ASSESSMENT, TRUTH AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

This paper concerns assessment within *formal religious education* (henceforth, RS).[1] We can (very roughly) gloss 'religious education' most broadly as those formative influences which bring their subjects to have a more informed and reasonable attitude to the religious on the one hand (including religious beliefs, practices and attitudes), and to the religion-focused on the other (including beliefs about religion, practices regarding it, and attitudes towards). We can (again, very roughly) gloss 'formal education' as the sort of deliberate, sustained formative influence distinctive of schools and universities. RS in this sense can and does occur in a great many countries globally, sometimes in private educational institutions, sometimes in public ones and sometimes in both.[2] One important question that cuts across national boundaries is this: if students' learning within RS is apt for assessment, in virtue of what should students' answers be marked as correct, as incorrect, or as more or less meritorious? Because this question cuts across national boundaries and across both Higher Education and education for younger students, I do not limit my discussion to any particular national context or age group.

It seems that assessment practices should be designed to measure variations along the dimensions in which it is hoped that students will improve. As John Wilson puts it, "the notion of education carries with it the ideas of success and failure, progress and mistakes, learning more or less, being more or less well informed, understanding, perceptive, etc." (Wilson 1976, 18). In short, the notion of education carries with it the ideas of improvement. For this reason, educational assessment requires a clear understanding of the dimensions along which students ought to improve, as well as what would reliably indicate such improvement.[3] What will concern us more specifically is the dimensions along which students ought to improve with respect to the religious and the religion-focused. I defend answers to these questions which draw on insights provided by Craig Bourne, Emily Caddick Bourne and Clare Jarmy (henceforth Bourne et al) in a recent paper of theirs addressing this issue, which they dub 'the problem of correctness' (669). I propose to elaborate and defend one of the solutions that

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[1] I will use 'Religious Studies' ('RS') to denote 'formal Religious Education' just because that is the term used by theorists that I draw on heavily in what follows. If asked what constitutes a religion, I can only emphasize the heterogeneity of religions, with, for instance, some religious traditions differing in the centrality with which doctrines, rituals or texts feature, with some lacking any sacred texts at all. I should note also that whether some essentialist reduction might truly be offered of religion is an open question (Tillson 2018), for the heterogeneity of the ways that water manifests does not preclude its having H_2O as a single essence.

[2] I acknowledge however, that the manner of RS that I endorse below is a practical impossibility in some contexts, such as illiberal, homogenous authoritarian contexts.

[3] A sceptic may contend that some dimensions of development are in principle immeasurable, not reliably measurable, or not reliably measurable given practical constraints. To keep the sceptic on board with our discussion, we can circumvent her concern by encouraging them to ask a slightly different question. Whether or not we can or should assess students' learning, which student performances (if any) should be regarded as requiring correction or concurrence, and why, and which student performances (if any) should be regarded as more accomplished and which as less?

Bourne et al canvas and reject. Let us begin by introducing the problem, as Bourne et al frame it, together with the potential solutions that they appraise in their attempt to address it.[4]

To understand the issue, consider how, intuitively, 'three days' seems to be the correct answer to the closed question 'how many days after his crucifixion did Jesus rise from the dead?' while 'four days' seems to be an incorrect answer, and 'Jesus didn't exist' seems to either miss the point or simply be facetious. What is it that renders these answers correct, incorrect, and point missing? Bourne et al consider and reject, albeit tentatively, a promising explanation. They call this the *elliptical approach*. On the *elliptical approach*, students' answers are understood to be 'elliptical for true sentences about beliefs (e.g. a sentence starting "Christians believe that …")' (Bourne et a*l*, 669). On this view, students' answers are to be marked as correct when they are true, including when the sentences for which they are elliptical are true.[5] Bourne *et al* offer counter examples to this approaches that constitute serious problems for their ability to account for current practice within RS. Their preferred explanation of what determines whether students' answers to closed questions ought to be marked as correct in RS is what they call the 'institutional approach'. On this view, what grounds correctness are 'practices of the RS institution, which include making endorsements of some judgements and not others' (ibid). The RS institution is to be understood inclusively as a complex of religious, non-religious, educational and political institutions seeking to affect RS practice. On their view, the institutions' participants mutually generate the standards of correctness without having to conform to any practice-independent standards. While I agree that the RE institution does determine what *is* treated as correct, I do not agree that it determines what *should* be treated as correct.

In this paper, my primary goal is to defend the *elliptical approach*, rejecting the *institutional approach*. I will argue that the *elliptical approach* can capture the correctness of many answers to closed questions in RS that Bourne et al judge ought to be marked correct, but think that the *elliptical approach* cannot account for all statements that *are* marked as correct. On my view, those statements which cannot be captured within this approach ought not to be marked as correct. I explain why statement *should* be judged correct with reference to what I take to be the most defensible aims of RS. I argue that the elliptical approach offers a more satisfying understanding of what RS teachers should judge correct than deference to institutional orthodoxy does. The secondary aim of this paper is to argue that if we cannot find any coherent, principled account of when RS teachers judge students' answers to questions to be correct or more meritorious, then this tells against teachers' practice as being

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[4] Bourne et al's discussion is more bounded than my own and is meant to be inclusive of test papers across different GCSE and A Level exam boards in England and Wales, and, more generally, of what teachers regard as being correct in Secondary RS. Their discussion also focuses specifically on the correctness of answers to closed questions. That said, the consequences of their discussion could be said to generalize to different discrete RS institutions in other educational jurisdictions.

[5] It is perhaps worth flagging how what *is correct* and what *should be marked as correct* might come apart. While it is ultimately truth that makes an answer correct, really, we should mark as correct whatever we have most reason to think is true.

confused, inconsistent or arbitrary. Any mismatch between the elliptical approach and actual practice is a failure of practice, I shall contend. Seen in this light, what Bourne et al's paper exposes is that many closed questions and answers framed in UK RS are underspecified to the point of confusion or vacuity; and where we confusion and vacuity is identified within RS practice, whether in the UK or elsewhere, practitioners should be ready to reform it. I begin with an account of what I take to be the most defensible aims of RS, broadly construed.

TRUTH AND THE AIMS OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Bourne et al observe that teachers can get things wrong. If they tell 'a student that the "yad" is used as a pointer when reading the Torah because to touch it directly would be sacrilegious, they would be saying something incorrect, as the "yad" is used rather for the practical maintenance of the scrolls' (680).[6] Here teachers go wrong because they get something wrong about the world – they don't get something wrong because they go against the 'done thing' in the community of teachers. The community of teachers ought, it seems, to defer to facts. Bourne et al distance themselves from this conclusion, saying that:

> whilst what is correct in the RS classroom is informed by the content of religious traditions existing independently of or externally to the [RS] institution, there is no direct route from what is practised, believed or accepted as part of a tradition to what is correct in the classroom (i.e. correctness cannot simply be boiled down to "being part of a tradition") (681)

Bourne et al can object that teachers go wrong because they get something wrong about the world *and* because they go against the 'done thing' in the community of teachers.[7] In particular the 'done thing' can be deference to facts. However, it is in virtue of failure to defer to facts (simpliciter) that teachers go wrong; the 'done thing' is immaterial.

While Bourne et al can capture the error of getting something wrong about the world within their explanation of correctness as rooted in the *institutional approach*, we need not invoke any further considerations about where the teacher goes wrong, than their getting something wrong about the world. Indeed, the aims of religious education that I will shortly elaborate will require that we do not go beyond it. Bourne et al are right that there is no direct route from what is practised, believed or accepted as part of a tradition (i.e. from facts) to what is

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[6] I would like to thank a reviewer for pointing out that a recursive relationships can obtain between what faith communities believe and what institutions say that they believe. It might be that a sloppy but prestigious academic claims (falsely) that some doctrine is considered true among a faith community, that some members of the faith community hear from this seemingly reliable source that this doctrine is part of their community's orthodoxy and come to the doctrine as true. Here the misdescription becomes accurate through a self-fulfilling prophecy. This does nothing to undermine the distinction, but does highlight an interesting possible interaction.
[7] I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for drawing my attention to this point.

to be taught and credited in the RS classroom. This has to be mediated via the aims of RS. For this reason I shall now give a brief account of what I take to be the most defensible aims of RS.

Consider how RS (as with any educational undertaking) might possibly aim to influence students' beliefs, understanding, attitudes and skills. It seems that within RS, these dimensions of the student are to be influenced with respect to religions. That is to say, the range of influences that an RS teacher might logically have, qua RS teacher, include influence over their students' religious beliefs and beliefs about religions; their religious attitudes and attitudes to religion; their religious understanding and understanding of religions; their skills in religious activities and activities concerning religion and their practices within religions and their practices towards religion. The most defensible aims in RS, where beliefs are concerned, is the promotion of students' knowledge in epistemically settled cases, and the promotion of the (epistemic) reasonableness of students' beliefs in epistemically unsettled cases (cf Hand 2004).[8]

However, knowing the truth and believing what is reasonable do not exhaust the epistemic goods that it is appropriate for RS to deliver. Such goods include understanding the truth, as well as understanding more generally, and to competencies in and tendencies towards rational investigation and deliberation (Carter and Kotzee 2015). The latter should include rational deference to intellectual authority (Hand 2006). The literature on educational epistemology refers to such competencies and dispositions as epistemic virtues, and to their converse as epistemic vices (Baehr 2013). In its simplest form, pedagogy encouraging knowledge could involve marking an answer as correct with a tick or as incorrect with a cross. Pedagogy encouraging rational investigation and deliberation could involve saying 'that's interesting, how do you know that?' or commenting 'that's wrong, but you're approaching this in a very sensible way – good reasoning' respectively. Assessment for knowledge sometimes takes the form of closed questions to which there are right and wrong answers, which include 'yes or no' questions. Assessment for understanding more naturally lends itself to open ended tasks, which might include explaining a concept in different words or using one's own examples. Assessment for rational deliberation can be very open ended, and might involve students comparing and contrasting two rival views, bringing out the merits and

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[8] For criticism of this view, namely that teaching with respect to belief should be constrained by the Epistemic Criterion, see Cooling (2014), Hess and McAvoy (2015), Warnick and Spencer Smith (2014) and Gregory (2014). For defences, see Hand (2008, 2014, 2014a, 2014b) and Tillson (2017). For a defence of the good of knowledge among the aims of education more generally, see Adler (2003). These epistemic aims are rejected on political grounds by Clayton and Stevens (2018); on what they call the Acceptability Requirement, "education policy must be regulated by principles that are acceptable to reasonable people" (forthcoming). The concept of reasonableness they have in mind is that of having a "baseline commitment to treating others as free and equal, and to social unity". On their view, appeals to what is epistemically decisive are sometimes divisive among politically reasonable people and to be rejected when they are, and where religion is conconered they often are. These epistemic aims are also rejected by Clive and Jane Erricker due to considerations they take to tend toward some kind of relativism (2000), for a response to their position, see Tillson (2013) and Wright (2000).

demerits of each, and synthesizing them into a third, more epistemically satisfactory option. Assessment for rational investigation might often be very open ended too, perhaps requiring students to define a research question, and design a method of inquiry that would best answer it.

With these considerations foregrounding our discussion, we can now proceed to discuss the relationship between correctness and truth. That is to say, we can now proceed to discuss how the assessment practices of marking some answers as correct, or incorrect, and crediting more answer more or less highly are connected with students' improvement with respect to the religious and the religion-focused.

THE CORRECT AND THE TRUE

When one says 'Christians believe that X', it is hard to imagine what is being claimed except for some purported fact. It is very hard to see, furthermore, what would justify a claim of its form being marked correct except for the overwhelming force of warrant for its assertability, or what would justify its being marked incorrect apart from a total lack of warrant for its assertability, or the overwhelming force of warrant for its deniability.[9] Consider a student's having been marked correct for answering a closed question with a particular proposition. We should ask ourselves what message we would communicate in marking it as correct. Most naturally we would communicate that the proposition is true. If we were not communicating that we confidently regard that content as being true in virtue of marking it correct, we must ask what it is that we are communicating. If however, contrary to current implication of the practice, we were to make clear that marking for correctness is in no way meant to track truth, it might fairly be asked what we were doing. Certainly we would be encouraging the student to continue to answer the question in that way, but for what reason if not to communicate to them some truth and then test their knowledge of it? It would seem an odd process of hoop jumping to go through otherwise. The further question could be raised at to what relation the correctness had to the truth of matters or to what is most credible (our closest proximate of truth). Given that the most plausible educational aims of RS are to promote knowledge in settled cases and reasonable belief in unsettled cases, whatever is being marked correct would seem a miseducational distraction.

Consider again a student being marked incorrect for answering a closed question with a particular proposition. What would the purpose of this be, except to inform them that they were asserting something false? It would seem most peculiar to say: while you answer the

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[9] We should distinguish between assertability from the point of view of human knowledge, and from the student's point of view. It is from the point of view of human knowledge that students are to be marked as correct or incorrect. What there is no reason to believe from the point of view of human knowledge, might conflict with what there every reason to believe from their point of view. This view allows that in such cases, while students should be corrected, they can at the same time being given points for 'working out'.

question truly, you answer incorrectly. The perplexed student who is told this would be entitled to ask what the point of learning to answer questions in ways that do not communicate the truth is other than to mislead them. The alternative to a model on which students' answers are marked as correct because they are reliably judged to be true, seems to be that students learn which phrases to utter in response to which cues without at the same time learning anything about religions. If a teacher were to tell their students that 'this answer is correct, but it is not true', how should they understand this? It might sound like the teacher is disillusioned with the curriculum, perhaps in the manner of a creationist teacher coaching their students to pass an exam on evolution, though all the while cautioning her students that the answers they are to give are merely for the sake of passing, in truth they indicate no more than the errors of the scientific orthodoxy. Here, it is natural to hear the word 'correct' in 'X is the correct answer, but it is false', as occurring in quotation marks – as if to say it's not correct *really*.

How else are we to teach the correct answer, and not at the same time stake a claim that it is true? We might deny that the answer has a truth-assertive quality. Among Muslims, it might be correct to respond to the greeting 'As-Salaam-Alaikum' (peace be upon you), with the words 'Wa-Alaikum-Salaam' (and upon you). However, sentences dealt with in RS, and that ought to be dealt with in RS, are often not like that. Instead they are truth claims, even if they are truth claims about things that are not truth claims. For instance, 'Wa-Alaikum-Salaam' is not a truth claim, but 'Among Muslims, "Wa-Alaikum-Salaam" is considered to be the correct to response to the greeting "As-Salaam-Alaikum"' is a truth claim. Or again, one might teach that Genesis is not comprised of truth claims, and mark students as correct for claiming that 'Genesis is not comprised of truth claims'. In this case one would be teaching the truth of the claim that 'Genesis is not comprised of truth claims'.

IN DEFENSE OF THE ELLIPTICAL APPROACH

Bourne et al draw special attention to statements like 'Jesus rose again on the third day' which ought to be marked as a correct answer to the closed question, 'On what day did Jesus arise from the dead?' while they may or may not be true. The natural response to these cases is to regard such statements as incomplete; missing a prefix, or suffix such as 'according to Christians'. Bourne et al call this the *elliptical approach*. While they regard it as initially plausible, they ultimately reject it as failing. They point out its failure to correctly predict, current practice in the context of the UK RS classroom. A natural response to this is to reject current practice the UK RS classroom. More deeply they point out that 'there is an immediate problem for the elliptical approach', namely 'specifying what the tacit prefix must be' (672). However, this is not so much a problem for the account as a problem for the teachers and exam boards: if they cannot fill in the rest of the sentence to show how it is true, they should question quite what content it is that they are hoping to teach at all.

Bourne et al observe that the elliptical approach cannot account for the correctness of sentences like 'Jesus rose again on the third day' just by claiming it is elliptical for 'Christians believe that Jesus rose again on the third day.' While some Christians do believe that, the view faces two problems. Firstly, not *all* Christians do, and secondly, it could just so happen that all and only Christians happen to believe something irrelevant to their faith. They then ask for a criterion of relevance. However, this demand is gratuitous. We do not need a clear definition and principled distinction between what we should consider Christian or non-Christian. Any account of the distinction between the Christian and Non-Christian would have to take account of the fact that 'Some Christians believe that Monk is the greatest detective show' (Bourne et al's example, 506) would not be constitutive of their Christianity. After all, while concepts are supposed to determine application, if we are looking to define concepts, we have to work backwards from their most plausible application (perhaps to settle the less obvious cases). Those beliefs held qua Christian would be those beliefs which when had, would be partly constitutive of one's Christianity, or when lost or gained, could weaken or strengthen one's case for being Christian.[10] As to what features counts towards being Christian, I only note that Bourne et al are themselves able to suggest plausible candidates e.g. being 'a lifelong member of the Church of England', 'an ordained Anglican minister' or 'Professor of Divinity at Oxford' (Bourne et al, 672).

Suppose we say that 'Jesus rose again on the third day' is to be filled out with 'Some Christians (qua Christians) believe that …' Bourne et al object further that 'even amongst relevant beliefs the prefix is too permissive. Some Christians believe that the formation of the Grand Canyon is down to the flood at the time of Noah, but, they claim, "The formation of the Grand Canyon is down to the flood at the time of Noah" would not be a correct thing to say in the RS classroom' (673). What this shows however, is that teachers and students need to be clearer about what is being asserted or denied. If they deny that 'The formation of the Grand Canyon is down to the flood at the time of Noah' is correct, their worry is surely that the claim is a perfect storm of being untrue to any central text, not believed by Christians (qua Christians) quite generally or traditionally, implausible theology, and untrue *tout court*. From this, quite reasonably, teachers might worry that children would come away with one of these mistaken impressions, and hope to guard against them by regarding the claim as incorrect because it is false on any natural elaboration. We should always be clear about what is left out of our elliptical sentences, and not accept expressions which are ambiguous between different propositions as being correct.

Indeed, consider the case of a student who does not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. What content they take the answer 'on the third day' to have, as the correct answer to the

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[10] Thought operates with concepts (e.g. the concept of a Christian) and concepts have application (e.g. to a particular person). It is an interesting question as to how the limits of concepts' are to be defined. For concepts to do the work that we require of them, namely to allow differentiated thought about elements of the world, they must have limits of application. I have no reflective account of concepts, where they come from, whether they are mutable, or of how sharp their boundaries of application are or need to be.

question, 'when did Jesus rise from the dead?' is worryingly ambiguous. They may believe that all Christians take that to be the case, or that most do, or that the average Christian does, or that in some sense Christians *should* take that to be the case. If they cannot articulate what it is that they believe, then that seems to be a problem for the item of knowledge that they can be said to have acquired, or lesson they can be said to have learned with respect to how the world stands. This, I contend, is a problem for practice. The lesson to draw from this is that the missing content in elliptical phrases taught as correct ought to be strongly implicit.

Propositions like 'Jesus rose on the third day' (i.e. contestably true statements in the absence of implicit content) can often be rendered true by tacit content that needn't refer to what most Christians believe. Instead, they can be treated in just the same way as sentences about fictional entities in stories like those by Conan Doyle. In fiction, we don't say: Sherlock Holmes is a detective iff (if and only if) the English teaching institutions agree that Sherlock Holmes is a detective. Instead, we say Sherlock Holmes is a detective iff he was a detective in the story (i.e. if the story turned out to be true, then he would in fact be a detective). So claims can be *true to* false or fictional or disputably true stories. Just as true to Conan Doyle's novels, Sherlock Holmes was the greatest detective in London, so true to the Gospels, Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. Clearly Sherlock Holmes was not a great detective if that sentence is not in some way relativized to the content of fictional stories. These stories can be introduced with reference to religiously central texts, or with reference to statements about all, most, or a significant number of religious persons qua religious persons.

In so far as it is not clear what our criteria of correctness are, we have a serious worry. Children may properly expect and be expected to know things about religion(s) when they leave school. They might be told that some answers to closed questions are correct, but if they are then not told which sentences are true, and which are merely correct, they will predictably believe all the answers they have been told to be correct to be true, and so have been deceived, or otherwise culpably misled. Suppose however, that students were cannier, and knew that the answers they were taught to give to closed questions were correct without being true, and so were not misled. They would still be in the dark as to what the correctness-makers were, why they were interesting, what further revelations would render them incorrect, and how any of that were supposed to connect up with what they have most reason to believe about the religious on the one hand, and the religion-focused on the other. After all, we ought to be falliblists about all of our judgements, ready to revise them when further considerations come to light. If students are to be capable of revising their beliefs in light of relevant evidence which has yet to come to light, then they will need to know what it is that is supposed to make their beliefs 'correct', and how this correctness relates to what is to be believed or to be thought true.

Bourne et al argue that where 'a teacher thinks that "God is omnipotent" is not true because they believe there is no God. The teacher would nevertheless mark this as correct, as opposed

to "God lives in the sky", which they would mark as incorrect' (670). However, this surely depends on what they are assessing for: truth about the world, or truth to a text, or truth about a particular religious community's beliefs. It is important to distinguish between assertion and quotation. Consider the following:

A) Jesus is the son of God
B) "Jesus is the son of God"

A) is an assertion, and B) is a quotation. When teachers are asserting, they ought to be clear that they are asserting. When they are quoting, they ought to be clear, that they are quoting, and clear about whom they are quoting. When children can understand the difference between reporting and endorsing an account, teachers ought to be clear which it is they are doing. If children cannot understand the difference, then that is a reason to refrain reporting what they do not endorse. Contextually, teachers need not always mention whether they are quoting or asserting, but when asked which it is they are doing, they ought to know. They may be quoting a key piece of religious scripture, or they may be quoting most Christians' beliefs qua Christians. That may be vague, but that is not a death knell, as we shall see below. Indeed, we should be especially wary about ambiguity (as opposed to vagueness) in the context of RS, for teachers can easily oscillate between confessionalism and non-confessionalism, teaching some statements as just being true to the religious texts, and other statements as being true to the religious texts *and* true tout court, without even appreciating the contours.[11]

Another way in which Bourne et al attempt to cleave correctness and truth apart is by observing that, in UK schools, saying '"The Mikveh is a ritual bath" would be correct, despite the fact that 'Many Jews use the Mikveh, a ritual bath' might in fact be untrue' (675). For them, this 'demonstrates that correctness as it actually is assessed in the RS classroom comes apart from anthropological claims about how many people believe or practise certain tenets or customs of their faith' (675). However, again, it may easily be taught that 'The Mivkeh is a ritual bath that *used more commonly* to be taken after menstruation' rather than leaving its prevalence unspecified. 'The Mikveh is a ritual bath' is true in the same way as 'A gladiator is someone who fights to the death for spectators' entertainment'. It refers to nothing currently in use, or much in use, but something that is real. Failure for students to understand which of these it true is a serious problem for their understanding.

As a final objection to the elliptical approach, Bourne et al point out that 'relatively few Christians are aware that the miracles in John are signs that point to religious significance beyond the events, whereas the miracles in the Synoptic Gospels show divine power' (673). They observe that while 'the miracles in John are signs that point to religious significance

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[11] Whereas "vagueness is deficiency of meaning" ambiguity is a lack of "univocal meaning" (Fine 1975, 265). To illustrate, consider how while the application of the term 'bark' may be sometimes be ambiguous between (among other things) 'the outer surface of trees' and 'the sides of a river', the application of the term 'stealing' is vague when it comes to unreturned borrowed books (Hand 2018).

beyond the events, whereas the miracles in the Synoptic Gospels show divine power' is correct, the reason that is correct cannot be that it is elliptical for the same sentence prefixed by 'Most Christian believe that …' While this is true, it does not tell against the elliptical approach. The truth of claims about Sherlock Holmes' actions, do not usually depend on what most, or all Sherlock Holmes' fans believe. More usually they depend on what is true to the texts. As to what can be said about the text, some claims are more or less warranted by the text without ever being explicitly endorsed. There may be some evidence as to whether Holmes is short tempered without it ever being explicitly stated. Bourne et al's claims about the significance of miracles in the Gospels are claims about the Gospels, rather than claims *in* the Gospels. They may be warranted by that text and this is still perfectly comprehensible within the goals of a truth-promoting and seeking curriculum, which takes some answers to closed questions to be elliptical for longer answers. While Bourne et al can capture all of this within their explanation of correctness as rooted in the *institutional approach*, we need not invoke any further considerations to explain the correctness of what the miracles in John point to.

VERISIMILITUDE AND THE ELLIPTICAL APPROACH

Epistemic staging posts are commonly accepted in Science education pedagogy, and here I argue that we should regard epistemic staging posts as an appropriate part of RS in directing students towards increased knowledge and understanding of complex phenomena. To help make this case, consider the increments of complexity reached in teaching students about the structure of matter as they progress through school. In the UK, Key Stage 2 students (ages 7 – 11) are taught that matter is made up of particles which are more or less densely packed together so as to take the form of solids, liquids or gasses. In Key Stage 3 (ages 11 – 14), students are introduced to further complexity where basic matter consists of atoms, which form elements or molecules, that can join to form compounds that in turn may form solids, liquids or gasses. In Key Stage 4 (ages 14 – 16), students are introduced to the internal structure of atoms, these being composed of protons, neutrons, and electrons. In Key Stage 5 (ages 16 – 18) students are then introduced to the idea of particle/wave duality in quantum mechanics in which light may be thought of as either a particle or as a wave.[12] It might be thought that at earlier Key Stages, certain answers are regarded as correct while they are regarded as incorrect on the more sophisticated understanding taught in later Key Stages. It might be further contended that this model of elaboration fits better with the institutional approach than with the elliptical or imaginative approach.

Let us develop this thought by asking whether it is true that, on the above model, students in lower Key Stages are taught things as being correct which are not regarded as being true from the perspective of human knowledge. In so far as it is thought (from the perspective of human knowledge) that quantum mechanics is true and that particle theory false, the answer is

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[12] I am grateful to Ian Cullen for conversations on this topic, and for offering me this example.

surely 'yes'. Indeed, it is common from experience for science students to remark that they have been misled or lied to by their teachers in the earlier Key Stages when they come to KS5. Suppose that a KS5 student were, feeling that they had been deceived, to challenge their KS4 teacher and ask 'why did you lie to me?' Let us consider two responses that the teacher could give in which the teacher accepts that they did not teach the truth; one where they accept that they taught a lie and one where they do not.

> I taught a lie: when I taught it as being correct, I did falsely teach it as being true, but I told you what you needed to hear when you needed to hear it. Having climbed a false ladder to reach the best theory (or the true theory), you can now throw it away.

Here we might reasonably think of simpler, false theories serving as pedagogical staging posts on the way to understanding more complex, more adequate theories. However, it seems that the teacher ought to have said that what they were teaching was not the truth, but the truth about a simple enough model for somewhat accurately understanding the universe (I will elaborate on this notion shortly). The fact that it is common for KS5 science students to remark that they have been misled or lied to by their teachers in the earlier Key Stages just lends support to the idea that there is something wrong with teaching some answers as correct when they are not true. Let us consider an alternative response in which the teacher accepts that they taught a false claim as being correct, but denies having lied in so doing.

> I did not teach a lie: I never said I was teaching you the truth about the universe, I merely told you what was correct and what was incorrect. Indeed, I told you truly what was correct and what was incorrect. The Science Institution decides what is correct or not, and I taught in accordance with its consensus.

This answer must disappoint our KS5 student since it provides no rationale for correctness and fails to appreciate the obvious fact that when a declarative statement is taught as correct the natural implication of this is that the statement is true. What rationale could the institutionalist provide? Perhaps something like this:

> [...] the Science Institution decided that what was to be correct at each stage was what would get you to believe the closest thing to the truth that you were able to understand at that stage.

Such an elaboration also takes advantage of the conversational implication, if only to mislead rather than to lie. It too could easily be improved upon by simply adding that what was being taught was not the truth about the universe, but the truth about a relatively simple model yielding a somewhat accurate understanding of the universe. It is now time to elaborate on this notion. It might be thought that that teaching contexts are occasions on which the teaching of a declarative statement *as correct* are naturally thought of as occasions on which

what is stated as being believable. However, the fact that that it is common for KS5 science students to remark that they have been misled or lied to by their teachers in the earlier Key Stages lends support to the idea that this is not true.

Let us consider a third way that the KS4 teacher might respond to their former pupil, one which denies having lied, misled or taught something false as correct:

> I did not teach a falsehood as correct: It is not clear that the particle theory is simply false. While it's not 'the *whole* truth and *nothing but* the truth', it has greater verisimilitude than some other theories.

On this understanding, Science teachers invoke simplified models of the world which are appropriate for the level of understanding of their students without at the same time disregarding their responsibilities of truthfulness, and without communicating any falsehoods. There are different ways of simplifying: not telling the whole truth, and not telling just the truth. A simplification which does not tell the *whole* truth might leave out lots of data, for instance, the claim that the American Civil War was about slavery, or that Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is about *War and Peace*. A simplification not telling *just* the truth may aggregate data to a high degree and include falsehoods, without the picture as a whole thereby simply being false. For instance the claim that horses have four legs is hardly false even though it leaves out the fact that some horses do not have four legs. These lessons carry over to RS. Plausibly, on the aims of RS endorsed above, what should make an answer correct is that it is (conscientiously, and doing due diligence) believed by the teacher to be as well attested as any truth claims which are marked as correct on, for instance, the History curriculum.

Bourne et al do well to draw attention to the filtering process used by teachers, and pedagogical considerations used in this process. 'Practitioners', they say, 'make additional judgements about how to present the filtered information to students of the age and the expectations they cater to' (681). Bourne et al wanted to affirm that 'three days' is a correct answer to the question 'how many days after his crucifixion did Jesus rise?' without its having to be thought true, and without needing an elliptical insertion to make it true. On my account, the question is ambiguous between more definite senses, and so requires to be made more precise if it is not to be taken at face value as a claim about what really happened. The likely contexts within which it could be taught are: in providing an account of the creeds of certain churches, or of the beliefs professed by Christians, or of the literal content of the texts which are central to those churches and people. Bourne et al point out, that, unless one can overcome the difficulties of establishing an essentialist account of Christianity, there are no beliefs that all Christians have qua Christians. This may make it problematic to assert any such sentence as 'Christians believe that after his crucifixion, Jesus was raised from the dead.' Certainly some Christians believe this. Perhaps the sentence should read: '*Some* Christians believe that after his crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead.' However, a natural response

would be to query which ones, how many, and why we should care about them rather than those who do not believe this. It might be rather hard to give a general account of what Christians believe, and the subject would quickly become rather nuanced. This might be too much complex information for young children to understand. So perhaps some simple truths can be told to children without acknowledging all of this complexity. It is true that simple 'truths' can obscure important differences and nuances through aggregation, but they may be coarse grained truths *en route* to finer grained truths. We might think of this process as a matter of precisifying indeterminate content which, until students are capable of noticing that it is indeterminate. Furthermore, we could credit students more highly in proportion with the verisimilitude of their answers and in proportion to the appropriateness of the degree of verisimilitude given students' stages of study.

INFERENCE AND THE ELLIPTICAL APPROACH

There is a world and there are claims that are apt to be made about it truly or falsely (call these truth-claims).[13] The world includes religious texts, beliefs, and practices, and truth-claims include ones about religious texts, beliefs and practices. Some religious texts purport to be about the world, while others do not. Truth claims about religious texts, beliefs, and practices can all be proper objects of inquiry for RS. Additionally, RS can properly concern itself with specifying the content and evaluating the truth of religious beliefs and of religious texts that purport to be about the world (to the extent that they do so purport).[14] In this case one is perhaps doing something that might be called philosophy of religion, or theology, which may in turn be considered a subset of religious studies along with, contemporary and retrospective the history, sociology or psychology of religion. Here it is reasonable to bring students into epistemic engagement with worldviews, which need not be endorsed either by themselves or by the teacher. In this context students are able to derive what ought to be believed from what is already believed in a religion, and here they may depart in their conclusions from what is currently believed in a religion. They may say: given these premises, the following conclusion would follow, and those religious people who accept the premises ought also to accept this conclusion. This engagement might yield answers to questions that teachers could credit highly. They might demonstrate excellent deliberative and investigative rationality, two of the epistemic goods to be developed by education broadly.

A benefit of the imaginative approach, argue Bourne et al, is that it 'allows us to make better sense of the correctness of *inferences* in the context of the classroom [than the elliptical approach can]. Students studying resurrection narratives could [correctly] infer from the story of Jesus's resurrection that, in Christianity, resurrection of the body is possible' (677). Bourne

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[13] I hope that this strikes the reader as platitudinous, but for elaborations and defences of this view see Tillson (2013), Lowe (2002, 2008) and Williams (2005).

[14] So too can RS properly concern itself with truth claims of about texts, beliefs, and practices concerning religion, and with specifying the content and evaluating the truth of beliefs and of texts concerning religion.

et al observe that 'If the correctness of an individual sentence is to be judged by the truth of an appropriately related prefixed sentence, the process of inference becomes one of hypothesising about what people are likely to believe given the prevalence of other beliefs' (677). This, they say, misses out an important aspect of which inferences teachers may properly judge correct: i.e. not all correct inferences turn on what people are likely to believe.

However, students might draw inferences for themselves without reference to what others believe, for instance, 'If I were to accept Y, then I ought equally to accept Z'.[15] Here we should allow that the *elliptical approach* allows us to make sense of the ways that RS teachers might properly credit students for doing theology (or philosophy of religion). This can constitute valuable activity in the context of RS classrooms. However, one does not want to lose sight of actual faith traditions in the process of reasoning what it is that their adherents should believe given other of their beliefs. According to my view, teachers ought to make plain that philosophy of religion and anthropology of religion are two different practises, with the latter being concerned with tracking actual beliefs and practises, and the former having an eye to their strengths and weaknesses in tracking the world and respecting the good. In light of these considerations, before being marked correct, the student who read about Jesus' resurrection in the Gospels and concluded that 'the body can be resurrected' should have specified what she meant: whether the body can be resurrected *really*, whether many Christians are *likely* to believe that it can in light of their other beliefs, or whether many Christians *ought* to believe it can, in light of their other beliefs. Given these considerations then, the elliptical approach can successfully incorporate the possibility of correct inferences.

In discussing what students would have to do in understanding faith traditions from an anthropological point of view, Bourne et al note that 'students might have to study psychological and statistical data about believers', objecting that 'this does not capture what is in fact their project, namely, piecing together the elements of religious worldviews to form a whole' (678). However, this anthropological study seems like something entirely valid within an RS context given the most defensible aims of RS. Sometimes students might be doing theology, agreeing to accept premises 'for the sake of argument'. Other times, students might be doing anthropology, wherein older and more advanced students ought to begin to understand the rich texture of similarities and differences within and between faith traditions based on psychological and statistical data. To the extent that these features are missing from UK RS tells more against UK RS practice than it tells against the bases here recommended for judging correctness and merit.

Bourne et al raise a worry about how comparisons are to be made between worldviews when one is imaginatively engaging with worldviews. This objection might be thought problematic

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[15] That said, one can usually make *reasonable* inferences from what someone believes to other things that people are likely to believe, and one might also reason in the following way "If most Xs believe Y, most Xs ought also to believe Z."

for using it to understand how judgements of correctness and merit can be made in the context of doing philosophy and theology.

> Take the example of a class studying the role of prophecy in Islam, in which a student might say "The Prophet Isa is the same person as Jesus Christ". Such a contribution cannot be understood as belonging entirely to the "Islam game", nor entirely to the "Christianity game". How, then, is the student's contribution to be construed by an approach which takes students in the RS classroom to be participating in games of make-believe? (679)

Brilliant thought this objection is against the *imaginative approach* to understanding of valid (and correct) inferences in RS, it does not seem to be a problem on the account provided here. First, we allow that a student can say: 'given the commitment of Christians to X, and the fact that X entails Y, Christians ought rationally also to be committed to Y'. Second, we equally allow that a student can say: 'given the commitment of Muslims to A, and the fact that A entails B, Muslims ought rationally also to be committed to B'. This does not preclude them from observing that Y and B are remarkably similar in some ways, but different in others. They can, either from within, or from outside of the worldviews, compare the content for similarity. Similarly, students have no problem comparing and contrasting the heroes of distinct fictional worlds (say, Batman and Sherlock Holmes) who students believe not to exist (as being non-government detectives differing in degree of vigilantism).[16] Nor do students have any problem comparing the hero of a novel to a real political leader. Bourne et al issue a challenge for the *imaginative approach* asking anyone prepared to defend it to 'say what a game of make-believe in the RS classroom involves' (679). A satisfactory account of inference without belief within meritorious RS behaviour seems to be just this: accepting certain premises for the sake of argument, and seeing what follows validly from them. The premises can be found wherever you want them: in religious texts, or in the beliefs of some particular sect, qua membership of that sect.

ACTUAL PRACTICE AND THE ELLIPTICAL APPROACH

Our central concern has been with which criteria we should use to decide whether students' answers to closed questions should be marked as correct, and which students' answers to open-ended questions should be marked more highly in the context of RS. If we were to accept an institutional approach to answering this question, then we would accept that the correctness of a judgement *should simply be* 'constituted by its being the kind of judgement that a good judge would make', or again, that what is correct *should simply be* 'determined

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[16] It is only to the extent that the games are incommensurable that such judgements would be impossible. For instance: very arguably, we could not imagine whether a Great White Shark, in its natural environment, would fare in a fight against Saber-Toothed Cat in its natural environment, for, very arguably, the relevant natural environments are mutually exclusive.

by what is recognised as correct by those who have undergone the relevant training' (684, 683). However, one needs to have a rather detailed elaboration of what makes a good judge, and of the relevant training to keep these answers from vacuity. The worry is that it will have to be in virtue of their consistently making correct judgements that they can be identified as a good judge. However, that is obviously circular and cannot help us to discern either good judgements or good judges. The elaboration that Bourne et al provide – namely, that a good judge has a delicacy of sensibility in observing beyond the obvious, and in lacking in prejudices – ends up being cashed out in terms of their having good aims, and greater knowledge and understanding. This answer just seems to delay the question as to what aims we should have. The worry of using the institutional approach to answer the question of what should be marked as correct or credit more highly, especially with Bourne et al's emphasis on training, is that the answer simply amounts to saying, 'That's the done thing', or 'That's how I was shown to do it'. While they say that their 'proposal is that the criteria come from a *practice*: that of teaching, studying and assessing RS in schools' (680), this is no explanation of what the criteria are. For Bourne et al, the criteria for correctness are not what any individual judges them to be, but what the RS institution collectively judges them to be. Putting aside practical difficulties of what sorts of consensus must arise in order to constitute a robust criterion of correctness, the more important questions to pose is, 'What *should* the RS institution be looking for in judging answers to be correct?' While they observe that it 'is the teacher who judges the student's contributions to be correct' (680), which is surely right (along with examiners and curriculum writers), the elliptical approach and imaginative approach never denied this - they just help us to connect (e.g.) UK RS practice with the most defensible epistemic aims of RS practice *tout court*.

While the institutional approach was supposed to help teachers answer the question 'How do you assess that?' (685), it does not seem to tell teachers how to assess anything. Certainly a teacher's training might give them an idea of how to assess something, but of course, practice can be confused, and can stand in need of improvement. Indeed, I may not be any the wiser in understanding *why* something is to be judged correct, despite being trained in what to mark as correct, or indeed any the wiser in knowing how that judgement is supposed to connect with our interests in life more broadly (e.g. with what propositions are true; with what activities are permissible or admirable or obligatory; with what is worth doing and what is a waste of time).

CONCLUSION

In this paper, drawing on the insights of Bourne et al, I sought to answer the question of what *should* determine whether students' answers are marked as correct or incorrect in the context of RS. I argued that a combination of judged truth, whether simplified or richly complex, true to life, or true to the text and plausible judgements about what ought to be

believed, given certain premises, jointly provide us with proper constraints on how judgements of correctness *should* be made and when greater credit *should* be given in RS in the UK and further afield, and in Higher Education as well as at earlier stages. Furthermore, I argued that if we cannot find any coherent, non-arbitrary account of how judgements of correctness *are in fact* made within current UK RS practice in Schools, then this tells more against current practice as being confused and inconsistent than against the constraints on how judgements of correctness or merit should be made that I have defended in this paper. In the course of this paper, I hope to have contributed a little to the larger ambition of restoring the concepts of truth and knowledge as properly grounding the practice of marking students' answers as correct both within RS as well as in education more generally.

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