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Trevor Cooling

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Knowledge in a religion and worldviews approach in English schools

Trevor Cooling

Emeritus Professor of Christian Education, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, UK

ABSTRACT

The Final Report of the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE) in England published in 2018 advocated what it called a religion and worldviews approach. One of the significant questions it provoked was the approach to knowledge that it took. This article explores this question. It first explains the background to the Commission Report and then the subsequent interpretative work undertaken by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales to develop its recommendations. It then focuses on the vision lying behind the religion and worldviews approach that draws on CoRE's claim that 'everyone has a worldview', and reviews the debate that resulted around that claim. A detailed consideration of the approach to worldview taken in the subsequent REC work and its exemplification in a revised Statement of Entitlement follows. Finally, it is argued that the understanding of knowledge taken in this literature resonates with that of Michael Polanyi in his development of the idea of personal knowledge and that of Andrew and Elina Wright's exposition of critical realism. The article advocates that this results in an approach to RE that puts learning to make scholarly and reflexive judgements at the heart of knowledge-rich RE.

KEYWORDS

Personal knowledge; religion and worldviews; statement of entitlement; commission on RE

Introduction

In his speech to the 2023 Conservative Party Conference, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (2023) commented proudly on how his party had reintroduced 'proper knowledge' back into education to replace the Labour Party's 'false ideology'. He went on to announce a new initiative for 16+ education calling it 'the new rigorous, knowledge-rich Advanced British Standard'. This aspiration for a knowledge-rich approach and its equating with academic rigour has been a recurring theme of the current British Government's education policy since 2010 (Cooling, Bowie, and Panjwani 2020, 24; O'Grady 2022, 110–111).

What then do these notions of *proper knowledge*, *knowledge-rich* and *academic rigour* mean for RE? This is a question that has particular significance in England in the light of the advocacy of a religion and worldviews approach by the Commission on RE (CoRE) (Commission on Religious Education 2018). Here are four illustrative examples of the questions raised by commentators on CoRE. In a BJRE editorial, Stern (2023) reflected on the perceived binary between student-centred and knowledge-centred approaches to RE and suggested that CoRE was seen as knowledge-centred. His concern was that this binary is unhelpful. Seemingly in contrast, Andrew and Elina Wright (2023) argued that CoRE made the mistake of giving inadequate attention to ultimate reality as 'a clearly

CONTACT Trevor Cooling ✉ trevor.cooling@canterbury.ac.uk 📍 Emeritus Professor of Christian Education, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, UK

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demarcated object of study' (p. 4). Moulin-Stozek (2023, 148) suggested that the epistemological and ontological assumptions behind the proposed approach needed exposing in case there was an underpinning bias. Finally, Fraser-Pearce and Stones (2023) argued that epistemic literacy should be at the heart of RE. They define epistemic literacy as: 'Competency and proficiency in the identification, interpretation, understanding, questioning, navigation and communication of knowledge'. (p. 5).

In this article I will take up the epistemological, ontological and pedagogical challenges posed by these authors to the religion and worldviews approach as it is currently being developed in England by the Religious Education Council (Religious Education Council for England and Wales 2023; Pett 2022). I will do this by offering my interpretation of its stance on so-called proper knowledge in response to four key questions. Is the approach unhelpfully knowledge-centred? Does it have an underpinning ontological and epistemological bias? Does it underplay knowledge as the exploration of ultimate reality? Does it promote epistemic literacy? In doing this, I will draw on the theory of knowledge developed by the Hungarian philosopher Michael Polanyi in his reflections on the nature of science. However, before that I will summarise my understanding of the main features of the current religion and worldviews initiative in England that are relevant to this discussion.

The religion and worldviews approach in England

In September 2018, the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) published the final report of the independent Commission on Religious Education (CoRE) that it had set up to review the state of RE in publicly funded schools in England. The report identified a key aspiration as being to provide a new vision for the subject that was encapsulated in the claim that 'everyone has a worldview' (Commission on Religious Education 2018, 30). The vision was that RE should contribute to pupils' understanding of the role that religious and non-religious worldviews play in human life and enable each of them to develop an informed, scholarly and reflexive approach to their own personal worldview development through robust academic study of religious and non-religious traditions.

CoRE's Chair described the new vision as follows:

The subject should explore the important role that religious and non-religious worldviews play in all human life. This is an essential area of study if pupils are to be well prepared for life in a world where controversy over such matters is pervasive and where many people lack the knowledge to make their own informed decisions. It is a subject for all pupils, whatever their own family background and personal beliefs and practices. (Commission on Religious Education (2018, Foreword)

The key characteristics that pupils should know and understand concerning how worldviews work in human life were laid out in a proposed National Statement of Entitlement (Commission on Religious Education 2018, 12–13). The aspiration was that, irrespective of their school character or their own background and personal worldview, pupils would be taught these characteristics using recognised scholarly disciplines through a curriculum that was appropriate for their school's particular context. It was envisaged that local authorities, academies and dioceses would each develop an appropriate curriculum for their schools, although it was recognised that national support for these local bodies would also be required. The aspiration was not to impose conformity, but rather to articulate a shared vision for the subject that met the educational needs of all pupils by preparing them for life in the plural and secular society that constitutes modern Britain.¹ The expectation was that this vision could be taught in a variety of ways appropriate to the context of different schools (Cooling 2020).²

Recognising that the Commission on Religious Education (2018) was the beginning not the end of a process of curriculum reform, the REC subsequently commissioned an academic literature review to map the understandings of the worldview concept across a range of academic traditions (Benoit, Hutchings, and Shillitoe 2020) and a report arising from five consultations with leading academics

discussing the implications of this review for classroom RE (Tharani, 2020). Building on this work, the REC then recruited three teams of teachers to develop exemplar, context-specific curriculums and units of work exemplifying different interpretations of the CoRE vision.³ These will be published in the early summer of 2024 alongside a resource designed to support RE curriculum developers in their own context specific work. A draft of this resource was made available for comment in May 2022 (Pett 2022).

The meaning of worldview: an epistemological debate

At the heart of the epistemological debate is CoRE's claim that 'everyone has a worldview'. What view of knowledge is implied in this claim? Critics of CoRE offered two contrasting interpretations.

On the one hand, Philip Barnes challenged CoRE's claim by arguing that: 'Many people, religious or non-religious, and particularly the young do not espouse a worldview, that is, they do not have a *reflective* philosophical view of the nature of reality of the kind that is properly described as a worldview (Barnes 2022, 90 and 95; see also 2023, p. 86). A worldview, he argues "refers to the basic beliefs that are foundational to some specific religion . . . that is sufficiently shared among adherents for it to take *institutional* form" (2023, p.84) and "is concerned with the intellectual side of religion" (2023, p. 82). Here he appears to be echoing Stern's (2023) concern that the religion and worldviews approach is knowledge-centred because it will focus pupils' attention on gaining cognitive knowledge of such intellectualised traditions. In such a knowledge-centred approach, it seems that knowledge is understood as information. A common assumption is that CoRE reflected an information-accumulation approach to knowledge by recommending the *addition and transmission* of yet more information about yet more worldviews to the curriculum (e.g. Barnes 2022, 93). Clearly, if this is the case, the problem would be that it entails an unmanageable quantity of information for pupils to learn and does not address the educational benefit for them of learning it. Barnes is of course correct that worldview is sometimes seen as this highly cognitive, doctrine-based phenomenon (e.g. Smart 2007), and that systematic study of such intellectual systems might well be arid and uninspiring. The question is, however, whether the REC is advocating this interpretation of CoRE.

On the other hand, commentators have expressed concern that CoRE's religion and worldviews initiative might be embracing postmodern relativism by failing to take ontological reality or truth seriously (e.g. Watson 2024, 20). Thus, Andrew and Elina Wright (2023) accuse CoRE of overemphasising epistemic relativism and paying too little attention to ontological reality (p. 2). Philip Barnes comments that, 'the impression is given by CoRE that everyone can have their own their own interpretation of the world and of religion and that everyone's subjectively constructed attribution of meaning to religion is equally true' (Barnes 2023, 89). He asserts that the concept of personal worldview is inspired by Clive and Jane Erricker's 'self-confessed postmodern approach to religious education' (p. 89). In similar vein, Trigg (2023, 123–126), again commenting on the notion of personal worldview, suggests: 'There lies the path to a cynicism that suggests that we each construct our own worldview' remarking that this ends with 'retreat from any idea of a real world independent of us all' (p.123). Trigg (p. 127) supports his position by accusing Cooling's interpretation of CoRE of making 'reality inaccessible', of saying 'that there is no such thing as truth'. Here then the criticism is that CoRE is too student-centred and does not give proper attention to ontological reality. Knowledge, it is asserted by these critics, is more than just a personal construct. Again, the question is whether or not the REC is adopting this radical, postmodern interpretation of knowledge construction.

Where then does the religion and worldviews initiative in England stand on the question of knowledge in RE? Is it embracing both positivistic (facts to be learnt) and relativistic (opinions to be expressed) understandings as the critics seem to suggest? What is its position on ontology and epistemology? What is its understanding of epistemic literacy? What clues to answering these questions are there in the REC literature that has sought to interpret and develop the CoRE vision so as to offer an educationally valid understanding of knowledge in RE?

The REC academic literature review (Benoit, Hutchings, and Shillitoe 2020) demonstrated that there are diverse interpretations of the worldview concept. One of the key questions the literature review poses is whether in RE worldview should only be understood in the cognitive, consciously thought-out way that Barnes regards as its proper understanding. If so, then it is clearly the case that the result would be the objective, cognitively focused study of information from a range of religious and non-religious worldviews which, as Barnes and others correctly point out, would overload the curriculum (Barnes 2022, 96). However, I will argue that this is not what is being suggested. Barnes' objection only succeeds if other understandings of worldview from his overly cognitive, positivistic understanding are arbitrarily ruled out as illegitimate. But if Barnes is wrong here in his characterisation, does that mean that the charge of radical relativism made by Barnes, Trigg and others is indeed correct?

Tharani's (2020) report of the academics' five conversations in response to Commission on Religious Education (2018) and Benoit, Hutchings, and Shillitoe (2020) highlight the interpretation the REC is now pursuing. They develop the significance of two dimensions of worldview identified by CoRE, namely the organised and the personal (Commission on Religious Education (2018 drawing on Jacomijn et al. 2013, 2017). Organised (sometimes called institutional) worldviews emphasise foundational beliefs and practices of communities and are the traditional focus of a world religions approach. These are closest to Barnes' *proper* understanding, but with more emphasis on fluid boundaries, development over time and embracing of the non-cognitive dimensions of religion. Personal worldview reflects a focus on the universal human experience of making sense of and living in the world. It is a core element of a person's identity. Personal worldviews are rarely systematised and comprehensive in the manner of organised worldviews. They are significantly shaped by the surrounding culture and communities which we each inhabit and are often tacit and developing.⁴ It would have perhaps been clearer if CoRE's claim that 'everyone *has* a worldview' had been expressed as everyone *inhabits* a *personal* worldview. Certainly, the claim should not be read as everyone has a fixed, *organised* worldview. Nor should the word personal be seen as synonymous with individual. It is essential to recognise that personal worldviews are always developed through the experience of living in community. Humans are essentially social beings who are both consciously and unconsciously influenced by those around them.

The phenomenon of personal worldview is explored by many scholars, each giving it their own distinctive name and character. The list includes habitus (Pierre Bourdieu), credo (Lesslie Newbigin), social imaginary (Charles Taylor), pre-understanding (Anthony Thiselton), plausibility structure (Peter Berger), fiduciary framework (Michael Polanyi) and prejudice (Hans-Georg Gadamer). Barnes accepts that this phenomenon exists and acknowledges its hermeneutical impact on pupils' learning (2023, pp. 84–86), his objection seemingly being that calling this a worldview is inappropriate. It might indeed have created less misunderstanding if CoRE had used a different name from personal worldview to distinguish it from the notion of organised/institutional worldviews, but it is difficult to see what alternative name might have made sense to teachers. Maybe much of the criticism of the term worldview in the REC initiative would have been allayed if more careful attention had been given in the CoRE Report to clarifying both the distinction between and the relationship between organised and personal worldviews?

How then should worldview in the religion and worldviews approach be understood? Tharani (2020, 5) suggests that CoRE was using worldview as a 'can opener' idea to point to a different pedagogy from the traditional world religions approach. Then RE is not simply the objective study of information about a range of organised worldviews, but is rather exploring how organised and personal worldviews interact in the human experience of being formed as a person (Cooling 2020). Andrew and Elina Wright (2023) make a similar point. Drawing on worldview theory, which reflects on the epistemological relationship between humans and the world (p. 2), they argue that worldview is properly understood as a heuristic tool and not as a definition of content (pp. 7–8). The critical question would then be *how are worldviews to be taught?* not *which worldviews are to be taught?* Worldview then primarily defines a pedagogical approach not curriculum content. The pedagogical

purpose is understanding how organised and personal worldviews interact in the formation of people's identities, the influences that shape this interaction and the appropriate, scholarly responses to it. The desired impact of this approach on the pupils is to enhance their understanding of their own personal worldview development and to promote their ability to make mature, informed, reflective, scholarly and reasoned judgements when encountering other people. This is achieved through the study of religious and non-religious worldviews in the RE classroom.

In other words, to use the language of hermeneutics, the religion and worldviews approach entails embracing both the horizon of the lesson content and the horizon of the pupil. The teacher's pedagogical responsibility is then to plan carefully the interaction of these two horizons. The relationship between the student and the content studied becomes more than simply mastering knowledge or retaining information. Rather it becomes an interpretive experience with a focus on understanding how people (those studied and those in the classroom) both shape and are shaped by their encounter with the substantive knowledge specified in the curriculum. The classroom focus is therefore hermeneutical understanding rather than just knowledge gain and retrieval. Such an approach to academic rigour embraces both personal development and a knowledge rich curriculum. It recognises that scholars are human beings and not just retainers and retrievers of information.

A proposed understanding of knowledge in the religion and worldviews approach in England

The Commission on Religious Education (2018) does not directly address Moulin's questions about ontology and epistemology. I will now suggest that the concept of personal knowledge and the theory of critical realism together offer a way through to a profitable understanding of knowledge in the religion and worldviews initiative.⁵

The term personal knowledge has its provenance in the epistemological work of Hungarian polymath Michael Polanyi (1962, 1966, Scott 1985, Mitchell 2006 and Lightcap Meek 2011).⁶ Polanyi was a distinguished chemist, who found academic safe haven from the ravages of both Nazism and Soviet Communism in Manchester University. In the latter part of his career, he switched discipline to reflect on the nature of scientific knowledge, publishing his Gifford lectures as the influential book *Personal Knowledge* (1962). Having observed the totalitarian abuse of science, his motivation was to challenge dangerous epistemological positivism, where it is assumed that objective ontological knowledge emerges mechanically through the impersonal exercise of the scientific method. Rather, he argued there is always personal involvement in generating scientific knowledge, since scientists rely on their own 'fiduciary framework' (i.e. personal worldview) in their work. These deep-seated, tacit assumptions and presuppositions heavily influence the questions asked, the concepts deployed, and the knowledge generated by scientists. A famous Polanyian catch phrase is 'we know more than we can tell' (Polanyi 1966, 4). For Polanyi, people's knowledge results from the interaction of the (often subconscious) subjective with the objective. Our personal worldview (or fiduciary framework) is then the filter through which we experience and interpret the information we receive about and from ontological reality and thereby generate our knowledge of the world. In a Polanyian epistemology, knowledge is a lot more than objective information (Lightcap Meek 2011), it entails interpretation by humans, much of which is tacit in nature. Although factually correct information is of course important, *significant* knowledge emerges from personal judgements that are then debated with others. Such judgements are not just generated 'through explicit ideas, but through narratives, images and shared practices in community' (Gallagher 2010 which are absorbed through living in a particular context. Such significant knowledge is spiritual in nature and contributes to human flourishing if managed in a healthy way.

However, Polanyi was definitely not an ontological relativist.⁷ He argued that knowledge claims are made with universal intent, meaning that they assert a claim to ontological truth. Polanyi's notion of personal knowledge therefore resonates with critical realist RE where learning to make judgements as to truth in the midst of epistemic diversity on the basis of reliable and relevant evidence

and sound argument is central. Andrew and Elina Wright express the critical realist path to personal knowledge as follows:

Critical realism functions as a heuristic tool rather than a foundational philosophy, under-labouring for any intellectual endeavour by focusing attention on three critical issues: the nature of reality (ontological realism), the extent of our knowledge of reality (epistemic relativism) and the possible enhancement of such knowledge (judgemental rationality). Ontological realism recognises that all viewers inhabit the same shared world; epistemic relativism recognises that despite participating in the same reality they often view it in significantly different ways; judgemental rationality recognises a moral, spiritual and intellectual imperative to strive for more truthful viewpoints. (2023, p. 2)

Pupils should therefore learn that claims to knowledge are interpretive judgements influenced by our personal worldview and critical appraisal is required to test their validity. The educational goal is then that pupils learn how to make informed, reflective, scholarly and reasoned judgements as to truth such that they are prepared for adult life in a world where there is much diversity and controversy around questions of truth between the many religious and non-religious traditions. Using a Polanyian, critical realist approach to knowledge, learning in RE is then essentially a hermeneutical activity where the interpretive nature of knowledge generation is taken seriously. This emphasis on the role of interpretation in knowledge generation is fundamentally different both from the current positivist obsession in England with transmission of cultural facts⁸ and from the radical relativist movement that sees knowledge as a purely human construction.⁹

A very important implication of this approach to academic rigour is that it entails the promotion of certain scholarly virtues. For example, to make tenable judgements one has to be a good listener and to be willing to change one's views in the light of evidence and reasoned argument. It means being able to hear another person's story (i.e. pay serious attention to the narrative that shapes their life). Hermeneutical virtues such as epistemic humility on the part of the learner have therefore to be nurtured.¹⁰ A truly knowledge-rich curriculum therefore entails promoting certain character traits that are central to scholarly knowledge generation. The character of the scholar matters. O'Grady (2022) is therefore correct when he argues that a religion and worldviews approach prepares pupils for life as citizens in a plural democracy. It involves learning how to live well together in the midst of controversy and diversity. Such an understanding of academic rigour offers a third way to Stern's (2023) binary of knowledge-centred and student-centred approaches to RE.

This understanding of knowledge is, I suggest, embedded in the REC's National Statement of Entitlement (Pett 2022), which is the beating heart of the religion and worldviews approach.

The Statement of Entitlement

The Statement of Entitlement was central to CoRE's strategy for developing and promoting a shared vision for RE and is the inspiration for the heuristic tool or can opener function that the religion and worldviews approach offers to RE curriculum designers. Surprisingly there has been minimal discussion of this in the literature, in contrast to the storm that broke out over the *worldview* word. CoRE describes the Statement as follows:

The National Entitlement is a set of organising principles which form the basis for developing programmes of study . . . It sets out the parameters of the subject and the key underlying concepts that pupils must be taught in order to understand religious and non-religious worldviews (Commission on Religious Education 2018, 32)

This is elaborated in a series of nine statements as to what pupils must be taught which appear to be an attempt to summarise the understanding pupils should develop as to how worldviews work in human life (Commission on Religious Education 2018, 34–35).¹¹

Following the publication of the two clarifying reports (Benoit, Hutchings, and Shillitoe 2020; Tharani 2020), the REC established a project to explore how curriculum developers and syllabus writers might implement the developing interpretation of the CoRE vision. A key element of this project was to refine the original Statement of Entitlement to underline its role as a heuristic tool for curriculum designers rather than presenting it solely as a statement of content that has to be taught

to pupils. The resulting revision (Pett 2022, pp. 18–21) is essentially a pedagogical document capturing the classroom experience that it is suggested should characterise the RE that curriculum developers should be aiming for.¹²

Pett's development of the Statement of Entitlement is therefore a significant refinement of CoRE's original proposal. It is divided into three different dimensions:

- (1) **Content:** This outlines six key features of how worldviews work in human life that pupils need to learn. For example, a) the importance of the context we each inhabit in shaping our personal worldview and b) the way that organised worldviews demonstrate both continuity and change over time. It is not the traditional statement of substantive content found in the world religions approach in that it does not prescribe the organised worldviews to be studied. That is a task for curriculum developers taking account of their own particular context and of statutory requirements.
- (2) **Engagement:** This specifies three key features of the study methodology the pupils will experience. It highlights a) the use of different ways of knowing (i.e. disciplines), b) the encounter with lived experience of adherents of organised worldviews and c) the importance of both dialogue and interpretation in knowledge generation.
- (3) **Position:** This emphasises pupils reflecting on how their own personal worldview impacts on their study and how their study impacts on their personal worldview.

There are 11 statements, six on Content, three on Engagement and two on Position. In using these for planning, teachers are encouraged not to treat them as a series of categories to be worked through. Rather they are dimensions that will be present in all units of work but will receive differing amounts of attention in different topics. To clarify this, Pett (2022, 37) draws on the metaphor of a music mixing desk with 11 sliders and asks the curriculum developer to decide which of the 11 sliders will be most prominent in any given unit. The aim is to avoid a tick box approach to the Statement of Entitlement which treats each element of the pedagogical experience as a separate entity.

In its current iteration, the Statement of Entitlement is then best understood as defining what an academically rigorous approach to RE looks like where students are required to engage with three interacting elements:

- (1) The topic that they are focusing on in their study of religious and non-religious worldviews and the question of how studying that topic enhances their understanding of how worldview works in human life.
- (2) The methodology and academic discipline(s) they will use to answer their question. Here being able to identify appropriate ways of knowing for answering the questions that are the focus of the topic is a key indicator of an academically rigorous approach. In addition, they learn key interpretive and dialogical skills and scholarly virtues through study of the lived experience of adherents and the dialogic and interpretive practices they exhibit.
- (3) Their own positioning in relation to the question and the impact of their positioning on both the conduct of their studies and the final judgements that they make. They will also reflect on the impact of their study on their own positioning. The ability to do this is fundamental to becoming an academically rigorous scholar and involves the development of certain scholarly virtues. The inclusion of this element is critical to the personal knowledge characterisation of the approach and, importantly, contributes to pupils' preparation for active citizenship as adults in the diverse society that characterises England today. This is an antidote to the culture wars model of dealing with diversity that is, unfortunately, becoming increasingly influential.

The approach to academic rigour here is, therefore, not just to focus on the retention and recall of ever more demanding information, but is also to focus on the rigour of the scholarly approach that the pupils are inducted into in the RE classroom. The pedagogy embedded in the Statement of

Entitlement is hermeneutical in seeking to create a dialogical interaction between the horizon of the content studied and the horizon of the pupil in a way that equips pupils both to make the informed, reasoned, scholarly and reflective judgements and to develop the scholarly virtues that are integral to an academically rigorous approach.

The view of knowledge embedded in the Statement of Entitlement therefore reflects Polanyi's notion of proper knowledge as being personal knowledge. This contrasts with a positivist view of knowledge which regards growth in knowledge purely as mastery of objective information. Rather the focus is on the appropriate interaction between the objective and the subjective in knowledge generation. Hence the importance of active attention being given to the role of personal worldview (fiduciary framework) in both those being studied and in those doing the studying. Furthermore, the Statement of Entitlement resonates with Andrew Wright's Critical RE approach in its emphasis on the nurture of judgemental rationality in the cause of enabling pupils to understand the relationship between ontological reality (the shared nature of the world that all humans inhabit) and epistemic relativism (the different judgements that humans make on that shared reality). This is where the Engagement and Position strands make a particularly significant contribution to the nature of the learning experience. Echoing the Wrights, this makes the Statement of Entitlement a heuristic tool.

It has been claimed that the worldview approach (Cooling 2020) represented a paradigm shift for RE. This has been challenged on the grounds that many of its elements are drawn from past approaches to RE (Barnes 2023). That is, indeed, true (Pett 2022, 40; Cooling 2020; Cooling, Bowie, and Panjwani 2020). However, what this criticism ignores is the innovative nature of the Statement of Entitlement in encapsulating the role of personal knowledge in a pedagogical process by:

- (1) Defining a new purpose for RE in terms of understanding how worldviews work in human life and equipping pupils to make sound scholarly judgements in the light of this knowledge.
- (2) Reconceptualising a knowledge-rich curriculum as engagement with the personal nature of knowledge rather than being simply mastery of information.
- (3) Offering a pedagogy heavily influenced by hermeneutical worldview theory.
- (4) Making the nurture of scholarly virtues such as reflection on one's own personal worldview positioning, epistemic humility and dialogical empathy central to academic rigour and thus contributing to preparation for life as a responsible citizen.

Conclusion

Echoing Fraser-Pearce and Stones, it has been argued that the development of the religion and worldviews approach presented in the REC's Statement of Entitlement (Pett 2022) is one that has epistemic literacy at its heart in its embracing of Polanyi's concept of personal knowledge. It embodies that in the interaction of its three dimensions, which together provide a pedagogical tool for curriculum designers. In so doing, and in agreement with Stern, it rejects a knowledge-centred, student-centred binary and affirms the importance of the hermeneutical interaction between the learner and the substantive content being taught. However, contra Stern, it is not a purely knowledge-centred approach, something which has been made clearer in the development of the Statement of Entitlement from its early form in the CoRE Report. In contrast to Stern, the Wrights (2023) charged the CoRE Report with implying that knowledge generation did not pay due regard to the shared ontological reality that pupils are investigating. I have responded to that by showing that their critical RE approach is implicit in the current Statement of Entitlement. Finally, I hope that my unpacking of the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying the Statement of Entitlement will allay Moulin's fears of bias. Rather, it acts as a heuristic, pedagogical tool rather than being an assertion of a particular ideological positioning. Its aim is to embody the nature of the scholarly approach that reflects the current shared understanding of good practice in RE in the English context. This can be manifested through many different approaches to RE.

Rishi Sunak was correct to be a fan of academic rigour and a knowledge-rich approach to education. However, he did not spell out what he meant by that, other than to contrast it with Labour's ideology. In the current religion and worldviews approach to RE in England, I have argued that being knowledge-rich entails more than the acquisition of information. It is rather learning to make justifiable, interpretive judgements whilst manifesting scholarly virtues like epistemic humility. The current REC Statement of Entitlement encapsulates what such a knowledge-rich pedagogy for RE entails in the classroom. This is what a proper knowledge-rich approach entails in a religion and worldviews curriculum.

Notes

1. There was therefore never a recommendation for establishing a national curriculum that would be a legal requirement for schools to teach (contra Wilcockson and Coupe 2023).
2. A most interesting example of this aspiration having concrete expression is in the recently published Directory of Religious Education for Catholic Schools (Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 2023).
3. For more details of the projects described in this paragraph see <https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/worldviews/>.
4. The Theos animation *Nobody Stands Nowhere* was created to capture this sense of world view. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFRxFK-FJdos>.
5. For fuller exposition of the relevance of personal knowledge and a hermeneutical approach in a religion and worldviews approach to RE see Cooling (2020) and Cooling, Bowie, and Panjwani (2020).
6. Contra Philip Barnes (2023, 89), who asserts that it comes from Clive and Jane Erricker.
7. An important point to note is that personal knowledge is not to be equated with individual knowledge as does Trigg (2023, 123). One's fiduciary framework or personal worldview is fundamentally shaped through interaction with others and by the experience of being part of communities and influenced by their narratives. It is a fundamental misunderstanding to suggest that the notion of personal knowledge leads to subjectivism or even solipsism.
8. This approach sees learning primarily as moving information from short term to long term memory and success in learning as effective retrieval of that information.
9. Trigg (2023, 127) rejects the relevance of critical realism outright in his extended attack on the religion and worldviews approach by simply placing it inside scare quotes accusing his target, Cooling, of arguing that there is no such thing as truth and of making reality inaccessible.
10. See the video *The Joy of Being Wrong* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRXNUx4cua0>.
11. The Statement of Entitlement was inspired by the approach of the *Big Ideas Project* (Wintersgill 2015) that preceded the publication of CoRE.
12. The Statement of Entitlement is currently being trialled by three teams of teachers, each of which will develop a curriculum for their own context and will be further revised in the light of their experience. See <https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/resource/strictly-re-religion-and-worldviews-project-presentations/>

Disclosure statement

The author discloses that he is Director of the REC Curriculum Project that is the subject of this article. However the views expressed here are his personal views and do not constitute the policy of the REC.

Notes on contributor

Trevor Cooling is Emeritus Professor of Christian Education at Canterbury Christ Church University, UK. Previously he was Director of the National Institute for Christian Education Research at Christ Church. From 2015 to 2021 he was Chair of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales. He is Project Director of the REC's Religion and Worldviews Curriculum Development Project

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