fertility criterion. However, similar to other criteria, fertility can be a sign of the truthfulness of a religion because it will cohere with foreign beliefs held truthful. But, since what is fertile may be true, what is non-fertile may also be true, fertility is very limited as a criterion for truthfulness; it also should be considered with other criteria.

B. d) Simplicity

Simplicity, known in the philosophical tradition as parsimony, is exemplified by the principle of Ockham's razor, which states that the simplest explanation is the best explanation.[516] At root simplicity amounts to not having multiplying entities beyond those necessary to provide an

[515] Bruce D. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 147.
[516] Elliott Sober, *Ockham's Razors: A User's Manual,* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 5.

explanation.[517] More entities are necessary and thus justifiable if they can open the way to generate a more accurate belief via inference. Following some remarks on Ockham's razor, Wright specifically highlights that the more straightforward the aesthetic beauty and moral integrity of a worldview, the more likely it is to be truthful.

We can reasonably assume that it is likely that there is an aesthetic dimension of reality as it can strike us immediately. Suppose we live in a natural place. On a summer afternoon, we go near the river and sit outside and look at the view full of flowers. Most people would not deny the beauty of this. However, we also should note that beauty can shift, turning into undesirable things. The moral domain can be considered more complex. This can also be discerned in Wright's own work. On the one hand, Wright argues that there is evil in this world, which can imply that reality involves things like atrocity. This is reasonable because what we can call bad or evil takes place in reality. Not only, but most detrimentally perhaps, humans commit evil, but also animals and even some plants, as part of the reality mostly destroying other lives, and sometimes brutally. Recall, in Wright's own example, in the journey of the pig showing courage to explore the outside world, a fox was beaten up by a badger.[518] On the other hand, Wright points out, reality is value-laden and possesses moral dimension. He argues, for instance, 'genocide is evil…because it is an intrinsic aberration of the moral order- of-things (ontology).'[519] In another example, Wright states, 'the natural world is intrinsically and ontologically beautiful, regardless of our ability to discern its magnificence. The willingness of an animal to protect its offspring at the expense of its own life and the devotion of a dog to his owner would appear to reflect an embryonic moral order.'[520] Thus, we can claim that there is what we call evil and good in the world. Can we, however, say then reality with respect to morality is simple, and the moral precepts of an account reflecting this simplicity are more likely to be true?

Evaluating a worldview according to the principle of simplicity in relation to domains such as morality seems to be limited in the context of revealing the truth. A worldview can be more truthful if it also reflects this complexity. In other words, it can be relatively argued that a worldview shedding light on the very nature of reality including these tensions and contradictions would be a more truthful account. Indeed, I take Wright to be somehow aware of this tension as he has remarked, 'such simplicity is necessarily relative to the complexity of the reality it seeks to describe.'[521] Yet, he does not develop any further explanation of this.

However, at the same time, we should highlight that it can be considered simple to say there is both good and evil, for example, and to an extent distinguish between these sides. Regarding the argument that attaching these truth indicators to the notion of happiness can enhance and enrich pursuing truth, we can exemplify the point in relation to this in the context of simplicity: contributing to the flourishing of society can be simply admitted as good on the basis that a flourishing happy life is what we ultimately strive for, while genocide can be easily regarded as evil. In this context, the simplicity criterion can be used for the beliefs of a worldview concerning how one ought to live in the face of the existence of these different dimensions. In this sense, Wright's claim of moral simplicity in the sense that the simpler the moral rules of a

[517] M. Pacer and Tania Lombrozo, 'Ockham's Razor Cuts to the Root: Simplicity in Causal Explanation', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 146.12 (2007), p. 1761. See also, Don L. Anderson, 'Occam's Razor: Simplicity, Complexity, and Global Geodynamics', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 146.1 (2002).
[518] See Chapter 6, Section C.
[519] Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, p. 12.
[520] Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism,* p. 61.
[521] Wright, *Critical religious education*, p. 223.

worldview, for example, the more truthful that worldview is likely to be, can be accepted as a reasonable argument.

Furthermore, when we think about Wright's work here as a whole, he both considers simplicity as a criterion and criticises the empirical wing of modernity because it reflects reality in a basic way, thereby privileging simple ideas over complex ones. Seeking a direct ostensive relationship between ideas, words and objects in the world is a simple understanding of complex reality. If what can be known or if reality is what is understood empirically, then, on this view, the value-laden nature of the universe cannot be reflected. This is because in empiricism ontological nature tends to be limited to the aptitude of empirical tools. Bhaskar makes a distinction between three realms of reality: empiric, actual, and real.[522] A deeper discernment, where available, necessitates engagement with the real realm, which consists of underlying mechanisms of events and objects that exist in the actual world. Since empiricism tends to remain in the realm of sense, complex and never-fully-comprehended reality should triumph over parsimony.[523] Now, one can argue that what is meant by simplicity in the narrative of empiricism and Wright's simplicity as an indicator, do not contradict each other. This would be a correct view when it is admitted that the former concentrates on just a simple explanation of reality, while the latter requires that the simpler of at least two things is likely to be more truthful: as examples, these two could be aesthetic accounts purchasing on reality. When it is accepted that reality is devoid of aesthetic, moral, and spiritual strata according to epistemic principles of empiricism (or perhaps logical positivism), and value is an inherent part of reality in Wright, this tension seems to dissolve. It is inconceivable that the simpler element is closer to the empirical realm because if it does not recognise the ontological nature of these strata. It seems, however, there is a tension and difficulty here: wouldn't the simpler matter be closer to the empirical wing of modernity even if the value-laden nature of reality is recognised? This again means that simplicity seems to be limited in the context of revealing the truth. We can conclude that similar to other criteria discussed above, despite happiness contributing to this criterion, simplicity is also limited, and therefore the complexity of reality should be considered within the simplicity criterion, and this should be taken together with other criteria.

B. e) Depth

If when compared to others, a worldview has superior explanatory depth from which we gain more insights about the world, it is more likely to be true. Prima facie, this suggests a conflict between the principles of depth and simplicity. The relationship between these two is devoid of explanation in Wright's work. Yet, it can be thought that there is no contradiction between simplicity and depth because, for instance, an account describing reality including simplicity in more details than others can be said to have more illuminating power: if a worldview gives more detailed explanations of how the nature of reality works, also considering simplicity, it can be accepted as richer and more profound.

When a worldview we engage with presents us with a richer and more profound vision of the order of things, then it can trump alternative explanations. Consider the example, we can say a documentary showing how and why animals behave in the way they do has superior illuminating depth compared to a documentary presenting only animals hunting each other. While watching the former, we will probably gain more in-depth knowledge about why animals behave in the way they do. Once more, considering the point that associating these truth indicators with the notion of happiness can enhance and enrich pursuing truth, we can give an

[522] Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science.*
[523] Wright, *Religious Education and Critical Realism*, p. 227.

example in relation to this in the context of depth: a religious or non-religious worldview that offers a detailed explanation of the nature of reality in relation to our desire to attain a flourishing happy existence can be accepted, in terms of being more illuminative, as trumping another worldview that simply states that people aspire to money, for instance. Depth requires explanations not merely of what, but also of why. Aristotle, in his *Metaphysics*, argues that science and art come to men through experience and that people with experience are more successful in action than those without, even if they have theory. Yet, while men of experience know this is so, but do not know why; those who know the theory know the cause. For this reason, for Aristotle, artists are supposed to be wiser than men of experience because they know the reasons, whereas the latter do not. Aristotle says of experience that 'we do not regard any of the senses as wisdom; yet surely these give the most authoritative knowledge of particulars. But they do not tell us the 'why' of anything - e.g., why fire is hot; they only say that it is hot.'[524] From this standpoint, depth means to tell us something of why and cause, which goes beyond what.

However, there seems to be a problem here too: similar to fertility, a worldview that is not deep could be truthful, whereas a deep worldview might not be. For example, at first glance, Christianity sounds as if it is more truthful in terms of depth, as it gives detailed explanations of how everything came into being: that God created the world, that Eve convinced Adam to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree and that they fell from heaven. It can be claimed that this account possesses more depth than the one articulating the Big Bang theory, according to which there would have been an explosive event, whereby everything started to separate, and the universe expanded but which adds little else.[525] It is not to say the Big Bang precludes Christianity, but if there is no God and the Big Bang is true or more truthful, then the account of the Bible is only fiction, while the theory of the Big Bang is true or more truthful. Therefore, we cannot say a worldview that seems less deep in its current state is less truthful than another worldview that has a deeper account of reality. However, one can say that though the account of the Bible seems to be deeper now, it does not mean the Big Bang theory is not also deep. If more details emerge in the future, deeper knowledge of it will also materialise. Expressed in these terms, it doesn't mean that something isn't deep if we don't fully know it, but if we were to understand it in greater depth, perhaps we would render a very informed assessment of it. Therefore, we can only make comparisons based on available beliefs. Indeed, knowing all the details of the Big Bang theory, for example, would probably tell us more about whether this theory is true, so we would already have a more informed decision about its truth value, and maybe we wouldn't need to compare it with other accounts anymore. One can also be reminded that in CR ontological reality is deemed as a benchmark, thus, it does not matter how deep a worldview is if it is first not deemed to describe reality truthfully. If the claims of Christianity, for example, seem to not describe reality truthfully or are irredeemably false then the point of comparison with other accounts that are deep or not deep is likely to lose its power. However, since we don't know exactly whether the Christian account of creation reflects the ontological order of things, and since it seems deeper than the account of the Big Bang as things stand, then our claim is not unreasonable that a worldview that is not deep could be truthful, whereas a deep worldview might not be. Therefore, this criterion is also limited and should be considered with others.

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[524] Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* p. 4.

[525] For the Big Bang Theory see, Stephen Hawking*, A Brief History of Time: From the big bang to black holes* (New York, 1988), pp. 8-9. Hawking argues that the result of Edwin Hubble's observation in 1929, that the galaxies in the universe were moving away from us (meaning the universe was expanding), required us to think that in early times objects were closer to each other. There was even a time, Hawking thinks, when the universe was small and dense. As a result of an explosion-like event, things started to separate from each other.

C) Conclusion

The main argument of this thesis revolves around an understanding of religious literacy predicated on the principles of CRE and the notion of happiness in the sense that when these elements become widespread in schools, RE can have the highest potential in terms of achieving the flourishing of society in the face of the tension between contested truth claims of faiths and the need to promote the flourishing of society.

In this chapter, it is aimed to contribute to the truth indicators presented in the context of judgmental rationality, which is a very important element of CRE, in relation to the notion of happiness. This chapter claimed that the influence of RE on society can increase as a result of centralising the notion of happiness with a more enhanced CRE.

In this context, the criticisms directed at Wright by scholars such as Erricker, Strhan, Olof, and Jackson have some weight. In this light, the field of religion is like a complex labyrinth, webbed with the possibility of many answers, and in which there can exist a substantial counterargument. It spells out how difficult it is to implement judgemental rationality with regard to competing truth claims. Yet, I think making sense of the truth of a worldview is not impossible because as Basill Mitchell notes, 'although the disputes which arise cannot be settled by appeal to strict proof or inductive probabilities, nevertheless it is in principle possible for one side or the other to be rationally preferred because it makes better sense of all the available evidence.'[526] However, it will take a long time and a lot of effort. In other words, although pursuing truth does not seem to be an abstract task, it demands reflection and that seems to involve something complex: weighing the diversity of things against one another. Thus, although the application of these truth criteria is important in the process of making reasonable decisions, it should be underlined that this should be thought of in the context of an ongoing process.

When considered in this way, there are three important implications that need to be taken into play for the use of Wright's truth indicators in a classroom. The first one is that taking each one of these criteria on its own can be accepted as weaker than benefiting from their combined epistemic power to figure out which beliefs can be more likely to be true and which are not. Thus, teachers should draw attention to the idea that in this ongoing process if a worldview is supported by more than one criterion, then it is more likely to be true.

Second, as can be seen from the examples given above, associating these truth indicators with the notion of happiness can help us make more sense of the truthfulness of different worldviews. This is because, to reiterate, the possibility of making more sense of the truthfulness of a worldview tends to increase. There are two elements of this: although the notion of happiness is not regarded as a truth criterion in itself, when we accept that we relatively have certainty about happiness as something that we aspire to, not only the space of the question of truth can expand but also the evaluation of truth claims of worldviews in relation to this can be considered.

As a third note, it is hoped that further studies can contribute to this domain by drawing on the criticism of these epistemic indicators this chapter has put forward. If these criticisms can open the door to new developments in this field, pursuing truth may become more applicable.

[526] Basil Mitchell, *The Justification of Religious Belief* (London, 1973), p. 75.

Chapter 8

Concluding remarks, contributions to knowledge, and recommendations for further research

Aristotle gives potentially truthful answers concerning the fundamental causes of human efforts. This thesis is a scholarly endeavour: humans, from an Aristotelian perspective, engage in academic efforts because they naturally want to know the truth. The subject of knowledge can range from human nature to the very nature of the world and the universe. In this sense, reality and truth can be deemed as important in themselves. From an Aristotelian perspective, our scholarly endeavours are also concerned with finding a flourishing happy existence. In fact, the desire to achieve such a life exists not only among humans but also animals.[527]

This thesis, although knowing and flourishing seem to be closely related to each other, is essentially concerned with the role of RE in achieving the flourishing of society.

We dwell in the world and on a larger scale the Universe. What we know about this universe is likely to be very limited. For instance, we do not clearly understand the answer to why we naturally want a flourishing happy life. Neither do we know exactly what should be done so as to achieve such a life. If we had a full grasp of the nature of reality, perhaps we would know exactly what to do. In the face of the limits of our knowledge, we can still have reasonable answers, as the teachings of Critical Realism assert.

Having reasonable answers can lead to truthful living. However, one of the important points here is whether truthful living is the best thing for the flourishing of society. This thesis underlines that even though there are things in the universe that we can call evil, there seems to be a path that we can call a good way. Therefore, pursuing truth and making reasonable decisions can lead us to be informed by the nature of reality in attaining a flourishing happy life.

Now, since we dwell in the same universe as others holding different truth claims, and at the same time we human beings desire the flourishing of society, this thesis has firstly claimed that there is a tension between these different truth claims and the need to promote a flourishing society. One of the most important reasons for this tension stems from the desire to have a flourishing life and the necessity of choosing between different beliefs.

Since making the best choices and living in the best way vis-a-vis the nature of reality serves important function of having a flourishing life, this thesis sees handling the tension that arises between the existence of different accounts of the same reality and the need to promote the flourishing of society in the best possible manner as perhaps the most important way that RE can genuinely contribute to the flourishing of society.

In order to find the best way to handle this tension in terms of the flourishing of society, it is deemed appropriate to first engage with already existing accounts. It is thought, such accounts that emerge in relation to existing cumulative knowledge can enlighten us on how to approach this tension, rather than starting from scratch.

[527] Perhaps to a great extent a flourishing life among animals, as happiness is interpreted to be of humans.

After critically scrutinizing different available approaches, CRE has been found to be the most promising approach for the flourishing of society, as it offers an important way to adopt the right lifestyle and beliefs and avoid the wrong lifestyle and beliefs. In fact, if we pay attention, when it comes to making a choice, because we are talking about choices that are burdened by the existence of contested truth claims and the desire to have a flourishing happy existence, it is not a coincidence that the best account of pursuing truth allowing us to make reasonable choices has the highest potential. In addition, comparing different accounts in this thesis and saying that the one with the highest potential should pervade in schools points to the process of searching for the right account, that is, in fact, the path followed in this thesis is in the same direction as CRE.

While it is enlightening to engage with important existing approaches rather than starting from scratch, this does not mean that already existing approaches may not be incomplete. In this sense, this thesis argues in favour of the notion of happiness taking a central place in RE, stating that it is not evident that happiness as the ultimate end has been realised and developed in any deep and meaningful way in already existing approaches. The basic argument here is based on the idea that when people become aware of the fact that individuals, even other living beings, pursue a flourishing happy existence, we can live as we should in the world.

This thesis therefore states that the best answer to this tension in terms of the flourishing of society is to centralise CRE together with happiness. In support of this main idea, the thesis includes three more elements. The first of these focuses on the notion of religious literacy. After doing some research in the area of religious literacy I have concluded that because the notion of religious literacy implies the feasibility of what is being studied in RE it has some practical values in terms of carrying the understanding of the most promising paths in handling this tension to actuality; and that religious literacy should be considered as the product of the study of faiths in their own rights. For these reasons, I have come to the conclusion that using the notion of religious literacy is likely to help achieve the main purposes of this thesis.

The second element is empirical study. For RE to contribute to the flourishing of society by approaching this tension and the idea of religious literacy in the best available way, an empirical investigation of these two themes was found to constitute an important component: because of how religious literacy and this tension are currently being understood in schools can be subjected to discussion of how to best approach them represents a significant part of enhancing RE to contribute to the flourishing of society, as this can lead to enhancement of these matters in schools, this empirical study was found important. In other words, the idea of religious literacy and this tension are important issues, and because considering the current situation about these matters in schools together with the theoretical part of this thesis can be more encouraging for change for the better, this thesis has investigated the perspectives of RE teachers about these two issues. It has been found that the notion of religious literacy is likely to be understood problematically in schools. This is because of reasons like seeing religious literacy as the product of the study of faiths is unclear and it should be informed by the vision of how to approach this tension in the best available way. Drawing on this, this thesis can be read as a call to interested bodies like scholars and teachers to establish a more robust understanding of religious literacy in schools. Thus, once again, in such a context, the empirical and theoretical parts of religious literacy together seem to generate a more powerful call for change for the better.

With respect to the tension, there is an understanding among teachers, taking the truth claims of faiths and the question of truth seriously. The trajectory among teachers in the face of this

tension is promising for the flourishing of society as it is in the same line with CRE which has been found as the most promising account of handling this tension.

We have argued that considering both the empirical and the theoretical parts together can be influential in reinforcing change for the better. But if the most reasonable path is already followed in schools, does empirical work have no value in terms of change for the better? If the most reasonable path is already embraced, then there is no need for change. However, even saying this shows that this empirical study is important because this thesis can be valued as a call that the situation in schools is truthful and should be maintained that way.

However, what was articulated in this thesis was that although the truthful approach was followed in schools, there were important signs that it was not deep and systematic. So, this thesis's call to interested sides such as schools in terms of change for the better is that there is a truthful understanding in schools, but it needs to be made more systematic and deep using Wright's approach which offers the best account of what it means to pursue truth in RE.

Moreover, despite not having asked direct questions about the notion of happiness, we have stated that when the findings of two questionnaires are read with respect to happiness, it is not evident in the answers of teachers that centralising the notion of happiness as what we ultimately aim to achieve is a good path for the flourishing of society. At this point, it has been stated that since we know the existing situation in schools about centralising the notion of happiness and the theoretical part of this thesis, these two parts can be expected to play a more triggering role together for change for the better regarding also the notion of happiness.

Considering the empirical study and theoretical part on these two subjects, it has been concluded that the understanding of religious literacy in schools should be regarded as a state that reflects the principles of CRE and the notion of happiness.

Thirdly and finally, this thesis aims to contribute to the truth criteria presented in the context of judgmental rationality, one of the three most important components in CRE. The aim is to strengthen the best way to approach this tension. In this context, it has been underlined that despite their importance, little space is given to the truth indicators offered by Wright. Since Wright's approach has been found to be the most promising approach in terms of the flourishing of society among the existing approaches, it has been suggested that contributing to judgemental rationality will enhance the best way to approach this tension. In this context, it was stated that if the truth indicators presented by Wright are applied together, it will help us to make more sense of the truthfulness of beliefs. It was also stated that dealing with these truth indicators, especially with the notion of happiness, would contribute to the process of the pursuit of truth. Two elements of this are drawn attention to: although the notion of happiness is not regarded as a truth criterion in itself, when it is accepted there is some epistemic certainty about happiness as what we ultimately strive for, not only the space of the question of truth can expand but also the evaluation of truth claims of worldviews in relation to this can be considered.

In light of the basic arguments above, the contribution of this thesis to the literature can be expressed as follows. Firstly, expressing that handling this tension in the best way can be the way for RE to reach its potential to make the highest contribution to the flourishing of society indicates that this tension should be the subject of knowledge more clearly in RE. Of course, while different approaches were examined in the first and second chapters, a reading was made around the subject of how they handle this tension, which means, this tension is a very

important issue in RE, whether we are aware of it or not, and it can be said, it is somehow engaged in RE. However, addressing this explicitly can be deemed important in terms of drawing a clearer route to RE. The route here indicates that this tension is a very main issue that needs to be dealt with and resolved in terms of the flourishing of society. To put it another way, it means knowing that RE's greatest contribution to society will come from dealing with this tension. This, again, can be considered the first important contribution of this thesis as it sets a direction for RE.

The second contribution undoubtedly lies not only in revealing the most appropriate account of handling this tension in terms of the flourishing of society but also in laying an important basis from which the best account can be pursued. Starting with the latter, in the context of RE, it is uncommon in the literature to explicitly evaluate different approaches to questions such as what the optimal answer to this tension in terms of the flourishing of society is, again through the subject of the flourishing of society. As seen in the first and second chapters, the issue of whether one account is more promising than others in terms of issues like the flourishing of society is generally discussed around questions such as the content and the purpose of the study of religion. This goes hand in hand with enquiries such as which account is more committed to reflect the nature of religion truthfully, and which is not. This thesis has stated that such elements are important and that without neglecting them, the potential of different approaches to handling this tension can be evaluated through the subject of the flourishing of society. As for the former, determining the best approach on the basis of the flourishing of society while giving place to elements such as content and purpose in the background, is an important contribution that sets an important route to RE, similar to the first contribution of making this tension the direct subject of knowledge. The route is that CRE is the best answer to this tension among already existing accounts, and it should pervade schools.

Seeing happiness in relation to what human beings ultimately strive for as very fruitful in terms of ensuring the flourishing of society in the face of this tension is one of the most important contributions of this thesis. If the flourishing of society is that at which we aim, then centralising the notion of happiness together with CRE is a contribution in the context that RE can truly reach its highest potential in achieving this aim. Such an argument has not been realised or developed in any deep and meaningful way in the history of RE. Other approaches generally focus on different tasks such as pursuing truth and engaging diversity well and ultimately aim at the flourishing of society. The contribution of this thesis lies in the idea that learning about what human beings ultimately strive for is a flourishing happy existence in a very clear and explicit way has great potential to greatly contribute to the flourishing of society. The main idea behind this is to become more aware of something that originates from our nature, to recognise it more accurately, and as a result, to follow, in light of this driving force, reasonable paths to attain it.

In this context, another area of contribution lies in clarifying the main purpose of RE, which is contested. Drawing attention to different expectations set for RE, Teece, for example, has argued for prioritising pupils' spiritual and moral development.[528] The main purpose of RE has emerged as humanization in Grimmitt, in Dinham as engaging diversity well, and in Hannam as appearance of a child in their uniqueness in relation to the uniqueness of others.

[528] Geoff Teece, 'Too many competing imperatives? Does RE need to rediscover its identity?', *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 32.2 (2011).

In this thesis, there is not a direct title concerning what the main purpose of RE is to be; but if the argument put forward in this thesis is true, that is, if a flourishing happy existence is that at which human beings ultimately strive for, then the main purpose of RE should be attaining to flourishing happy lives. Other aims such as pupils' spiritual and moral development, the pursuit of truth and truthful living should rotate around this core purpose. In fact, this is valid not only for RE but also for other subjects. Therefore, this contribution can be understood in a wider context as it concerns any other subject in schools.

In achieving the main purpose of attaining a flourishing happy existence through centralising CRE together with the notion of happiness, it can be said that there are three other contributions in the context of subsidiary elements.

The first of these is related to the understanding of religious literacy. When the existing studies on religious literacy in the literature are read together, it would not be going too far to say there is great conflict. Some keep it separate from RE, some seem to understand it only as one of the purposes of RE, and others seem to take it as the product of their studies.

This thesis argues the way to eliminate this conflict in this field is to see religious literacy as the product of the study of faiths on their own merits, as the notion of religious literacy is a term that does not mean much anything on its own. Its meaning is bound up with the underlying account that religious literacy predicates. Thus, this is to an extent an important contribution because it eliminates the existing conflict in the literature.

In addition, arguing in favour of the retention of the notion of religious literacy because it implies the practical benefits of learning about faiths can be considered a valuable contribution. Asserting that religious literacy is a useful idea that should be retained is beneficial insofar as it can carry the objectives set for RE to actuality. More specifically, if religious literacy is employed within the framework of a promising approach to studying faiths, it holds value in that it can play a practical role in realising the goals of this approach concerning issues such as the flourishing of society.

The second refers to the empirical study of this thesis. Given the lack of direct studies on religious literacy and this tension, especially in the British context, this empirical study can be considered a contribution in itself, as the thesis plays a role in filling this gap by providing new data on these two themes.

Added to this, in serving the main purpose of this thesis, talking about moving for the better by considering the current existing situation in the field together with the theoretical arguments can be seen as a contribution in terms of change for the better.

Finally, it can be considered a contribution to present an argument about truth indicators offered in the context of an important component of CRE being found as the best available account of handling this tension. The main contribution here is based on the idea that although happiness can be not considered as a truth criterion, the truth value of things like propositions about the notion of happiness can be evaluated in relation to happiness as what human beings ultimately strive for. This is not a path followed clearly when discussing truth criteria. Of course, happiness can be construed in the context of CRE's truth indicators: for example, considering the congruence indicator implying that beliefs that are in line with our life experiences may be more likely to be true than those that are not, it can be accepted that a proposition in line with the idea of happiness as what people ultimately desire to attain to is likely to be true. What this

thesis puts forward, that can be regarded as its contribution, is that although we do not know exactly why we ultimately want to attain a flourishing happy life, people struggle for such a life, and evaluating the propositions in relation to this fact is capable of enhancing the process of finding the truth.

I would like to conclude this chapter by suggesting three further studies that can advance this field. First, informing teachers about the principles of CRE and the ideas that this thesis puts forward about the notion of happiness as what we ultimately strive for, asking teachers to try those in the classroom, and finally getting feedback from both teachers and students regarding the flourishing of society can be a research area. Thus, we can learn more about the practical value of centralising CRE together with happiness, which is found to be the best response for the flourishing of society in the face of this tension. Second, a study can examine various philosophical perspectives on the nature of happiness specifically in terms of its contents and compare them with the underpinnings underlying CRE. This exploration can shed more light on the interplay between CRE and happiness. Within this framework, questions such as whether a specific philosophical approach aligns particularly well with the idea of CRE can be addressed. Third, a more detailed study on truth criteria in CRE in relation to pursuing truth, truthful living, and happiness can promote the subject.

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