

## ***Philosophy for/with Children, Religious Education and Education for Spirituality.***

### ***Steps Toward a Review of the Literature***

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The authors describe the organization of a review of research literature on the relationship between Philosophy for/with Children (P4/wC) and religious education/education for spirituality (RE-EfS). They summarize a debate about whether the two are mutually enhancing or incompatible. They explain delimiting the scope of the project and present a grid of research questions used to analyze the literature. They summarize findings on how P4/wC is relevant to five categories of aims of RE-EfS: hermeneutical, cultural, socio-political, moral/spiritual, and epistemological. Many papers in the latter category promote P4/wC as a method for children's epistemic agency in constructing their religious beliefs. Some respond to objections that children may reject traditional beliefs. Few address potential confusion and angst of children asked to question and defend their religious views. The authors conclude that the pragmatic thrust of P4/wC in resisting a dichotomy between religious and scientific thinking is a value to post-secular society.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Philosophy for/with Children, religion, spirituality, hermeneutics, epistemology, pragmatism.

## RESUMEN

Los autores describen la organización de una revisión de la bibliografía con las investigaciones sobre la relación entre Filosofía para/con Niños y la Educación Religiosa/Educación para la Espiritualidad (ER-EpE). Resumen la discusión acerca de si se refuerzan mutuamente o son incompatibles. Explican cómo delimitar el alcance del proyecto y presentan una matriz con las cuestiones usadas en la investigación para analizar la bibliografía. Resumen los hallazgos sobre en qué sentido Fp/cN es relevante para cinco categorías de fines de la ER/EpE: hermenéutica, cultural, sociopolítica, espiritual/moral y epistemológica. Muchos trabajos de la última categoría promueven la Fp/cN como un método para la actividad epistémica de los niños en la construcción de sus creencias religiosas. Algunas responden a las objeciones de que los niños puedan rechazar las creencias tradicionales. Pocas plantean la posible confusión y temor de los niños a quienes se les pide que cuestionen y defiendan sus creencias religiosas. Los autores concluyen que el enfoque pragmático de P4/wC para resistir una dicotomía entre el pensamiento religioso y científico es un valor para la sociedad post-secular.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Filosofía para/con los niños, religión, espiritualidad, hermenéutica, epistemología, pragmatismo.

## INTRODUCTION

### *Setting the problem*

In this chapter we present the first (and preliminary) steps of an ongoing project aimed at a reconstruction of the debate on Philosophy for/with Children (henceforth P4/wC) and both religious education and education for spirituality (henceforth RE-EfS) by conducting a review of the existing literature. Before describing the methods we have adopted, sharing the first analyses we have undertaken and illustrating some questions resulting from them, we will briefly consider the nature of the debate that has prompted this inquiry into the relationships between P4/wC and RE-EfS. Although our preliminary research has revealed numerous, complex relationships between these fields, it has also confirmed the centrality and the increasing intensity of a debate between those who see P4/wC as an important approach to RE-EfS and those who see the former as inimical to the latter.

Many of those who see P4/wC as a beneficial approach to RE-EfS argue that there is nothing surprising in this; that the development was inevitable and is merely further evidence of the fecundity and flexibility of P4/wC across epistemic-experiential domains and areas of the curriculum. From this perspective, our research is not significantly different from exploring how P4/wC has been used in mathematics education (see, e.g., Groves, Doig & Splitter, 2000; Lafortune *et al.*, 2002; Kennedy, 2009; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2012), science education (see, e.g., Sprod, 1997, 2014; Calvert *et al.*, 2017), and so on.<sup>1</sup> The majority of

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<sup>1</sup> To take just an example: in the volume edited by Lewis & Chandley (2012), the chapter on religious education (by Patricia Hannam [2012b]) is placed between one on 'P4C in Science' and another on 'P4C in Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE)'. The case of the UK is admittedly special, as RE is a compulsory part of

those who disagree with this perspective come from one of two oppositional camps. One camp objects to religion and spirituality being thought of as only one more portion of the curriculum (even in contexts in which they explicitly are parts of it) and argue further that *in principle* there is a kind of incompatibility between the inquiring thrust which is typical of P4/wC and the goals of any religious education, which have to do with some kind of edification. People in this camp emphasize the rationalistic and critical nature of philosophical inquiry, and argue that there is something unique and precious about RE-EfS that needs to be protected from philosophical dissection. The other camp opposed to the use of P4/wC for RE-EfS sees the latter as ineradicably indoctrinatory and argues that the deployment of P4/wC for religious education will inevitably result in the compromise and deformation of critical philosophical inquiry. This position is exemplified in Paul Fairfield's curt dismissal of the legitimacy of religious education:

The grounds that Dewey provided for opposition to religious education are unmistakable and several: religious instruction at an early age severely weakens the capacity for independent thought, creates an often insurmountable prejudice that distorts future inquiry into theological, philosophical, ethical, and related questions, creates deplorable intellectual habits of docility and deference to authority, promotes dogmatism and parochialism rather than their opposites, and in general furthers the cause of illiberal education. [...] My Deweyan argument is that teaching religion in any manner to the intellectually immature is mis-educative and that what passes for spiritual training in countless institutions of learning today can be nothing other than indoctrination and a distortion of education's true purpose. (Fairfield, 2009, pp. 183-184)

Fairfield's position seems to exclude the possibility of religious education characterized by the kind of 'openness and inquisitiveness, [...] hospitality to new ideas and a flexibility' (ibid., p. 193) that are pivotal for any educational undertaking. Thus, for different reasons, both of these camps describe an either-or situation: either religious education or education for and through inquiry. From this perspective, the very endeavor to dovetail philosophical inquiry with children and RE-EfS results in a kind of educational and even theoretical *hirco cervus*, a mythical creature composed of an unnatural and hideous combination of parts of other animals.<sup>2</sup>

However, the earliest proponents of P4/wC did not share these misgivings. In fact, P4/wC has been 'haunted' by the question of religion from its very inception. As early as 1977, in the first edition of *Philosophy in the Classroom*, Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp and Frederick S. Oscanyan distinguished between religious and philosophical questions, but noted that '[p]hilosophical discussions need not just take up where science and religion leave off [...] but] can frequently become involved in questions of science and questions of religion' (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan, 1977, p. 88). Partly in response to the reaction against P4/wC by certain groups of conservative American Christians, Lipman (1984a) defended the constructive role that philosophy can have in religious discussions, not only by clarifying meanings, uncovering underlying assumptions, and analyzing concepts, etc., but also by inventing new ideas and new connections among ideas.

While supporting this use of P4/wC as a 'thinking skills' approach to RE-EfS, Sharp (1983) took a more radical step, toward a reclamation of spirituality as an important but

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the curriculum there (see Jenkins, 1986; Thwaites, 2005; Jackson, 2007; Prescott, 2015; Lancaster-Thomas, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> The term was used in 1944 by Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce to describe the forced union of socialism and liberalism (a *hirco cervus* that confounds politicians and political philosophers to this day).

neglected component of the kind of humanistic education to which P4/wC aspires. Sharp invited us to consider the affinities between the vocabulary of philosophical inquiry and that of spirituality and the religious dimension of experience. Significantly, the idea that the religious or the spiritual, like the aesthetic, refer not to esoteric knowledge or experience but to qualities that may be discerned and intensified in ordinary experience also came from Dewey (2006 [1934]; see also Reed, 1992). Sharp's line of argumentation reclaiming spirituality as an aim of education culminated in a valorization of education through philosophical inquiry:

Education ought to seek to produce moral, intelligent, sincere, autonomous agents who can form sound and reasonable judgments. [...] *If we assume that education has these two roles, socialization and autonomy, then it follows that it also has a spiritual dimension.* The relationship between autonomy and spirituality is one that has been explored by many Western and Eastern philosophers: St. Augustine, Spinoza, Martin Buber, Gandhi, Gabriel Marcel, Maritain, Pascal, and St. Thomas Aquinas, to mention only a few. One of the greatest dangers today is that education has relinquished its aim of autonomy and has resigned itself to be no more than a socializing instrument' (Sharp, 1983, pp. 351-52, emphasis added).

We have indicated these two signposts to show not only that the question of RE-EfS was addressed very early in the field of P4/wC, but also that in the first decade of its existence at least two different positions were already articulated. On the one hand, this should come as no surprise insofar as religion can be considered 'the repressed dimension of philosophy' (Heinrich, 1981) and the controversial issue of the circuit between philosophy, education of youth and religious piety presides over the entire course of Western culture since at least the trial of Socrates. Thus, the early engagement of P4/wC scholarship with religious education may be construed as the reemergence of something that has been constitutive of the bond between philosophy and education.

Against this backdrop, rather than adding our own perspective to the theoretical and pedagogical debate over how and to what extent P4/wC and RE-EfS can be combined, we have decided to attempt a review of the published literature on this debate, in order to map out the territory of the work that has been undertaken over the past nearly 50 years. This choice responds essentially to a methodological reason, which implies also, however, a stance in terms of research ethics: P4/wC has a rich scholarly tradition and, therefore, it would be intellectually irresponsible not to explore it before attempting to contribute to this debate ourselves. Moreover, we have found that our preliminary exploration of the history of this topic has not only made us conversant with the main trends that have emerged in its treatment, but also given us new insights into how P4/wC has been developed, interpreted and even revised as a result of its engagement with RE-EfS. Thus, we anticipate that our literature review on this very specific topic may contribute also to a broadening of our understanding of P4/wC itself. Therefore, for the purposes of this literature review, we have intentionally resisted any settlement of the question of the (harmonious or antagonistic) theoretical, educational and practical relationship between P4/wC and RE-EfS.

### ***Delimiting and Organizing the Field of Inquiry***

We began our work with a necessarily vague notion of wanting to look at published research relating P4/wC to both RE and EfS. One reason for this was practical: the research literature includes papers that treat each of the latter two areas, as well as papers that do not make clear distinctions between them. Another reason was that though religion and spirituality can be sharply distinguished for certain purposes, they are nevertheless closely

related to one another. A sense of this sibling relationship is conveyed in Dewey's distinction between *religion* 'as a noun substantive' and *religious* 'as adjectival' (Dewey, 2006[1934], p. 8). The former always signifies a special body of beliefs and practices having some kind of institutional organization, loose or tight. In contrast, the adjective "religious" denotes nothing in the way of a specifiable entity, either institutional or as a system of beliefs. It does not denote anything to which one can specifically point as one can point to this and that historic religion or existing church. For it does not denote anything that can exist by itself or that can be organized into a particular and distinctive form of existence. It denotes attitudes that may be taken toward every object and every proposed end or ideal. (*Ibidem*)

The religious attitude signifies something that is bound through imagination to a general attitude. This comprehensive attitude, moreover, is much broader than anything indicated by "moral" in its usual sense. The quality of attitude is displayed in art, science and good citizenship. (*Ibid.*, pp. 16-17).

The latitude and depth of Dewey's notion of 'the religious' approaches and even overlaps with the idea of 'spirituality'. Indeed, the phrase 'education for spirituality' in the literature we have examined points to a broad range of phenomena, including a) the opening onto existential questions concerning the meaning of (human) existence or of one's own life; b) consideration of what is sometimes captured with the notion of 'soul' as a sort of core of the personality that is not unrelated to the cognitive, cogitative and ethical dimensions of human existence but somehow exceeds them through a relation to the Whole, however that expression is understood; and/or c) a set of contemplative or 'spiritual' practices for self-work conducive to a radical transformation of our relation with the world of experience and of personality itself (see Hadot, 2001). However, it is not coincidental that these very types of existential, metaphysical and contemplative dimensions of human life are also the stuff of religious doctrine and practice, and this affinity between religion and spirituality justified a form of 'methodological opportunism' resulting in our decision to include papers focused on either RE or EfS in our initial literature review.

A second delimiting question that emerged in building the repertoire of sources for this study was whether to include only papers that treated a (quasi) P4/wC approach in relationship to RE-EfS, or to also include papers engaging with the relationship of RE-EfS to other paradigms of philosophical inquiry or to philosophy itself. This question arose when we began to distinguish different kinds of papers our initial search had uncovered. One kind is typified by a paper by Claire Elise Katz (2004) discussing how Jewish religious education can benefit from deploying philosophical inquiry construed in Levinasian terms. The case is all the more interesting because Katz took her MA with Lipman and Sharp, and recognizes an intellectual debt to them, while endorsing a Levinasian stance on the meaning and aim of 'humanistic education' (Katz, 2013). As we collected several papers concerning P4/wC and RE in Jewish settings (e.g. Glaser & Gregory, 2017; Matthews, 2009; Matthews & Deichter, 1993), excluding Katz's article from our analysis would have precluded the possibility of contrasting P4/wC with other philosophical traditions mobilized within RE. We became aware that a too-strict adherence to our initial purpose of reviewing *only* P4/wC scholarship might be detrimental to our research agenda.

We discovered a very different kind of paper coming from a German-Scandinavian context, addressing what is called *Theologizing with Children* (TwC). These papers required us to determine whether TwC, as described in each instance, might be considered as a peculiar inflection of the more general domain of children's philosophical inquiry in reference to religion, or as rooted in a completely different set of presuppositions. These

papers, too, were obviously rich with insights gained from decades of focused theoretical and practical work that promised to yield suggestions translatable into the P4/wC paradigm.

In the light of these considerations we formulated a tentative and generously broad criterion to identify the corpus of papers to analyze: that papers had to present *reflections on philosophical inquiry with children – broadly understood (i.e.: not necessarily related to P4/wC) – and RE-EfS*. In addition, due to time constraints, we agreed to confine ourselves, at this stage, to considering papers published in English. With these criteria in place, we searched the indexes of journals historically dedicated to P4/wC, a bibliography assembled by Maughn Gregory for a doctoral course on P4/wC and Religion, and databases of academic journals available at our respective universities. We collected over 80 potential papers.

Our next step was to each read each of the 80 papers independently against our criterion, and discuss together which of them to include in our study. This discussion resulted in our agreeing to classify the papers into the following four groups (this was not always a straightforward task, as in many cases the grouping of a paper depended on interpretation, and a dialogue between us was necessary in order to reach a mutual decision):

- G1: papers immediately related to the research topic (*philosophical inquiry with children –broadly understood—and RE-EfS*). This group was subdivided into two sub-groups:
  - G1.a: Theory-oriented papers (not presenting any actual experience in a classroom or other educational setting);
  - G1.b: Papers reporting actual experiences of philosophical practice in a classroom or other educational setting (obviously theoretical reflections are often present also in these papers);
- G2: Papers not directly addressing the topic but presenting either of two features:
  - Authored by people with a strong P4/wC background;
  - Providing concepts and ideas which enrich the theoretical platform for the engagement with the research question (e.g. Cannon, 1996, 2012; Deitcher & Glaser, 2004; Kennedy, 2000).
- G3: Papers not convergent with the topic, but that provide contrast cases that bring our research question into sharper focus. This group included, for instance, papers on Theologizing with Children that included no mention of philosophical inquiry (e.g. Berryman, 2009).
- G4: Papers completely excluded as irrelevant to our analysis.

The result of this process was that we agreed on a corpus of 66 papers, all of which are listed below in the bibliography of our sources.

In the process of reading the papers, each of us also began to schematize the relationships among P4/wC and RE-EfS presented in them, and about mid-way through our reading we agreed upon a preliminary grid of research questions that each of us would use to analyze each paper:

- 1) Given that most of the publications talk about a role that some kind of philosophical practice can play in RE-EfS, how many different aims of RE-EfS are described in this work, and how is philosophical practice seen as relevant to each of those aims?
- 2) What other arguments are made in this work regarding other relationships between philosophical practice and RE-EfS, or regarding any other relevant issues or questions?

- 3) If the work reports an experience of philosophical practice in RE-EfS:
  - a) What is the educational aim of the experience?
  - b) What kinds of texts were used?
  - c) Briefly describe the experience, in terms of teacher and student activity.
  - d) If some form of community of philosophical inquiry was used, how was it used and were any modifications made to the traditional approach?
  - e) If the program was evaluated, what were the results?
- 4) Does the work report or suggest how a cultural context influenced the understanding of the relationship between philosophical practice and RE-EfS?

### ***Investigating P4/wC and the Aims of Religious Education***

In this section we present some preliminary findings related to the first question on our grid of analysis: ‘Given that most of the publications we collected talk about a role that some kind of philosophical practice can play in RE-EfS, how many different aims of RE-EfS are described in these works, and how is philosophical practice seen as relevant to each of those aims?’ Almost all of the papers relevant to this question came from G1, although some came from G2. For the sake of clarity of analysis and exposition, we found it helpful to group the aims we identified into five categories, which we present here with three provisos: a) many of the papers addressed more than one kind of aim and in doing so indicated a rich cross-fertilization among the categories we constructed; b) there is tension among some of the particular aims grouped together within each category, so the categories should not be understood as unified; rather, c) these categories should be understood as heuristic tools and not as fixed types. Also, it should be noted that as with the grouping of the papers themselves, the grouping of these educational aims was not always a straightforward task, but often required dialogue between us in order to reach a mutual decision. The five categories of educational aims for RE-EfS that we constructed were:

*Hermeneutical Aims.* A number of papers, including papers by each of the three founders of P4/wC (Lipman, Sharp and Matthews), argue that an important set of aims of RE has to do with becoming knowledgeable and skillful with religious texts. These aims include:

- The skillful reading of religious texts, including discerning similarities and differences of meaning and context, noting apparent ambiguities and inconsistencies, drawing inferences, recognizing and interpreting metaphors, analogies, allegories and parables, and generating critical questions about the text.
- The development of rich and nuanced understandings of religious concepts, including the variety of meanings particular terms have across multiple points of reference within a religious text and the variety of interpretations given to those terms in the intellectual tradition of a religious community. This aim also includes distinguishing metaphysical, ethical, political, aesthetic and other kinds of meaning conveyed in religious concepts. And it includes the possibility of generating fresh interpretations and new meanings of religious concepts consistent with tradition.
- Working out the implications of the meaning of religious texts for contemporary issues, whether philosophical (e.g., just war theory), practical (e.g., public policy on the rights of LGBTQ people), or personal.

- Some authors caution that religious texts require expertise to be properly understood and interpreted, and argue for the aim that one's understanding of religious texts should be informed by historical, cultural and linguistic study.

*Cultural Aims.* A number of papers argue that RE-EfS should provide better understanding of the cultural-historical background and context of religions, including religious history, holidays, rituals, symbols, music, institutions, etc., and the ability to reconstruct these meanings in light of novel political, scientific, and cultural developments. These aims include:

- Understanding how religious traditions reflect particular cultural concepts and values of the places of their origins.
- Understanding similarities and differences of cognate religious concepts (e.g. 'sacrifice' or 'soul') across multiple cultures within a particular religious tradition and across different religious traditions.
- Understanding how religious concepts and values are expressed in music, rituals, holidays and other aspects of personal and communal life, such that part of the meaning of at least certain aspects of experience is religious meaning.
- Understanding the relationship between religion and the academic disciplines / school subjects.
- Understanding that religious rituals, holidays and other practices change over time in response to political, scientific, cultural and other kinds of changes, which may or may not entail a change of the meaning of those practices.
- Creatively reconstructing the meaning of religious tradition in light of such changes as a means of preserving traditional meanings into the future.

*Socio-political Aims.* The wealth of meanings that religions can offer and their significance in the construction of personal and cultural identity can, at the same time, lead to the development of confessionally gated communities. Therefore, a number of papers argue that a certain kind of RE-EfS is pivotal within pluralistic, intercultural and multi-confessional societies in order to preserve their pluralism and, indeed, to help it to flourish. The particular aims in this category include:

- Understanding the sometimes deep epistemic, social and cultural differences among religious, spiritual and atheistic traditions and communities.
- Developing empathy – beyond a shallow and relativistic tolerance – for individuals and communities whose ir/religious beliefs and ways of life are incompatible with one's own.
- Critiquing religious beliefs and practices that are evaluated as not merely unjustifiable but positively harmful.
- Negotiating cultural differences, particularly in contexts of public policy and public space (including schools), in the manner and spirit of democratic citizenship.

*Aims of Moral and Spiritual Growth.* A number of papers argued for the value of RE-EfS in promoting moral, emotional and/or spiritual development or growth. Such aims include:



- Appropriating one's own religious, spiritual or philosophical tradition, and/or other traditions one has studied, as repertoires of existential meaning for constructing a sense of the meaning of one's life and/or the human condition.
- Appropriating those traditions as sources of guidance for ethical decision making and for imagining and aspiring to the kind of (moral) person one wishes to become, the kind of (moral) life one wishes to lead, and/or the kind of communities one wishes to help construct.
- Cultivating a sense of reverence, awe and/or wonder, understood as a spiritual experience (in either a theistic or non-theistic sense of that phrase).
- Creating new metaphors to substitute for the old metaphor of the Western, monotheist God, which is no longer in keeping with the mindset and the sensibility of contemporary human beings; practicing religion as a fundamental dimension of being in the world not necessarily related to historical religious forms.

*Epistemological Aims.* A number of papers proposed aims for RE-EfS having to do with affording children the opportunity to independently evaluate religious beliefs, values and practices, and to work out and justify their own positions regarding them, especially in regard to the religious tradition of their family. As an illustration of the richness of all of these categories, we will discuss this category of aims in more detail below.

### ***Zooming in on Epistemological Aims***

Under the heading of 'epistemology' we have identified a vast array of aims for RE-EfS related to recognizing and strengthening children's epistemic agency regarding religious beliefs, values and practices. These aims include:

- The ability to independently evaluate religious beliefs, values and practices in a non-dogmatic way and to work out and justify their own positions regarding those views.
- To allow children to ask and explore their own theological, philosophical, and/or existential questions (whether or not related to their own traditions). This aim explicitly builds on an observation made in many of the papers we collected, that children's thinking is already replete with religious meaning (see Deitcher & Glaser, 2004; Büttner, 2009; Gregory, 2008).

In the first contribution dedicated to the topic, Adrian Dupuis inaugurates a theme that will remain constant throughout the reflection on P4/wC and Re-EfS, i.e., that inasmuch as religion involves belief, it comes under the purview of philosophical epistemology:

The decision to accept or reject religious belief is philosophical; that is, each individual must answer the question, Is faith (or revelation) a valid source of knowledge? Philosophy examines the foundations of religious belief just as it examines the basis of scientific 'belief' [...] Revelation (faith) provides knowledge (truths) beyond the scope of the human mind. Nevertheless, it is the human mind which 'assents' to the authenticity and validity of these extra-human sources. (Dupuis, 1979, pp. 62-63)

Jennifer Glaser and Maughn Gregory (2017), Joseph Jenkins (1986) and Natasya van der Straten Waillet *et al.* (2015), agree that, to the extent that it is rational, the decision to accept or reject any belief (including a religious belief), is inherently philosophical.

A number of authors offer arguments as to why children should be not merely permitted but encouraged and supported in exercising the epistemic agency to choose and/or construct their own religious beliefs. Dupuis (1979), Patricia Hannam (2012a), Henrik Vestergaard

Jørgensen (2009), and Helen Thwaites (2005) observe that critical thinking, objectivity and non-indoctrination in the study of religion are legal obligations in secular government schools in many countries. Dupuis points out, further, that this approach is in fact favored by many religious schools and much contemporary philosophy of religious education. Gregory (2008), Hannam (2012a), Martens (2009) and van der Straten Waillet *et al.* (2015), discuss a number of ways in which supporting children's epistemic agency in the study of religion is good for them, e.g. that it answers their need to make sense of conflicting religious, moral and political messages they encounter, that it brings more reasonableness and fairness to religious discussions that children inevitably have together, that thoughtful, un-coerced inquiry is necessary in order for children to hold their religious beliefs with authentic conviction, and that epistemic agency is necessary for young people to develop a strong sense of personal identity and community belonging. Drawing on similar reasons, Stephen Law (2008) argues that parents do not have the right to send their child to a school where their religious beliefs will *not* be subjected to critical scrutiny. In addition, Gareth Matthews (1990) and Ann Sharp (1997) point out that teachers can learn from free and open philosophical discussions around religious questions with their students.

A number of authors offer responses to both actual and hypothetical objections to permitting children to question and therefore perhaps to reject traditional religious beliefs. Thus, on the one hand, Gregory (2008) and Lipman *et al.* (1980) caution that the philosophy teacher must avoid directly criticizing any particular religious view. 'The teacher's role is ... not to change children's beliefs but to help them find better and more sufficient reasons for believing those things they choose, upon reflection, to believe in. And further, it is to strengthen their understanding of the issues involved in their holding to the beliefs they do hold' (Lipman *et al.*, 1980, pp. 107-8). On the other hand, Law (2008), Martens (2009) and van der Straten Waillet *et al.* (2015) counter the notion that encouraging children to think critically about religion entails the promotion of religious and moral relativism, which constitutes another threat to religious belief. And Gregory (2008) makes the empirical claim that the majority of children who engage in philosophical inquiry do not change their basic value commitments.

Only two articles, by Parvaneh Ghazinejad and Claudia Ruitenberg (2014) and Peter Shea (2018) take seriously the confusion and angst that may befall children who are invited to question, publicly discuss and perhaps defend their religious views. Thus, Shea worries about the child whose 'experience is far enough removed from that of others that the child has no way of sharing that experience briefly in a community of inquiry discussion [...] The situation is worse for a child who believes that God told her something' (Shea, 2018, pp. 169). Ghazinejad and Ruitenberg address more dramatic concerns about children invited to question and evaluate religious belief, value and practice in fundamentalist communities in which 'conformity with these norms and rules is also part of children's safety, career prospects, and well-being' (Ghazinejad & Ruitenberg, 2014, pp. 319). They argue that 'in authoritarian contexts, respect for children's capacity for rational thought must be balanced with responsibility for their safety in their community,' and that 'P4C should be used not only to teach analytic critical thinking and foster a 'critical spirit,' but also to help students develop the practical wisdom to judge where, when, and how best to use these skills and dispositions' *ibid.*, p. 317).

The articles that support the aims of RE-EfS to develop children's epistemic agency offer, in turn, explanations of how a number of different aspects of P4/wC or other varieties of philosophical practice can support those aims. These include:

- First and foremost, philosophy teaches students how to, and that they ought to, 'search for and provide reasons for assenting to religious doctrines' (Dupuis, 1979,

p. 63; see also Lipman, 1984a). Philosophical reasoning includes the identification of assumptions, which is an important aspect of the search for reasons. As Lipman *et al.* explain, ‘religious discussions usually do not explore the assumptions on which religious beliefs rest, while a philosophical discussion cannot rest content unless it does explore its own assumptions’ (Lipman *et al.*, 1980, p. 107).

- The evaluation of religious belief, value and practice depends on an informed understanding of them, and philosophical analysis includes clarification of such beliefs, values and practices, including the clarification of ‘issues involved in [students’] holding to the beliefs they do hold’ (*ibid.*, p. 108).
- The philosophical analysis of any belief involves the consideration of alternative beliefs. As Lipman *et al.* suggested, ‘[t]here can be no serious objection to affording the child a view of the range of alternatives from which human beings throughout the world select their beliefs. After all, if it is not indoctrination to suggest to children who profess to believe in many gods, or in none at all, that there are conceivable alternatives to their views, why should it not also be possible to suggest to those who believe in a solitary supernatural being that there are many numerical alternatives?’ (*ibid.*, p. 107).
- The application of logic to religious beliefs can, on the one hand, ‘point up contradictions which arise in religious beliefs and even in religious practice,’ and, on the other hand, ‘enable one to construct a coherent religious system (a theology) which may convince the mind of the truth-seeker’ (Dupuis, 1979, pp. 62-3; see also Jenkins, 1986, p. 26).
- Philosophy encourages young people to ‘raise and formulate significant and puzzling questions about matters which are in the field of concern for religion and faith’ (Hannam, 2012a, p. 219). The practice of P4/wC involves explicitly soliciting young people’s questions. And teachers with philosophical training are more likely to recognize the religious, existential and/or philosophical meaning in children’s questions and to take these questions seriously by spending time on them, and encouraging the children to discuss, analyze and enlarge on them (Jenkins, 1986).
- Finally, the practice of philosophical dialogue, or the community of philosophical inquiry – a ‘disciplined discussion, where interpretations are put forth with reasoned defenses’ (Lipman, 1984a), involves virtually all of the methods just outlined. Through the practice of philosophical dialogue ‘children can be introduced to a range of ideas and can build on these together. This helps them to struggle collectively with complex concepts and possibly to create new ideas as a result’ (Prescott, 2015, p. 36; see also Hannam, 2012a). Roose notes that in the context of RE, ‘for such a discussion to be successful, the teacher must be ready to switch between several different roles, [including t]he expert ... [t]he partner at eye-level ... [t]he presenter of different canonical views ... [and t]he presenter of different non-expert views: (Roose, 2009, pp. 75-6).

### ***Un-concluding remarks***

Having insisted on the preliminary and embryonic character of this paper, it would be self-contradictory for us to presume to offer any definitive conclusions to the reader. However, there is a philosophical-educational point that could be made in relation to the context in which we have situated our literature review. In Section 1 we mentioned the two

oppositional camps that converge on the rejection of the very project of RE-EfS through philosophical inquiry, seeing it as a kind of *hirrocervus*. From the perspective of the *longue durée* this convergence is not surprising and can, in fact, be construed simply as the perpetuation of the much-too-modern discourse of reason, understood as the divorce of religion from philosophy and/or science. That divorce sometimes leads proponents of religion and religious education to assume stances of isolationism and even protectionism from the critical bent of secular philosophy and science. Secularism has indeed been a hallmark of the Enlightenment, but the secularization of school systems in the Western world beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ran along two divergent philosophical avenues. In the Hegelian avenue, religion maintains a specific role in the initial stages of education because it is one of the forms of the spirit, but is left behind once the student has attained the superior stages of the development of the spirit and requires the study of philosophy in order to substitute conceptual knowledge for the representational cognition of religion.<sup>3</sup> In the positivist avenue, religion is seen as a stage of human inquiry well overcome and replaced by science, and, accordingly, no place is granted to it in the educational system, which aims instead at cultivating the scientific attitude – in philosophy and history, no less than in mathematics and science.

As mentioned above, from the very beginning, the pioneers of P4/wC deviated from this oppositional stance and saw a number of affinities among religion, spirituality and philosophical practice. We suggest that this is a manifestation of the deep pragmatist thrust of P4/wC. We are aware, of course, that Gareth Matthews cannot be enrolled in the pragmatist tradition *stricto sensu*, and that P4/wC has had so many evolutions and inflections over decades and been deployed through so many different theoretical frameworks that many theoreticians and practitioners in P4/wC would be uncomfortable being identified with pragmatism. However, by the phrase ‘pragmatist thrust’ we refer to the kind of attitude William James (2000[1907], p. 23) captured when he wrote that pragmatism is the ‘mediating way of thinking’ between the tough-mindedness inspired by science and the tender-mindedness which is unwilling to dismiss other forms of discourse just because they are alien to science. Indeed, Lipman pointed in this direction when he wrote of the place of philosophy in a ‘metaphysics of wonder’:

When wonder occurs, it is due to the fact that the road ahead is being divided into a steadily widening path and a steadily narrowing path. The awesome widening path in time obliterates all the details of its existence: one’s relationship to it moves in the direction of the mystical, while the narrowing path moves in the direction of the scientific. It is out of the dynamic, explosive

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<sup>3</sup> Italy’s educational debate at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (culminating in the great school reform in the 1920s) provides us an exemplary case of this Hegelian stance. Indeed, the Neo-Hegelian school (the main exponent of which was the Minister of Education who authored and realized the reform) was radically immanentist and aimed at emancipating the educational system from the ‘grip’ of Catholic culture. However, these reformers operated in a context in which the Catholic Church still had tremendous cultural, social and political influence. The Hegelian stance allowed them to preserve and even recognize a legitimate place for RE at the primary school level by gainsaying, however, any role for RE in advanced levels of the school system. According to a Hegelian view, religion, and more specifically, the Christianity, was able to introduce young people into a spiritual dimension through ‘representation’ but it had to be replaced by philosophy when students grew up (at the high school level). In the end, however, the Neo-Hegelians did not succeed and RE has remained a part of the Italian curriculum at all levels. Of course, the Italian case is all the more interesting given the influence of the Vatican over the country’s school policies and the fact that Italy may have been the only country in which there was a compulsory teaching of philosophy for three years in grammar school.

relationship between these two movements, that thinking is generated. [...] And so Aristotle is right to see wonder as the ground of both religion and science, both of which are succeeded by thinking – philosophical thinking in particular. (Lipman, 2005, pp. 3, 5)

The nearly five-decade long engagement of P4/wC with the question of RE-EfS could be read as the instantiation, at the educational level, of the fruitfulness of such a pragmatist attitude, hostile to any final either-or. Moreover, we suggest that this attitude is especially valuable in our ‘post-secular society’, as Jürgen Habermas (2008) has called it; that is, a world in which religions are not seen any longer as a remainder of past ages to be overcome, but rather as legitimate speaking partners in the conversation of humankind. Valuable too, in this world, is the discovery of ‘tools’ like the community of philosophical inquiry, that can keep the avenues of communication open.

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