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## Philosophy – the benign tumour in the body of Religious Education

The drastic shifts in the nature and delivery of RE in all kinds of schools in Scotland mapped out in the changes to the curriculum, from before 5-14 - particularly following the Millar Report (1972), to the Curriculum for Excellence (2004ff) and is evident in the descriptive and analytical literature produced in recent years (including Harlen (1996), Whatley (2008) Conroy et al (2013), Nixon (2008))

There has been a significant growth in the “philosophication” of RE in Scotland as outlined by Graeme Nixon in a number of articles (2009, 2012), a move that is actively supported by some within the profession and by hostile critics of religion. (see also Nixon, G. (2008) *From RE to RMPS: The case for the Philosophication of Religious Education in Scotland*. Edinburgh. Edinburgh University Press.

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This paper argues that the growth of philosophy within Religious Education is comparable to the growth of a benign tumour in a healthy person. These growths may not be as “benign” as their name suggests. (Ref <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/what-is-cancer/how-cancers-grow#ftpdvr42MWbjv6j8.99> )

The work of Humanist, secular and “skeptical” organisations is critically explored, and their regular claims not to be hostile to religion (from numerous sources including Humanists UK, National Secular Society, Skeptic societies) are examined.

The nature and purpose of Religious Education is under threat, not only from external hostile critics, but from within (the “benign tumour” of philosophy).

The insights which might be gleaned from the different theoretical perspectives on the RE curriculum in Scotland point clearly to a crisis of identity and purpose, in which the core value of RE is in danger of being subsumed into a “skills” agenda. At worst, the skills agenda is a mask for a militantly anti-religious evangelical humanist crusade.

- Religious Education
- "Never has an understanding of our spirituality and the role of religion been more important to navigating the challenges we face"
- (British Academy president Sir David Cannadine, March 31 2019)
- The Establishment
- More than a quarter of England's secondary schools do not offer religious education, despite the law saying they must
- (NATRE Sept 17 2017)
- Philo-Sophia

- Benign tumours
- Usually grow quite slowly...
- Don't spread to other parts of the body...
- Philosophy's impact in other areas of the curriculum is negligible.
- Do not cause cachexia  
(weakness and wasting of the body due to severe chronic illness)
- The growth of philosophy does not weaken the educational body
- It threatens the integrity and value of Religious Education.
- Usually have a covering made up of normal cells...
- Philosophy can be disguised as "RE" in a system which fails to recognise the content or the value of "RE"
- Problems start with benign tumours when they grow very large.
- It is clear that philosophy has grown very large indeed, within the body of RE.
- Become uncomfortable or unsightly -
- Philosophy is taking up space that might otherwise be occupied by a more rigorous pursuit of religious literacy.
- Press on other body organs –
- the opportunity cost to the specifically religious content of RE is considerable
- Take up space inside the skull
- Release hormones that affect how the body works -
- "Philosophy" as "Thinking Skills":  
A Fallacious Equation
- The Equality Act (Scotland)  
protected characteristics:
  - age
  - disability
  - gender reassignment
  - marriage and civil partnership
  - pregnancy and maternity

- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- “Harassment refers to actions or words that are, or could be seen as discriminatory or inappropriate toward people based on:
- gender,
- race,
- sexual orientation,
- gender-identification,
- age or
- disability”
- Edinburgh Skeptics website
- Philosophy as Culture, not Critique
- “P4C” - “There are no limits on the content of Philosophy. (That’s why it is regarded as dangerous by autocrats)
- In CoPI (Community of Philosophical Inquiry) it is the CoPI Chair’s responsibility to ensure that the content is Philosophical. Not to input content, but investigate whatever comes up
- Both in Philosophy and in CoPI practise any content that has philosophical assumptions underlying it is allowed
  - • This includes content such as
  - • Racist
  - • Sexist
  - • Homophobic
  - • Facist [sic]
  - • Marxist etc.
  - • Views”
- Source: <https://catherinemccall.wordpress.com/>

- Catherine McCall is “a Scottish philosopher who worked with Matthew Lipman on the P4C programme at Montclair University in the 1980s and appeared in ‘Socrates for Six Year Olds’ showcasing Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CoPI), her own methodology (see McCall, 2009)
- Humanism
- “It’s about approaching people with kindness and empathy” – President, Professor Alice Roberts
- Humanists UK Promotional video 2019
- FAQ: Is Humanism anti-religious?
- “Humanism is a positive belief system, we seek to promote our positive vision for a secular Scotland where all people are treated equally.
- We do however campaign for many changes in society, such as the legal and social privileges that many religious organisations enjoy – sometimes people interpret this as negative, but it’s impossible to campaign for any change unless we highlight the flaws with current arrangements.”
- “A word of warning, they will pull no punches in their criticism of religion... Not for the faint of heart or the easily offended. You have been warned.”
- Humanist popular memes:
- Philosophia and Her Problems
- Consolations?
- Socrates, Epicurus, Seneca, Montaigne, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on some of the things that bother us all: lack of money, the pain of love, inadequacy, anxiety; the fear of failure and the pressure to conform.
- Appendix: Philosophy Higher  
(from [https://farnborough.ac.uk/course/alevel\\_philosophy](https://farnborough.ac.uk/course/alevel_philosophy) )
- Year 1 (50%)
  - Epistemology: Can we be sure we are not now dreaming?; Can we rely on our senses to give us knowledge?; Can we know anything just using thought alone?
  - Moral philosophy: Is the right action the one with the best consequences?; Are there any facts about what is right and wrong?; Does “murder is wrong” just mean “murder, yuck!”?
- **Year 2 (50%)**
  - The metaphysics of God: Does God exist?: Definitely? Probably? Definitely not? Probably not?; Does the idea of God make sense?

- The metaphysics of mind: Is the mind physical?; Could robots have minds?; Can we know that other minds exist?
- Appendix: Philosophy A Level (AQA)  
(Part 3 of 4)
- Metaphysics of God - THE CONCEPT OF GOD: The divine attributes: Omnipotence, Omniscience, Omnibenevolence, Eternal/everlasting, Personal
- Problems with this concept of God, The Euthyphro dilemma , Omniscience vs. free will
- DOES GOD EXIST?
- Ontological arguments – Anselm – Descartes - Problems: Gaunilo’s island - Hume: ‘God does not exist’ is not a contradiction
- Kant: existence is not a predicate - Modern ontological arguments: Malcolm - Plantinga
- Teleological arguments - William Paley: Natural Theology - Problems: Hume: problems with the analogy
- Hume: causation requires multiple instances - Hume: infinite time, finite matter; Darwin: evolution by natural selection Swinburne: The Argument from Design
- Problems: Multiple universes Hume/Kant: is the designer God? Cosmological arguments The Kalam argument Aquinas: Five Ways - Argument from motion, Argument from causation, Argument from contingency - Descartes’ cosmological argument
- Problems: Is a first cause necessary? Hume: ‘everything has a cause’ is not an analytic truth - Is the first cause God?
- The problem of evil - The logical problem of evil - J.L. Mackie: Evil and Omnipotence - Inconsistent triad
- Reply 1: good couldn’t exist without evil - Reply 2: the world is better with some evil than none at all - Reply 3: we need evil for free will
- Problems: Alvin Plantinga: God, Freedom and Evil - Free will defence - Natural evil as a form of moral evil - The evidential problem of evil -
- Problems: Free will - John Hick: Evil and the God of Love - Soul making - Why God allows animals to suffer - Why God allows such terrible evils
- Why God allows pointless evils -
- RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE – Cognitivism - A.J. Ayer: verificationism - The verification principle – Falsification - Problem: self-defeating - Anthony Flew: invisible gardener - Basil Mitchell: ambiguous resistance fighter - R.M. Hare: Bliks - Non-cognitivism - Wittgenstein: language games
- Rationale for taking philosophy A level

- 1. Independent thought: doing philosophy is an excellent training in thinking for yourself. In our experience, many people are quick to say that beliefs, especially on such philosophical matters as ethics or religion, depend on upbringing. But very few people say this about themselves. Does what you think about abortion or about life after death come straight from your parents and teachers? Or do you think you have good reasons to believe what you do? If you aren't thinking for yourself already, doing philosophy will provide you with the perfect opportunity!
- 2. Subject matter: the questions that philosophy investigates are the most profound questions that we can ask. It investigates the deepest aspects of what it means to be human. Are we simply animals that have evolved, or do we have a spiritual dimension that will survive the death of our bodies? Does God exist, and if so, what does God expect of us? What can we know about the world we live in, and is certainty important? Is there one moral code for all people to live by, or is right and wrong 'simply' a matter of culture? How far can you take this idea – could it really ever be right to sexually abuse someone, whatever your culture says? Whether you study these questions in a religious context or not, they are questions that get to the heart of our existence.
- 3. Dispute: if there are any answers to these questions, they are not obvious! This means that philosophy requires you to suspend your belief and disbelief while thinking. It asks you to avoid being too quick to jump to conclusions, especially the conclusions you want to be true. Thinking hard without quickly falling back on what you already think can be quite scary at first; that's why, perhaps, some people don't have any time for philosophy – it can feel unsettling and personally challenging. But what is personally challenging also offers a chance to grow.
- 4. Character: because it encourages open-mindedness, doing philosophy can actually change your character. It can help you mature in your thoughts about and relations with people who are different to you, whether they are people you meet or authors you read. This doesn't just mean it can give you new thoughts, but it can only new ways of thinking – about yourself, about others, about the world.
- 5. Thought: doing philosophy is not easy. It is difficult to understand the arguments and the ideas. As with doing anything that is difficult, you develop new skills that make it easier with practice. Some of the skills that doing philosophy can teach you are:
  - a) understanding the relations between ideas: how one idea can imply another or contradict it
  - b) the ability to spot flaws in arguments
  - c) the ability to argue
  - d) imagination: coming up with novel solutions and novel ideas
  - e) communication and conversation: philosophy is done through discussion and debate

- 6. Self-understanding: taking all these ideas together – being able to think and think independently, thinking about deep questions but without resorting to what you already believe – philosophy can help you to understand yourself. It's what education is really about. What more could anybody want from an A level??
- Religious Studies A level entries decline by 22.8% as the subject is squeezed out of the curriculum 17 August 2018
- '...Congratulations and thanks must also go to their teachers who have worked tirelessly to ensure that students can reach their full potential in this reformed A level. It is of little surprise to those of us who teach RS that it remains popular amongst young people, however it is very disappointing to see that the number of entries has dropped by over 20%...' Ben Wood, Chair, NATRE.
- At a time when Religious Education is more important than ever, with the need for community integration in our diverse society, it is concerning to see a significant drop in the number of young people taking Religious Studies at A level in England and Wales. The drop in RS entries by 22.8% is disappointing given the subject's popularity has grown in recent years. Despite this reduction in entries for RS, there are still 65% more entries than in 2003 (11,132 entries were recorded in 2003).
- The key outcomes of the 2018 A level results in England and Wales for Religious Education are as follows:
  - 18,422 RS A level entries were recorded, a decrease of 22.8% on 2017.
  - The decrease in RS A level entries is an extreme example of a broader pattern of decreasing entries for humanities and social science subjects (English language down 14.8% across the UK, Geography down 11.3%, History down 2.7%) while entries for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths (STEM) subjects have increased (Chemistry up 3.4% across the UK, Physics up 3.4%, Biology up 3.1%, and Maths up 2.5%).
  - Overall the number of A-level entries across England and Wales has dropped by 1.8% on 2017. This is related to the smaller cohort of students taking A levels this year with a decrease in the number of 18-year-olds in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland of 3.5% on 2017, and also due to fewer pupils taking four A-levels.
  - There were 6,024 entries for RS at AS level, a decrease of 63% on 2017; this reflects the decline across all subjects where the number of AS entries fell by 55% across England and Wales (as AS level grades no longer count towards A levels under the linear scheme).
  - 22.4% of entries for RS A level were awarded an A or an A\* with 4.6% of RS entries awarded the top A\* grade.
- The dramatic fall in the number of Religious Studies A level entries in England and Wales comes after warnings in recent years of insufficient action to support the subject. In 2017 the RE Council of England and Wales (REC) and the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) published analysis based on data from the Department for Education showing that



28% of secondary schools in England report that they are not meeting their statutory obligation to teach religious education (RE).

- The decline in entries is surprising given that Religious Studies at A level continues to be a favourable gateway to university and jobs. The importance of RS A level as a subject for Higher Education entry and for graduate recruiters is increasingly recognised by independent bodies. Whilst RS A level is not listed by The Russell Group as a ‘facilitating subject’, The Russell Group of top universities has made it clear that RS A level provides ‘suitable preparation for entry to university generally’, and both Oxford and Cambridge University include Religious Studies in the top level list of ‘generally suitable Arts A levels’.
- In fact, almost 21% of students admitted to Oxford University to study English and 13.5% admitted to study History in 2015 had an RS A level, more than those with Economics, Physics and Business Studies A levels.<sup>1</sup>
- Employers recognise the value of religious literacy. For example, in February 2017, EY announced the creation of Religious Literacy for Organisations (RLO), a diversity and inclusion training programme designed to help organisations better understand religious inclusion and its positive impact on business process and performance.
- Career prospects for those that take Religious Studies/Philosophy at degree level are also very bright due to developing a strong academic skillset with transferable skills attractive to employers. In 2015/16, 16.5% of Philosophy graduates entered the professional sector in the fields of Business, HR and Finance, compared to 10% for all disciplines. With 13% of graduates going on to work in the fields of legal, social and welfare, 6.8% choosing to become educational professionals and 4.6% managers.<sup>2</sup>
- The drop in the number of pupils taking A level and AS level Religious Studies is all the more concerning at a time when there is a shortfall in recruitment for teacher training in Religious Education. Evidence collected by the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) suggests that headteachers are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit RE specialists.
- The Commission on Religious Education established to review the legal, education and policy frameworks for religious education in schools will present its final report findings to government next month to address the current challenges faced by Religious Education in England today.
- Comment from Ben Wood, Chair, National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE)
- “Congratulations to the many students receiving their Religious Studies results today. These results are the product of their hard work grappling with some of the most difficult questions to ever puzzle humankind, and I am sure that they will feel the benefits of studying RS for many years to come. Congratulations and thanks must also go to their teachers who have worked tirelessly to ensure that students can reach their full potential in this reformed A level. It is of little surprise to those of us who teach RS that it remains popular amongst young people, however it is very disappointing to see that the number of entries has dropped by over 20%. This devastating fall has been expected given successive policy decisions that have failed to maintain and support the position of RS as part of a

broad and balanced curriculum. RS A level is an excellent preparation for both further study and for entering the world of work. It is a subject that helps young people gain access to a wide range of degree courses, and it is valued by employers, with the subject matter and approach of an RS A level helping to equip students with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to succeed in modern Britain.”

- Comment from Rudolf Elliott Lockhart, Chief Executive, Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC):
- “At a time when our increasingly diverse society makes high quality religious education more important than ever, it is deeply concerning to see such a dramatic fall in the number of Religious Studies A level entries. It is, however, an unsurprising consequence of policy decisions such as the exclusion of RS from key performance indicators at GCSE, insufficient bursary provision to encourage people to train to become RE teachers, and a lack of action to hold schools to account when they fail to teach RE. Last year the REC and NATRE highlighted that 28% of secondary schools in England report that they do not meet their basic statutory duty to teach RE. Today’s figures are further evidence of the critical need for decisive action to be taken. Next month will see the publication of the Commission on Religious Education’s final report: I hope that the Government will be keen to take heed of its recommendations and work with us to secure the future of high quality education about religions and belief in this country.”
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- Notes: GCE A level results of A level candidates in England and Wales.
- Source: Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)
- Download full media release which includes A level entries in RS in England and Wales, 2003 to 2018
- 1 A level RS and Uni admission 2015
- 2 Data collected for “What do graduates do? 2015/16 Higher Education Career Services Unit [www.hecsu.ac.uk](http://www.hecsu.ac.uk)
- 3 Due to a change in the way that JCQ present the data, figures for 2003 to 2015 include entries from candidates in the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, figures for 2016 and 2017 do not. This change has a relatively small impact on the time series data. 2016 is the only year in which it is possible to measure the impact of this methodological change: there were 117 entries for Religious Studies from candidates in the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man suggesting that the impact of the change will be very slight.
- Numbers from AQA 2018
- RELIGIOUS STUDIES      3021
- PHILOSOPHY                      2808

- The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.
- Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, thesis 11.
- Philosophy stands in the same relation to the study of the actual world as masturbation to sexual love.
- Karl Marx, The German Ideology, International Publishers, ed. Chris Arthur, p. 103.