Postmodernity, Secularism and Democratic approaches to Education—the impact on Religious Education in Scotland

An Analysis of the "philosophication" of Scottish Religious Education in Light of Social and Educational Change

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Received 21 October 2008; accepted 3 July 2009

Abstract
The nature of the subject variously described in Scotland as Religious Education, Religious and Moral Education, and Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies has changed radically over the last four decades. This paper seeks to examine possible reasons for the move to non-confessional, multi-religious and philosophical approaches, both set against the wider social climate and also as evidenced in empirical data. This hypothesis of this paper is that changes within Religious Education (RE) can be understood against the background of societal change, secularisation and the adoption of more democratic educational approaches. The intention of this article is to evidence this claim with reference to key documents in the development of RE, as well as the content of RE curricula. Empirical data also informs this discussion, principally from a questionnaire based pilot study of nine RE departments in a particular local authority.

Keywords
RE policy, philosophication, curricular change, postmodernism, social-cultural context of RE

1. Introduction — Article Structure and the Research Problem

This article begins with an overview of the methodological considerations for the empirical work undertaken. This is followed by a broad historical overview of RE in Scotland. This allows the reader to place the development of RE in Scotland in a wider historical context. Beyond this lies a consideration of the changes in Scottish RE, particularly since 1972, and attempts to situate these changes and their influences in a broader United Kingdom (UK) and European context. This is followed by a section outlining definitions of philosophy,
given that the emerging research question considers reasons for the emergence of philosophy in RE. There follows a section outlining where this 'philosophical turn' can be located in Scottish RE policy. The next three sections explore the hypotheses that philosophy has emerged as a result of complex social change in Scotland which is divided threefold into social theoretical analysis, secularisation and the emergence of more democratic approaches to education. In each of these three sections the result of a survey conducted on one Scottish Local Authority are considered. A conclusion follows.

The research problem that emerges from the initial sections is that RE in Scotland has, since 1972, become increasingly explicitly philosophical, not simply in methodological terms, but also in terms of content, particularly in the secondary school (ages 12-18). This article seeks to address what may have been the factors which have contributed to this, both through documentary analysis and a pilot survey. In doing so, it is hoped that the reader can gain an understanding of RE and its development in Scotland which can be compared to other contexts. It is also hoped that this may also allow the researcher and reader to begin to understand the anatomy of curricular change in Scottish RE.

2. Methodological Considerations

The empirical data which informs this article is drawn from a pilot study from one local authority in Scotland (May 2007). In Scotland there are thirty two local authorities. These are effectively local government in each of these areas, and their remit includes, among things, social care and health, transport, environment, and education. Consent was sought and given from the local authority in question. Anonymity was assured. The whole process was consistent with Scottish Educational Research Association ethical guidelines for educational research (2005). The aims of the questionnaire were:

1. To summarise RE provision (what topics and units were offered and when?)
2. To establish the title used for the subject RE
3. To establish where philosophy and philosophical approaches inform approaches to teaching
4. To establish possible reasons for the emergence of philosophy within the subject

In this case, the researcher identified a Scottish Local Authority with whom he enjoyed a positive relationship (2005-present), having delivered continuing
professional development to RE staff; been involved in partnership with regards to student teacher education placements, and taken part in the RE Principal Teacher (department head) network meetings, at which the researcher disseminates RE related research findings and developments on a regular basis. Using this local authority would provide a high rate of returns (9 out of 12 schools responded), as well as a forum (the Principal Teacher network) in which to discuss any issues raised by the research, the questionnaire and its completion. The geographical proximity for the researcher was another appeal in electing to pilot within this particular authority. The respondent in each case was the Principal Teacher RE though it is hoped that their views represent those of others in the department in each school. Though none of the responding schools are denominational (Roman Catholic) there is provision for Catholic children in the authority provided by a peripatetic specialist teacher. Nevertheless all responses received reflected the non-denominational RE curriculum guidelines in Scottish secondary schools.

One possible drawback to using this authority was that of intellectual proximity to the researcher and his vision of RE. In other words, the close working relationship (outlined above) may involve shared understandings of issues within RE that may not, in time, be obvious to those completing the questionnaire from authorities remote to the researcher. This represents a possible problem with regards to capacity of these respondents, working in schools that are effectively satellites of the researcher’s university, to objectively appraise the research instrument as well as possible researcher effect on the findings. This may also explain the dearth of critical comment about the questionnaire (outlined below).

Nevertheless, the homogeneity of RE staff in one authority and extent to which the researcher has a shared vision with these staff is perhaps overstated here. Though the researcher has close working and personal relationships with a number of the respondents, others are more peripheral and offer a more distant or previously undisclosed perspective. The results of the pilot support this in that there are a rich variety of responses to each of the questions. Furthermore, the pragmatic reasons outlined above regarding return rate and opportunities for discussion (formal and informal), were felt to outweigh any arguments in favour of using an authority remote to the researcher.

The pilot was distributed in April 2007 and the researcher met with respondents in May 2007 to discuss the questionnaire. During this discussion respondents commented that the questionnaire was well worded and easily understood; that it was neither intrusive nor overly onerous. The researcher also elicited positive feedback about the transparency (as well as the worth and currency) of the research, as well as about the layout and space provided for responses (Munn and Drever, 1996).
Respondents also commented on the types of questions used which were incrementally more evaluative and analytical in nature, thereby allowing the respondent to clarify their position in a quantitative manner before tackling questions about reasons for the emergence of Philosophy in RE (Munn and Drever, 1996).

The schedule of questions was as follows:

1. Please outline your current RE/RME/RMPS provision
2. What title is used for the subject in discussion with pupils, teachers and parents?
3. Is philosophy introduced to your pupils? If yes, how and when does this happen? If not, can you explain why?
4. If you do introduce philosophy to pupils, how do they respond?
5. If you offer philosophy as opposed to RMPS in S5/6 — why?
6. Why do you think philosophy has emerged nationally as part of the subject RE?
7. Any other comments?

The structure of the questionnaire reflects Wellington’s assertion (2000) that schedules of questions should begin with closed questions and move towards openness, thereby allowing interviewees the space and time to engage with the deeper, more reflective issues as they complete the questionnaire. The researcher included an initial question that would allow respondents the chance to outline their RE provision (a non-evaluative question). The hope was that this question, while providing rich quantitative data for the researcher, would also allow the respondent the opportunity to ‘warm-up’ (Robson 1983) before tackling the higher order analytical questions to follow.

Discussion with respondents also centred on the issue of possibly leading responses in these questions and clarity as to what was being asked. In both of these cases the respondents claimed that the wording of the questions did not falsely lead them to answer in a particular way. While the questions were, in the main, open-ended, respondents felt that the scope provided in the rationale pre-empted the possibility of possibly over-general answers (Cohen et al., 2005).

3. The Scottish Context and Beyond

Since the Reformation, Religion and Education in Scotland have been intertwined. John Knox’s 1560 Common Book of Discipline made clear the need
for the need for access to vocational and/or academic learning in his Presbyterian manifesto for a system of parish, church-governed schools in Scotland. What he made even clearer, however, was that this aspiration would be secondary to catechism into reformed church doctrine. Over the next three centuries the parish school system Knox envisaged largely preserved Scottish national consciousness in the absence of a parliament and also, in its meritorocratic philosophy, has contributed to Scottish education's self-image and mythology wherein the 'lad o'pairts' (the child from any background) could access any level of education.

However, as a result of the inability of the church to maintain the burgeoning school system in Scotland in the nineteenth century, the 1872 Education Act sought to remove schools from Church control (at least financially). This Act, however, was created out of the conviction (from politicians and churchmen alike), that though there was a loss of fiscal influence, that there would be no parallel diminishment of theological influence. This conviction was based on the view that Scottish society was unalterably and monolithically Christian in character and that this should be reflected in the classroom (Bruce 2002).

The Education Act 1872 created a national system of compulsory elementary schools. This legislation effectively sanctioned the creation of a secular school curriculum with religious instruction as an appendix. However, the 1872 Act also furnished schools with a statement of support for mandatory Religious Instruction and Religious Observance which continues to the present day. It also provides the first mention of a conscience clause for parents giving them the right to withdraw their child from Religious Instruction.

The 1872 Education Act thereby laid down the statutory conditions for Religious Instruction in schools. Bruce describes the significance of the 1872 Act thus:

> When the Church of Scotland handed control of its schools to the state in 1872, it did not insist on legal safeguards for their religious ethos and settled for an assurance that religious education would continue on the basis of locally determined “want and usage”. The minority Catholic Church refused to accept that settlement and did not accept state funding until the 1918 Education Act gave it a framework that ensured (Catholic) Church control over staff appointments and school management. The majority Presbyterians did not demand such safeguards because they assumed that their schools would continue to reflect the religious ethos of their surrounding environments. Unfortunately, they did: as the general climate became more and more secular, so did the schools. (2002 p142)

The “minority Catholic” denominational sector Bruce refers to continues in Scottish education, currently comprising 15% of school provision, largely based in the Glasgow conurbation. This article does not look at the differences
between denominational (Catholic) and non-denominational RE provision and the section of methodology makes it clear that all results were obtained from non-denominational schools. The researcher does acknowledge, however, that the extent of philosophisation in denominational school RE (if any) would be worthy of further study.

Nevertheless, RE in Scotland has changed dramatically since 1972 and the publication of Malcolm Millar's pivotal report into Religious and Moral Education (Scottish Education Department 1972). Millar's report arose out of a crisis in the RE classroom. The confessional Religious Instruction approach delivered previously by well-meaning non-specialists was failing to meet the needs of an increasingly secular, globally aware and multi-cultural pupil population. As a result of the recommendations outlined by Millar's committee RE became a non-confessional "personal quest" (ibid. p89), allowing pupils to explore their own responses to the need for meaning, value and purpose. This was to be delivered by specialist teachers. In time certification and Her Majesties' Inspectors of Education (HMIE) government inspections would aim to add further credibility to RE. The latest changes in the subject include an increasingly philosophical approach, and content within the subject now refers explicitly to philosophical positions and traditions.

While there have been a range of writers who have explored the impact of various social, religious and intellectual factors on RE and the emergence of new approaches and rationales for the subject in the UK (for example Broadbent and Brown (2002), Erricker and Erricker (2000), Grimmitt (2000), Hull (1982), Jackson (2004) and Law (2006)) this has not happened in a specifically Scottish context. These writers have confined their analysis mainly to RE in England and Wales, or to the broad UK picture. RE in Scotland and the relationship of religion to education in Scotland are both different from the situation in England or elsewhere in the UK. Although RE (or Religious Instruction as it tended to be known) in the entire UK shared a similar crisis in the late 1960's and early 1970's and certain documents (the Durham Report 1970) and thinkers (principally Ninian Smart) were seminal to subsequent developments, it can be argued that later developments in the subject's content and methodology are unique to the Scottish context. Furthermore, though Hannah's thesis (2007) seeks to uncover the reasons for the 'educationalisation' of RE in Scotland it does not address the possibility that RE has changed to become credible in light of fundamental changes to the belief landscape in Scotland. Therefore, hopefully, the originality and importance of this article is established.

Having said that, Roger (1990) suggests that Scottish educational policy often follows that of England and Wales, citing the chronological and thematic
closeness of the 1870 (England) and 1872 (Scotland) Education Acts as an example of this. This can also be traced with regards to RE. The Durham Report (1970), Working Paper 36 (1971, both English) and Scotland’s Millar Report (1972) do indeed share a lot and it is in no ways contentious to suggest that very similar (and in many cases identical) socio-cultural and academic factors were influential in the formation of these documents. These reports were aimed to address the perceived failings of Religious Instruction in an increasingly pluralistic and secular United Kingdom, albeit in Scottish, and English and Welsh contexts respectively. These reports appeal to a tradition of educationalists arguing for a child-centred non-confessional approach to RE and seek to ground the subject on educational grounds as the “fourth R” (Durham Report 1970, p59). They argue for the professionalisation of RE teachers and the establishment of professional bodies (advisors) to oversee subsequent development. These reports advocate an approach that it exploratory rather than evangelical. If education is culture perpetuating itself (McIntyre, cited in Jackson, 1982) then we are therefore perhaps in a position to discern a degree of cultural homogeneity between Scotland and England and Wales.

At this point it may help to broaden the scope somewhat by looking at developments and approaches to RE internationally. The European Forum for Teachers of RE (EFTRE) has published reports from a number of European countries into the nature of RE provision and current issues within the subject in these countries (EFTRE website, accessed November 11th 2008).

A summary of EFTRE reports into developments in European RE reveals very similar trends, developments and issues across the participating countries:

1. Debate about a confessional or educational approach and the unpopularity of the confessional approach (Austria, Estonia, Finland)
2. A perceived need for religious literacy (Estonia, France), particularly in face of religious extremism (Germany) and consumerism (Estonia)
3. Discussion of the influence of political ideology, particularly in post Soviet states (Estonia, Hungary) but also where there is political will to teach citizenship and ethics (Belgium, France)
4. Sensitivity to diverse views. This is seen in the various manifestations of the conscience clause and the triggers for a non-confessional approach (Finland, Estonia, Austria, Denmark, Norway)
5. The emergence of an RE professional class and an educational approach to the subject (Austria, Estonia, Hungary, Sweden)
6. Increasingly philosophical content on ethics and science (Denmark, England and Wales, Sweden, Belgium)
This snapshot of RE provision and developments across Europe, while having limitations (chiefly its brevity), does go some way to placing the story of RE in Scotland within wider international developments. The Scottish story of RE does include all of the above six trends: the move to educational, non-confessional, belief sensitive, professionally delivered and philosophical RE is very much in evidence.

This overview lends weight to the view of Starkings:

> It is only with some equivocation that we can affirm religion as being the bedrock of culture and then make an educational policy out of that affirmation. (1982, p69)

The “equivocation” Starkings speaks of is perhaps what has been happening in RE over the last 4 decades, not only in Scotland but across Europe, as seen in the above summary of EFTRE findings, where educationalists have had to examine and reappraise the place and influence of Religion in education and move towards an increasingly multi-religious, secular, pupil-centred, philosophical and ethic-centred presentation of the subject.

4. Definitions of Philosophy

Before presenting the evidence for the philosophication of RE and considering the reasons for this development it is helpful to provide what we mean by the terms ‘philosophy’ and ‘philosophical’. These words are used frequently in day to day speech and have a range of meanings and connotations which can, according to one dictionary (http://encarta.msn.co.uk/dictionary_/Philosophy.html) include:

1. An Examination of Basic Concepts:
2. A System of Thought:
3. Guiding or Underlying Principles:
4. A Set of Beliefs or Aims:
5. Calm Resignation, intellectual restraint and rationality:
6. The Liberal Arts:

This paper suggests that within Scottish RE philosophy has manifested itself in all six of the above understandings. It has emerged both as a tool for examining fundamental concepts and exploring universal questions using rationality and intellectual restraint (numbers 1 and 5 above) and also as sets of principles underlying a system or systems of thought or belief (numbers 2, 3, 4 and 6).
Russell (1959) and Wittgenstein (2001) were keen to state that philosophy is not a body of ideas but a particular way of thinking. For both of these philosophers philosophy is not a matter of dogma but of open exploration and clarification of ideas. Russell argues that when confronted with mystery humans tend either to adopt the views of their culture or to work things out for themselves. This latter approach is what Russell thinks is characteristic of philosophy.

Robinson and Groves (1999) define the role of philosophy as follows:

Philosophers are obliged to provide some kind of explanation, proof or evidence for their ideas. This obligation marks the one obvious difference between philosophy and religion. (p5)

They go on to argue that philosophy is not satisfied by “mythical” answers to the fundamental questions and that a move to philosophy as it now exists beyond its medieval role as Theology’s handmaiden represents a move away from theocracies which insist on a static orthodoxy. Hitchens (2007) goes further with his proposition that religion is, in fact, humanity’s earliest attempts at philosophy, ready to be supplanted by a philosophy free of theological considerations. As a result of the Renaissance and Reformation, according to Hitchens, more radical philosophy and philosophies became possible. Other writers, (Dennett 2007, Dawkins 2006, Harris 2004, Law 2006) also similarly argue that a new philosophical criticality is required with regards to religious claims.

Nevertheless, whether one is a philosophical rationalist, empiricist, existentialist, pragmatist or even involved in parodying philosophy itself as postmodern philosophers are wont to do, it can be said that certain ‘rules’ or ways of ‘doing’ philosophy apply. Being philosophical is characterized by Robinson and Groves (2007) in terms of Dewey’s view of a critical intelligence. The Times Leader put it as follows:

The great virtue of philosophy is that it teaches not what to think, but how to think. It is the study of meaning, of the principles underlying conduct, thought and knowledge. The skills it honours are the ability to analyse, to question orthodoxies and to express things clearly. (Times Leader, 1998, arguing that “Philosophy is a quintessentially modern discipline”)

This paper therefore evidences the emergence of a philosophical emphasis within Scottish RE. Though it may be too much to claim that this represents a justification of Comte’s three stage analysis of the evolution of society in terms of moving from the theological to the metaphysical to the scientific (1853), perhaps this thesis captures the essence of an important change in Scottish society and changes in RE may be barometric of this?
5. Documentary Evidence for 'Philosophication'

That RE in Scotland has become increasingly philosophical can be evidenced by analysis of key documents regarding both curricular content and teaching methodology. The Millar Report's emphasis on the celebration of pupil existential questions (Scottish Education Department 1972, p69) rather than any prescribed set of answers anticipates the Socratic approach to ultimate questions now adopted in many RE classrooms. The increasingly philosophical approach can also be evidenced in the guidelines for RE contained within Scottish Central Committee on RE's three bulletins (1978, 81 & 82 — Bulletin 3 unpublished). This can be seen in the recognition that non-religious views should be studied, but also with regard to the skills outlined. For example, Bulletin 2 advocates that pupils evaluate belief systems in terms on their "internal coherence, self-consistency and ability to meet objections." (p12), all of which echoes with definitions of philosophy provided by, for example, Wittgentstein (2001) who viewed philosophy as the logical clarification of thoughts. Such resonance between Scottish RE post-Millar and philosophy can also be found in University departments of philosophy throughout Scotland in their definitions of philosophy;

It is the approach to these questions as much the questions themselves that characterises philosophical inquiry. Whatever answer is proposed, it must be backed up by careful argument.

(University of Stirling Philosophy department website 2008)

or...

to find answers to some of the deepest questions about ourselves as human beings and the world that we live in — questions which most thinking people have always asked.

(University of Aberdeen Philosophy Department Website 2008)

The identity with, for example, the Personal Search Strand in 5-14 National curricular guidelines for RE (1992) is clear, as is the claim by the University of Dundee's department that philosophy is "using reasoned argument to straighten out your own world view." (University of Dundee philosophy department website 2008).

In many respects the evolution or development of RE in Scotland makes a great deal of sense if we apply the three stage analysis of Hull (1992). Hull's understanding of the evolution of RE is that:

we may discern the outline of three consecutive stages in the development of RE in modern national states. Mono-religious traditional instruction gives way to
multi-cultural education for understanding. This in turn becomes dialectical through controversy, leading to a heightened awareness of the ambiguity of religion.... (in Lane, 1992, p9)

Prior to the Millar Report (1972) Scottish RE was mono-religious; effectively Christian Instruction. Increasingly through the 1970's (evidenced in Bulletins 1 and 2), and in the creation of national curricula in the 1980's RE became multi-religious. Finally it became more dialogical and concerned with the rational consideration of religious claims and this can perhaps be charted in the formal recognition of pupil analysis in the 5-14 RE curriculum (1992), which encouraged pupils to consider the claims of religious traditions alongside their own and non-religious attempts to deal with the great existential questions (the Personal Search approach).

The evolution Hull describes from dogmatic transmission of religion; to the description of religion; to religion as a means to personal development, and finally to the dialogical critique of religion can again be traced in the developments in Scottish RE policy documents though not in a neat and easily discerned way and is also traceable in the evolution of RE in England and Wales where Grimmer (2000) describes an evolution from Religious Instruction to a phenomenological approach to humanistic, exploratory, interpretative and postmodern approaches as well as critical realist presentations of religious claims (this latter approach is not discernable in the policy history of Scottish RE).

In Scottish RE beyond 1992 (the publication of the 5-14 national curricular guidelines) Personal Search is intended to be a permeating methodology for all RE, including approaches to World Religions, and that in the current Scottish curricular review (Curriculum for Excellence outcomes, May 2008) this permeation is envisaged to continue.

Some illustrative examples of the congruence of the curricular guidelines for Personal Search and philosophy may be helpful at this point. Personal Search recommends that pupils (from 5-14 years of age) can express their own answers and responses to ultimate questions; that they can participate in discussion about ethical decision making and moral conflict, and that they can discern the key areas in the relationship between scientific and religious claims. The consonance with metaphysics, philosophy of religion, moral philosophy, epistemology and philosophy of science seems clear.

Within the context of Scottish nationally certificated RE we can again see an increasingly philosophical emphasis, albeit this time more explicitly in terms of content. In these qualifications, which are studied by pupils aged 14-18, we can see all the main areas of philosophy within the various secondary school qualifications (Ordinary Grade, Standard Grade, Higher, Higher Still,
Short Courses and Certificate of Sixth Year Studies). Note, the philosophical areas indicated in brackets are the researcher unpacking the philosophical content, though in many cases these terms are used explicitly in the provided support materials:

Table 1: Mapping philosophical Content within certificate RE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>PHILOSOPHICAL CONTENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'O' Grade</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>'Issues of Belief' (Philosophy of Religion and Epistemology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>'Issues of Morality' (Moral Philosophy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>1985 &amp; 1992</td>
<td>'Christianity: Critiques and Challenges' (Philosophy of Science Marxist and Humanist 'critiques' of Christianity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'S' Grade</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>'Issues of Belief' (Philosophy of Religion and Epistemology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>'Issues of Morality' (Moral Philosophy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCOTVECS</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>6 Philosophy Short courses ranging from introductory to Moral Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Courses</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>'Issues of Belief' and 3 courses on Values/Ethics (Philosophy of Religion, Epistemology and Moral Philosophy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSYS</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>'Religion and Reason' (Epistemology, Philosophy of Religion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Still (RMPS)</td>
<td>1999 &amp; 2004</td>
<td>'Morality in the Modern World' (include 4 optional moral issues = Moral Philosophy, Aristotle, Virtue Ethics. 'Language, Philosophy and Religion' Christianity: Belief and Science (Philosophy of Science, Epistemology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediates 1 and 2</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>'Metaphysics'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>'Issues of Belief' (Philosophy of Religion, Metaphysics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>'Morality in the Modern World' (Moral Philosophy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv Higher</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>'Philosophy of Religion'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>'Bioethics'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Intermediate 2, Higher and Advanced Higher (792 candidates 2006)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some examples may serve to further make this point. At Standard and Ordinary Grade pupils study 'Issues of Belief'; a unit which can be accurately described as philosophy of religion. Pupil answers would include names such
as Aquinas, Hume, Paley and Russell. Within the Higher, in its various incarnations within the unit concerned with the relationship between science and religion (from 2005 a mandatory unit within the Higher qualification) students have been studying Aristotle, Kuhn, Popper, Davies, Dawkins, Russell, Tillich, Bultmann and others. This unit is essentially philosophy of science. At the time of writing the majority of pupils in S3/4 (ages 14-16) RE in Scotland undergo Scottish Qualification Authority units in morality and ethics which forces pupils to consider stances for ethical decision making which are explicitly philosophical such as egoism, hedonism and utilitarianism. The majority of Scottish pupils at this stage, therefore, are studying moral philosophy in which religious views become one of a range of possible approaches to moral decision making.

Therefore, such documentary analysis does reveal a move towards increasing ‘philosophication’ of RE and can be shown both in terms of method and content. This paper intends to put forward a two-pronged hypothesis for these changes, namely that changes in society (particularly as described in the secularisation thesis) and Educational Change can explain the emergence of philosophy and philosophical approaches within RE in Scotland. The relationships between these areas are complex and in many ways are a-symmetrical. Aspects of Social Theory, which maps and attempts to explain significant changes in societies (principally in the West) is, in many ways, foundational to understanding the move to less heteronymous educational practice and a more secular approach to RE.

This paper intends to outline briefly what each of these areas entails, before evidencing them in data from a sample of policy documents, curricular content and questionnaire responses.

6. Changes in Society and Pilot Data

There are a number of commentators, social theorists, philosophers and sociologists who argue that there have been radical changes in developed societies over the last four decades. Lyotard defined postmodernity as a time characterised by “incredulity towards meta-narratives” and stated that the “legitimising master narratives are in crisis and decline.” (1984, cited in Butler 2002, p13) Simply put, the grand stories, the organising myths of culture are questioned. For some postmodern thinkers (Usher and Edwards 1994) the legitimising stories of the tribe aren't working as they did, especially given awareness of a multiplicity of seemingly competing stories. For these writers this is an age where cultures and narratives interpenetrate and can do so with no physical travel required; a time where there is a crisis of legitimation.
Bentley (1999) characterises the postmodern as:

a rejection, philosophically of the self as a 'knowing subject' in the form presented in European thought after Kant and before Heidegger, an allied rejection of the possibility of finding a singular 'true' picture of the external world, present or past; a concern to 'decentre' and destabilise conventional subjects of enquiry; a wish to see canons of orthodoxy in reading and writing give way to plural readings and interpretations; a fascination with text itself and its relation to the reality it purports to represent; a desire to amplify previously unheard voices from underprivileged groups and peoples; a preoccupation with gender as the most immediate generator of underprivileged or unempowered status: a dwelling on power and the lack of it as much as political configurations within a culture (Bentley 1999, pp140-141).

Acceptance of Thomas Kuhn's thesis (1996) about science as essentially a social process has, for academics like Dawkins (2007) become characteristic of this time. For Dawkins this has led to an unhelpful postmodern relativism that legitimises poorly evidenced knowledge claims and encourages a dangerous scepticism towards science itself. For Dawkins, these 'Paradigm shifts' are increasingly (and unhelpfully) occurring in areas Kuhn could scarcely have imagined, part of the essential vocabulary of living in postmodernity.

This is a time when such scepticism has been applied to reason itself. Derrida (1997) rejects it as dogmatically representing timeless objective certainty (logocentrism). Foucault's (2002) archaeology of knowledge claims to reveal a relativism of cultural 'epistemes' (dominating discourses) in history that fundamentally undermine modernity's linear view of human progress.

According to Losito (1996) we have emerged from naïve modernism into a time when people are free to experiment with ideas. Meaning can be constructed locally. However, confusion or a retreat to fundamentals also characterises the age:

The demise of modernism has liberated society from unfounded presuppositions and unwarranted expectations, but the resulting aftermath is cultural confusion. There is no coherent, inspirational vision to bring social order to the chaos of unbridled individualism, moral subjectivism, and epistemological scepticism. (p72)

The following diagram (diagram 1, adapted from Anderson 1995) perhaps captures the Sitz im Leben and possible responses to the challenge of postmodern uncertainty. According to this, typical responses to postmodernity are characterised by a retreat to previously held certainties. This can take the form of religious or scientific conservatism, or the adoption and/or synthesis of pre-modern perspectives. So we have religious and scientific fundamentalism,
Diagram 1: Responses to the Postmodern moment

perhaps discernable in terrorist atrocities, or in the 'new atheism' of Dennett (2007), Hitchens (2007), Harris (2006) and Dawkins (2006). Those who go through postmodernism either construct meaning locally and pragmatically (the constructivist response); experiment with hyper-reality (the 'player'), or become nihilists (rejecting the possibility of meaningfulness altogether).

Another possibility is the claim that the Enlightenment Project is alive and well, and that reason is emerging once more as the guide to social progress. Chief proponent of this view, Habermas (1992), bases these claims on a view that through a process of communicative action humans can develop a principled and non-conventional morality; a democratised, fully rational society can emerge. Law (2006) has also claimed that, for example, the appearance of philosophy and philosophical methods within school curricula is evidence that Kant's Enlightenment battle cry "Sapere Aude" (think for yourself) is alive and well.

Habermas posited that instrumental rationality has led to the decline of myth and religion and dominates the west. Habermas, however is not so pessimistic about rationalisation as other social theorists such as Adorno (1944) who felt reason had been hi-jacked by capitalism. In opposition to this Habermas supported:

The ideal of a universally accessible, voluntary association of private people, coming together as equals to engage in unconstrained debate in the pursuit of truth and the common good (Finlayson 2005 p13)

For Habermas we are in an age where natural science and reason have epistemic authority, but with the collapse of religious authority and the growth of specialised knowledge, this knowledge is detached from everyday life. The alternatives for Habermas of failing to resurrect the enlightenment project
through the development of rational consensus are regression to absolutes or a postmodern stance. For Habermas Postmodernism is a Trojan horse for irrationality. For him, the aim is to preserve the ‘life world’ from the corrosive effects of the capitalist and instrumentalist system. Modernity is the liberation of ideals from those of previous times and relies on discourse and communication rather than heteronomous paradigms.

For Habermas, homogeneous religious ideas of the ‘good’ have given way to a plurality. Morality has “transformed from a repertoire of commands to a system of principles and valid norms.” (Finlayson 2005, p68). Morality now is not concerned with substantive ideas of the good but with the testing of norms. Habermas espouses discourse ethics and, contrary to postmodernism, social evolution analogous to that of the individual. He uses Kohlberg’s theory of moral development (1958) as an analogy. That is, in modernity society is moving towards a post-conventional stage where an autonomous principled morality is emerging. This is preferable to earlier stages because we are more capable of dealing with or resolving moral issues.

Whether we subscribe to Derridean scepticism, Habermas’ rescue package for the Enlightenment or Pluralism is not the subject of this thesis. However, for Anderson (1995):

we are charging headlong into a new era: a time of rethinking and rebuilding in which beliefs about belief are shaken as never before, a time in which issues once left to philosophers — such as the nature of truth — become matters of vital everyday importance to ordinary people. (p3)

If these analyses are accurate the task of the teacher and perhaps particularly the teacher of RE becomes increasingly challenging not only in terms of pedagogical approaches to world views and religions, but also in terms of which of these multitude of traditions should be represented in the RE syllabus. The postmodern moment is characterised by not only metaphysical uncertainty but also a moral confusion, individualism and pluralism (Hyun-Sook 2006).

Losito describes these difficulties in creating a curriculum as follows:

Permeating all of these models (of the modern curriculum) is the realisation that a newly-constructed educational paradigm will have to be sensitive to the wholeness and complexity of human well-being and the inherent diversity of understanding and meaning-making in the human community. (1996, p76)

Being postmodern for Usher and Edwards is “to question the very notion of systematic explanation” (1994, p1). Arguably education is founded on modernist principles as the “vehicle for modernity’s grand narrative” (ibid. p2) in
which the enlightenment is actualised and education previously been the “dutiful child of the enlightenment” (ibid. p24). For Usher and Edwards this should be questioned as it is oppressive.

A postmodern critique, according to Usher and Edwards, has the potential to emancipate us from the totalitarian tendencies of modernity. The modernist idea of inexorable progress “has been thrown into doubt, rendered incredible by the continuation of want, disease, famine, destruction and recognition of the ecological cost of development.” (ibid. p10) In education Postmodernism represents a challenge to the notion of a subject who learns. For Usher and Edwards changes in education reflect the Postmodern moment, but without reflexive understanding of it (ibid. p25). For Usher and Edwards, to challenge modernist foundations is not to risk irrationality and to paralyse the educational enterprise but instead places dialogue and genuine engagement at its heart. For them “education needs a critical scepticism” (ibid. p31).

Within the context of British writers on RE a sensitivity to the social theoretical views summarized above can be found, particularly in the writing of Grimmett (2000), Erricker and Erricker (1998) and Jackson (2004). For example, Erricker and Erricker are happy to adopt a postmodern paradigm (where meaning is preferred to truth); allowing pupils total freedom to create their own meaning. Grimmett summarises the issue as follows:

Surely the time has come for religious educators to take seriously the fact that a lively debate about the realist or non-realist nature of religion has been going on among theologians for well over twenty years and that this debate is essentially about the credibility of religious faith in a postmodern age. (2000, pp46-7)

Jackson (2004) cites the approach of two Dutch scholars have advocated a postmodern pedagogy (Wardekker and Miedema 2001). Their approach is to place emphasis on the life world questions of pupils rather than the answers of meta-narratives or religions. Erricker (1998) laments the modernist spell cast on education, arguing that RE curricula exclude children from their own spirituality as they tend to be written in the language of religious language games. According to proponents of this view, to avoid privileging the religious over the secular, there must be a broad investigation of spirituality. Children must construct authentic knowledge for themselves.

Jackson (2004) cites the research of Loukes (1961) and Cox (1966, 1967) which demonstrated pupil ambivalence to RE and criticism of authoritarian and confessional approaches, and suggested that RE, in light of secularisation, should reflect the interests of pupils in existential and ethical questions. Jackson also argues that plurality leads to individualisation and the privatisation of religion. In addition Jackson echoes the views of Usher and Edwards (1994)
when he suggests that the hold of a modernist paradigm over education is increasingly being challenged, particularly in RE. The modernist view of knowledge as something to be acquired, according to Jackson, has, in the past, dominated national curricula. In contrast Jackson claims modern RE should be heir to the progressive, child-centred models of education which he sees emerging from the Romantic Movement of the nineteenth century where “the idea of drawing knowledge out of children, rather than filling them up with it” (2004, p9) was championed.

For Jackson the postmodern approach, with its “rejection of ‘total’ explanations of reality” (ibid. p10) is becoming paradigmatic in RE. On this view the knowledge claims of meta-narrative (religious or otherwise) is legitimated by internal language games rather than correspondence to reality. Jackson cites the views of Wittgenstein (language games), Kuhn (paradigms) and Foucault (epistememes) to support this view that in the postmodern age knowledge claims are relativistic and traditionally such knowledge has fulfilled a regulatory and controlling purpose. Jackson considers the potential of a postmodern perspective in the field of RE, citing King:

if postmodernism is not taken to nihilistic extremes, is not seen as a fixed position that denies all others, then its penchant for experimentation, questioning and diversity, its resistance to closure and definite meanings, open up new transcendent trails and divine disclosure in the midst of all our searching for a wisdom to live by — leading us back to the roots of spirituality. (King 2002, p6)

Jackson argues that a sensitivity to the role of the pupil in their own education can lead to a situation where the pupil becomes a genuine participant in their education as a joint seeker on the educational enterprise rather than simply as receivers of teacher led instruction and information:

Religious Education, not as defined by a fixed body of knowledge (although the development of knowledge and understanding is a crucial ingredient), but as a series of existential and social debates in which pupils are encouraged to participate, with a personal stake related to their own developing sense of identity. (2004, p18)

Data from nine respondent schools within a particular local authority reveal RE provision that very much reflects the views outlined above. In S1/2 classes pupils study a diverse range of units which include world religions, moral philosophy, epistemology, charities, the supernatural, philosophy of religion and units on ‘Personal Search.

Material, for example, on creation stories references not only those of current religious traditions, but primal religion and sets the Big Bang ‘Story' of
Science alongside these accounts. From S3-S6 as part of national qualifications in Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) students study the relationship between Science and Christianity; investigating whether this relationship is characterised by conflict, relativism or convergence. This unit perhaps best captures the current age of epistemological uncertainty and resonates with postmodern scepticism. Pupils as young as fourteen study solipsism, Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, Popper’s falsificationism, Logical Positivism, Kuhn’s paradigm shift, Christian Existentialism, as well as fundamentalist responses of both forms (Scientism and Creationism).

When asked why philosophical approaches had emerged within RE three respondents to the questionnaire cited the demise of religious stories, and the role of the media in highlighting this. Another respondent (school two) stated that the media has raised the profile of philosophy in popular consciousness and this is increasingly evident in the classroom. Perhaps the best illustration of this is the burgeoning use of the ‘Simpsons’ cartoon in the RE classroom. In all nine RE departments surveyed key points are made or issues are introduced using episodes such as ‘Bart Sells his Soul’, Lisa and the Eighth Commandment’, ‘Missionary Impossible’ and ‘Homer the Heretic’. In the authority surveyed the RE network has produced (October 2007) a CD Rom which catalogues 4 seasons of the Simpsons (81 episodes) and audits them in terms of use within the RE class.

The relevant point to be made here is that arguably the ‘Simpsons’ is totemic of the postmodern age. The Simpsons intertextuality and cynical take on modernity and its institutions is arguably postmodern. In one episode (‘They Saved Lisa’s Brain’ 1999) Stephen Hawking (guest starring as himself), says to Homer “Your theory of a donut shaped universe intrigues me, I may have to steal it.” The relativism of the time is well represented, for example when (‘Grift of the Magi’ 1999) Krusty the Clown says, “So, have a merry Christmas, happy Chanukah, kwazy Kwanza, a tip-top Tet, and a solemn, dignified Ramadan.”

Another potentially relevant area to the hypothesis that societal change can explain changes within RE is the popularity that Buddhism enjoys, particularly at S5/6 level where it is the most studied world religion nationally (Scottish Qualifications Authority 2006). Some (Anderson 1995) have argued that Buddhism is the original Post modern position. It seeks to de-centre the self (Anatta, the concept of no permanent identity); acknowledges syncretism (for

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1 Correspondence with Tom Stannage, Qualifications Manager for Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (2006).
example in the Diamond Sutra where the Buddha describes religions as toys to entice children from a burning house); is anti-realist (Sunyata, the idea that all phenomena is fundamentally empty) and invites people to construct meaning in their own experience. Buddhism's perceived consonance with science, agnosticism and the apparent benefits of meditation may also add to its allure and give strength to Bruce's contention (2002) that Buddhism is becoming the default position of many people within secularised democratic countries.

Anderson (1995) identifies Buddhism as one of three responses to postmodernity. For him these are the response found in Buddhism to reject the illusion of the self; then there is the response of Habermas and his attempt to continue the Enlightenment. Finally there is the Postmodern response which bases itself on the notion of reality as socially constructed.

7. Secularisation and Pilot Data

As stated previously there are a number of connections and overlaps between the changes in society described by diverse social theorists and the process of secularisation. Indeed, one may be said to be the cause of the other; the age of confusion, characterised by relativism and devolution of meaning-making, described by social theorists is one in which traditional, realist and authoritarian approaches to reality (in this case most forms of religion) may find it hard to flourish. Chambers, cited in McKinney (2008) argues that there is an anti-Christian attitude prevalent in British society, promulgated by the media, which, for example is evident in negative attitudes to public figures who profess faith.

Secularisation describes the process by which a society loses a close identification with religious institutions. It can also be closely identified with a view about the progression of society towards modernity as posited by thinkers such as Marx (1967), Freud (2005) and Durkheim (2001). For these thinkers religious decline marked the replacement of faith with reason or superstition with science. Religious affiliation in secularised societies becomes individual as opposed to a being a powerful social obligation. Secularisation may also have arisen because of an increase in individual freedoms of thought and also an awareness of diversity. Perhaps Hume (1748) was prescient in his critique of religion when he argued that, in the face of competing claims to absolute truth the rational man rejects such systems of belief that arrogate truth to themselves (as revelatory religions are prone to do), especially when these traditions and claims, according to Hume, originate from primitive times with poor quality testimony for their accuracy?
Haldane, cited in McKinney (2008, p113) offers a distinction between secularisation and secularism. The former, according to Haldane, is an outdated sociological theory that discerns religious decline as a necessary corollary of industrial development and the emergence of democratic societies. Haldane contends that the situation in the USA is a persisting counter-example to this broad thesis. Secularism, on the other hand, is the view that delineation should be made between religion and society. For Haldane, this is not necessarily a position antipathetic to continuing religiosity.

The extent of secularisation is contested. For example, Davie (1999), Gill (1989), Martin (2003) and Cox (1982) voice criticism of the tendency to measure religious belief quantitatively and to fail to acknowledge the extent to which spirituality has diffused to areas of social life other than the church rather than ceasing to exist. Gill (1989) suggests that “an appeal to an underlying process of secularisation obscures a very interesting and ongoing adaptation of religious forms to the modern world” (p62). Martin goes as far as to suggest that the secularisation paradigm is “unqualified and crude” (2003, p8). Avis (2003), Stark (1985), Bainbridge (1985) and Berger (1999) also argue that many adherents to the secularisation thesis fail to realise that for many religious people attendance at a place of worship is not a defining aspect of their faith. In other words religious attendance rates are a poor measurement of religious beliefs which have, for many people, become privatized. Gill (1959) also contends that, to an extent, the empty church is more the result of over-ambitious ecclesiastical building projects than a genuine decline in religious adherence.

Conroy, cited in McKinney (2008) argues that there is a tendency to conflate pluralism with secularism, though one can see causal links between a multiple presentation of often conflicting world views as conducive to scepticism about religious claims (as Hume suggested above).

In response to the arguments for the process of secularisation Davie (1994, 1999, 2002, 2004) has claimed that people “believe without belonging” or that religiosity and spirituality have found new conduits, for example in more ‘privatised’ activities or in New Age thinking. Davie thinks there is a need for a more balanced view of the issue, arguing that membership of all voluntary organizations has declined since 1945.

Davie (2000, p) cites the European Values Surveys (1981 and 1990) which reveal responses of religiosity in terms of numinous beliefs as well as observable measurements of attendance and attachment (for Davie, the latter area is where secularisation applies). These surveys, according to Davie, while showing a decline in the latter area (attendance) reveal the “considerable persistence” (ibid.) of beliefs in Britain about, for example, the existence of God
(76% in 1981), life after death (45% in 1981) and Heaven (57% in 1981). That these statistics do reveal the persistence of certain religious beliefs is therefore established. However, Davie does acknowledge that these are not fleshed out, orthodox theologies:

in reality believing without belonging rarely represents a consciously selected personal package. It reflects instead the fall-back position acquired by British people when they simply do nothing. (1994 p199)

In other words these beliefs do not conform to any specific denomination or creed. Davie acknowledges that, in Europe, there is a lack of religious literacy and that religious collective memory in modernity is 'mutating' (2000); that a religious sensibility persists rather than a cogent theology.

Davie concedes that “as Europe’s economic and political life developed, it was evident that religion diminished in public significance; religious aspirations continued to exist, but were increasingly relegated to the private sphere” (2000 p26). However, she thinks the secularisation thesis as a total explanatory framework for the inevitable global decline of religious belief is limited and contrary to the evidence. Berger (1999) argues that the world is as “furiously religious as it ever was” (p2). These views of Berger (1999) are discussed in the context of the rise of Islam, Pentecostal Christianity and religious fundamentalism on a worldwide scale. European secularisation may actually therefore be the exception to a global picture of religious flourishing and should not be seen as axiomatic. Berger also describes the influence of the academic classes as distorting reality in favour of secularisation. In other words the intellectual elites, those, who for Berger, control the definition of reality, have tended to posit an inaccurate portrayal of secularisation, ignoring the reality of the ubiquity of religious belief in favour of a thesis that reflects their world view of inevitable progress towards a world governed by reason rather than faith. Berger also argues that “religious movements and institutions that have made great efforts to conform to a perceived modernity are almost everywhere on the decline” (1999 p6), which may in part explain the secularisation of Europe and the vitality of religious movements elsewhere in the world that have refused to conform to modernity.

Nevertheless, the current thesis concerns the European (and specifically Scottish) context. O’Connell cited by Davie (2000 p5) thinks European civilization is the result of:

1. Judeo-Christian monotheism
2. Greek rationalism
3. Roman organisation
Davie argues that each of these elements has, and continues to exert an influence in European society. With regards to the influence and preservation of religion (in this case Judeo-Christian monotheism) Davie argues that education has a key role in the transmission of values in a post industrial society and in preserving religious memory, though she does concede that RE has moved increasingly to a non-confessional and critical pedagogy in modernity. Interestingly she posits no weighting to each of these three influences. Is it possible that the currency of philosophy is part of a resurgent tradition of 'Greek rationalism', expanding in influence and visibility to fill the gap left by the declining influence of "Judeo-Christian monotheism"?

Davie also puts forward the view, shared by rational choice theorists, that religious diversity does not undermine religious plausibility but provides a genuine market of ideas that services individual needs (Davie thinks this may explain the vibrancy of belief in the USA and perhaps the decline in nations where the church and state worked together — the free market of ideas finds it hard to emerge from this entanglement). In other words, in countries like Scotland the state church is more of a "public utility than a competitive firm" (2002 pp138-139). That is, it is there when needed but not actively sought out, leading to a largely passive membership. Stark and Finke (2000), cited in Dennett (2007 p189) describe it thus:

To the degree that levels of religious economies are unregulated and competitive, overall levels of religious participation will be high. Conversely, lacking competition, the dominant firm(s) will be too inefficient to sustain vigorous marketing efforts, and the result will be a low overall level of religious participation.

Bruce (2003) contends that secularisation (or secularism) is not purely a measurement of a decline in involvement in religious institutions and activities but can also be measured in terms the loss of the influence of religious institutions. For example, for Bruce there is a degree of impotence on the part of the churches nowadays with regards to blasphemy, social mores, political agendas and sabbatarianism. There is also no clerical representation in the Scottish Parliament or Welsh Assembly.

Brown (1997) describes the situation thus...

an ultimate stage of secularisation may be now in progress in which the people — having shunned churchgoing, church membership and the religious rites of passage — are now losing their Christian faith... (p198)

According to one survey (Zuckerman 2005) in the UK there are 41 times more atheists than Jews, 35 more times than Sikhs, 2 times as many as
Buddhists. Overall atheists are 4th after Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. 31.44% of Britons are atheists or agnostic. According to Paterson et al. (2004, p144) though 2,146,300 Scots claim to belong to the Church of Scotland and 803,000 claim to be Catholic, active membership of the Church of Scotland fell to 639,000 in 2000 and to 225,000 for the Catholic church. According to some sociologists of religion religious decline in Britain is terminal:

Short of a religious revival, it is only a matter of time before Britain ceases to be a Christian country in the literal sense: baptised Christians will be in a minority. (Voas 2003, p98)

For Voas census questions elicit answers in terms of cultural background rather than religious affiliation. This is borne out in the 2001 Scottish census where, while more than 47% of people said they had been brought up as Church of Scotland, just 42% of these maintain that affiliation into adult life.

According to one survey (Field 2001) church goers in 1997 numbered 17% (a 7% drop from 1972), and the number of people who never or hardly attend church stood at 57%. Another survey states Scottish Church membership is in decline and that this is accelerating from a 19% decline between 1984 and 1994, to a 18% decline between 1994 and 2002 (Bruce 2006).

Other surveys suggest that British Church attendance has continued to decline. Field suggests that:

until the beginning of the 1990s around 30% of adults claimed to go to church regularly, once a month or more, although in the latest polls the proportion has fallen to nearer one quarter. The remainder of the population, the overwhelming majority, attend less often or not at all. (2001, p162)

Research into church-going conducted by Christian Research (2008) paints an even bleaker picture, suggesting that by 2050 attendance will have fallen by 90% and that the future of Christianity (in this case in England) is as a minority sect, mainly constituted by elderly people (Brierley 2008).

Alongside this apparent decline there has been an increase in interest and membership of Humanist societies. Email correspondence (2005) with the British and Scottish Humanist Association revealed that whereas 3000 Humanist ceremonies took place in the UK in 1998, in 2003 this number had risen to 8000 (British Humanist Association 2005). In Scotland, in 2004 there were 1542 Humanist ceremonies. This total represents a 26% increase on 2003 (Scottish Humanist Association 2005).

However, a BBC survey (2009) suggests that, despite the decline in religious affiliation and attendance, that there is a growing consensus that many do not want a “secularist wipeout” to occur in British society with regards to
foundational values and social mores. The survey also revealed a loose confederation of religious organizations of disparate faiths that are concerned about the diminishment of Christianity in British life.

Voas (cited in the BBC news website 2009) contends that what is emerging is a population who can be described as a "fuzzy faithful", who hold vague ideas of a higher power and underlying justice, but for whom what happens in church is of little consequence, except perhaps to serve ceremonial purposes.

According to Bruce (2006) secularisation in the UK happens subtly. It doesn't happen as a result of militant atheism but more because of internal divisions in churches, declining middle class belief and lack of agreement over doctrine. The death of religion in Britain is the result of the prevalent idea that we nowadays can make up our own minds. It is impossible to get back to a single religious doctrine. Most parents now want their children to grow up thinking for themselves. For Bruce, since 1851 (the Census of Religious Worship) all measures of religious involvement have declined. For Voas the pattern of decline across denominations is remarkably similar. Decline is irreversible. This is not due to adult defection but is down to marriage out of one's faith community:

religious affiliation is acting like a recessive gene: it only appears in the new generation if the parents supply a matching pair (Voas 2003, p97).

The survey of nine RE departments reveals that seven out of the nine schools deliver Christianity units to S1/2, more than for any other world religion. However, many of the units studied reflected a thematic approach to existential questions and ethical issues which referenced a range of beliefs and key figures from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. As we progress up the survey schools the focus becomes much more on moral philosophy and religious morality (not necessarily Christian) is studied as one of several moral stances. Interestingly, religious morality is described in Scottish National Qualifications as 'Religious Authority' and makes explicit reference to the heteronymous nature of religious morality as opposed to ethical principles derived autonomously. Arguably this connotation of religion with external authority rather than independent judgement is one that may not generate a great deal of sympathy in today's children, who are growing up in a world where, for example, an atheistic children's trilogy about the repression of free thinking by the magisterium of the Church (Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials) is number one at the box office (December 2007).

When asked why philosophy and philosophical approaches have emerged within RE five out of nine respondent departments state that it has much to do with secularisation and the decline of religion. Responses ranged from
stating that philosophy fills the gap left by the decline in religion (School five), to acknowledging that secularism is now reflected in the educational system (School eight). Others stated that pupils and teachers want to retreat from the fundamentalism associated with religion (School four), whilst another commented simply that philosophy has emerged because of the demise of religion (School two).

The evidence of curricular policy and guidelines, as well as the survey, therefore suggests that the evolution of RE in Scotland makes sense in light of the fact of increasing secularisation and the need to find new tools and approaches to ethical and existential issues such as are perceived to be found in philosophy. This is reflected in the response of one Principal Teacher (School seven):

It (philosophy) is central to the development of reasoned decision making in all aspects of life.

8. Educational Change and Pilot Data

As with secularisation, it is clear that changes in educational practice reflect changes in society and culture as described by social theory. A move away from authoritarian approaches to more democratic pedagogy is very much part of this. Can this be evidenced in changes within RE in Scotland?

There is a lineage of thinkers that have advocated a model of education that aims to develop autonomous reasoning, self-regulation, problem solving abilities and dialogic skills. These thinkers, who include Rousseau (1993), Dewey (2005), Freire (1996), Russell (1926), Neil (1998), Lipman (1991) and Law (2005) contend that education should centre on free exploration of the world and experiential learning which empowers the learner to develop the aforementioned qualities. For Rousseau, for example, the aim of education is to learn how to live, to develop reasoning and self-governance. For Russell we should educated children so that they become “free citizens of the universe.” (1926, p67) This democratising tendency in education is also apparent in the emergence of constructivist approaches to education.

Perhaps this then partly explains the currency of thinking skills approaches to education, as evidenced in the implementation in Scotland of strategies such as those advocated by De Bono (Thinking Hats are used widely); Feuerstein (Instrumental Enrichment was implemented in the Borders Region, but Feuerstein’s dynamic assessment also informs educational psychology across the country); Buzan (Mindmapping, used widely), and Lipman (Philosophy for Children, notably implemented in Clackmannshire but increasingly across the country).
Freire (1996) contends that the days of the “banking” approach to education are numbered. For him this is represented by the notion of the teacher as expert who simply deposits information into his or her students. Friere describes his concept of true (“problem-posing”) education as follows:

The banking approach to education, for example, will never propose to students that they critically consider reality. They (teachers) must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world. “Problem-posing” education, responding to the essence of consciousness — intentionality — rejects communiques and embodies communication. (1970, p41)

This echoes strongly with the views of Bottery (2000) and Lipman (1991). For Bottery there has taken place a threefold change in emphasis:

1) Cultural — the role of teacher should be redefined as consultant rather than expert.
2) Epistemological — teacher should not be seen as disseminators of truth but rather as facilitators of joint problem solving
3) Ethical — teachers should embrace uncertainty as opposed to certainty, both in their classroom and in terms of their own reflection on their professional values and development (2000).

Lipman (1991) argues that there should be a fundamental shift away from the standard paradigm of teacher as expert who presents the world as unambiguous and areas of knowledge as non-overlapping. The teacher of the standard paradigm works on the assumption that education is the transmission of information from those who do know to those who don't. The reflective teacher, on the other hand, facilitates a community of enquiry which views the world as mysterious and considers connections between areas of knowledge. The goal is not acquisition of information but developing philosophical skills allowing the pupil to grasp the relationships between subjects. Lipman seeks to underpin the educational enterprise with the scientific method. The pupil becomes the ‘little scientist’ examining the information before them critically and independently. Russell (who advocated a secular educational approach) anticipates Lipman when he said....

Education should not serve dogma, nationalism or the aristocracy. Teachers and students should adopt the scientific temper... I should make it my object to teach thinking, not orthodoxy, or even heterodoxy. (1924, p34)
The fundamental shift in RE in Scotland, which began with the Millar Report (1972) has two stages. Firstly the move to distance RE from confessional Religious Instruction was initiated by Millar's Report and still continues to the present. Secondly, there was a recognition that the neutral presentation of the phenomena of religion was not, in itself, desirable as it led to relativism and a lack of engagement. Therefore the subject developed a 'Personal Search' approach which aimed to allow pupils to develop understanding and empathy for the views of others through comparison and analysis with their own experiences of the human condition. While seeking to bring the subject to life and encouraging pro-social thinking it also invited critical reflection on religious and philosophical beliefs. RE should therefore go well beyond simple knowledge and understanding. This is described in Bulletin 2 (1981) where it states that pupils should be able to 'evaluate' a belief/belief system in terms of its "internal coherence", "adequacy as an exploratory system", "self consistency", "consistency with other knowledge, beliefs and convictions" and "ability to meet objections". (p12)

The emphasis on these skills represents an evolution from Millar's call for consistent and thorough thinking in pupils. Arguably they also represent a more developed philosophical approach to RE.

The Personal Search approach to RE was formally recognised when it was made one of the organising strands of the 5-14 RE National Guidelines (1992) and the Curriculum for Excellence (2006) recommends that Personal Search should permeate all areas of RE. Arguably, therefore, we see within non-denominational RE in Scotland the lineage towards democratic, problem-based, exploratory and experiential learning as discussed above with regards to Freire, Lipman, Dewey et al.

However, questions could legitimately be asked about the extent to which education in Scotland has truly been 'democratised' especially as many feel that education remains driven by exams and curricula based on outcomes. The task of discerning the progressive educational approaches outlined above has proven difficult, given these factors. However, current initiatives in Scottish education, (principally the Curriculum for Excellence review from 2005) describe the outcomes of education in terms of pupil experiences where the emphasis is less on external moderation and more on sensitivity to individual learners and teacher autonomy, and to a child centred, flexible approach to learning which, for example is reflected in access to vocational approaches, as well as proposals for more integrated qualifications in the secondary school. This national review also foregrounds the development of pupil criticality and thinking skills.

In the context of such change we can perhaps begin to see why philosophy and philosophical approaches to RE have become prevalent. Philosophy has a
natural place within a subject which seeks to critically evaluate truth claims and the answers posited to the great existential questions by all manner of traditions. Connotations of intellectual rigour and modesty may also be part of the attraction of those within RE who lobby to change the subject’s title to Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies for all pupils. It may also be the case that philosophy simply has a gravitas that lends the subject a degree of credibility.

In the local authority surveyed seven out of nine departments stated that philosophy permeates their RE curriculum from the first year onwards. While five departments offered Higher RMPS, six offered Higher philosophy to senior pupils. When questioned about this departments stated that this was the result of pupil preference for philosophy over RE. Questionnaire returns also stated that it would be impossible to engage critically with ethical issues without philosophy (Schools one, three and eight). Others felt that RE naturally lends itself to philosophy (Schools two and six).

9. Conclusions

This article sought to place changes within RE in Scotland against the background of the analysis of society; the decline of traditional forms of religion, and changes in educational practice. It has argued that RE has had to change to be relevant to an age where there is a crisis of legitimation; where the old tribal answers don’t seem to be working, and where educational practice has become increasingly democratic. These influences have been evidenced both within RE policy and guidelines and within the responses of RE departments surveyed in one local authority. The hypothesis presented here may emerge as only part of the RE story. The asymmetrical influence of certain individuals may also play a part. These individuals may be those engaged in writing outcomes (at present for A Curriculum for Excellence), support materials, exam setters and Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Education (HMIE); all of whom have, to an extent, pursued their own vision of the subject. Considerations of such individuals may add to more prosaic reasons for change in RE practice, for example to gain credibility within the curriculum. Having said that, the issue of credibility is one that is, in part, explicable in terms of educational and social change; as this article has perhaps demonstrated.

A further caveat on such research may be as stated by one teacher...

Teachers do not know why changes happen because they are not really consulted.
(comment in one email accompanying a questionnaire November 2007)
What seems to be the case is that RE is only part of a broader trend in education, albeit it is a subject which has a good deal more ‘baggage’ than others when it comes to the democratization of knowledge, given the sensitive nature of much RE material. The move to more democratic methods in education is something that is felt particularly acutely in RE in Scotland; a subject which nowadays purports, to represent revelation and reason equally (no mean feat!). The changes envisaged by Anderson (1995) when he said that this is a time when Philosophy has descended out of the ivory tower down to the level of all ordinary people are happening. Alison Coull, depute director of the Curricular division of the Scottish government has stated (November 2007) that philosophy will be “embedded” in all curricular areas, thereby demonstrating that this is an apposite time for the skills philosophy offers; a time characterized by epistemological confusion, the decline of traditional institutionally held beliefs and a more democratic approach to the learning process.

While the researcher understands the need to discuss the tension between ‘democratic’ education and centralised control of policy; national assessment requirements, and political interests, these areas merit a fuller discussion than space allows in the current paper. In due course the researcher hopes to look at these areas, both in a review of Scottish policy literature, but also through empirical work, including interviews with key informants and a national survey of RE teachers.

This paper therefore points towards further research, and suggests a number of key informants with regards to data gathering (for example, school inspectors and the authors of curricular change — principally seconded RE teachers). It is also the intention of the researcher, as a result of the pilot study discussed above, to issue a national survey to Scottish secondary school RE teachers. It is hoped that, besides from providing insight into the views of the RE profession about changes in RE and creating greater reflexivity within the RE profession by partaking in, and reading research findings; that it may also serve as a large case study into the anatomy of curricular change in Scotland.

References


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2 The ‘embedding’ of Philosophy within all curricular areas was outlined by Ms Coull in a presentation to the Scottish Joint Committee for Religious and Moral Education (Edinburgh, 12th November 2007).


University of Aberdeen Department of Philosophy, http://www.abdn.ac.uk/philosophy/ (accessed 14th November 2006).


University of Stirling Department of Philosophy, http://www.philosophy.stir.ac.uk/ (accessed 14th November 2006).


