



Theological Foundations of Action Research for Learning and Teaching

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End page: 140

[Return to vol. 8 no. 1 index page](#)

It is a fair assumption, I think, that these days most undergraduate courses in ethics will include discussion of MacIntyre's virtue ethics, and that it is therefore not improbable that at least some students in UK universities have a fair chance of encountering Aristotelian ideas about the importance of the 'cultivation of the virtues',¹ of 'actions according to right reason'² and, perhaps, of knowing 'how to exercise judgment in particular cases'³ (phronesis).

They may even encounter what MacIntyre describes as Aristotle's distinction between 'intellectual virtues' which are 'acquired through teaching', and 'virtues of character' which are acquired 'from habitual exercise'. They may learn that people 'become just or courageous by performing just or courageous acts', and that they 'become theoretically or practically wise as a result of systematic instruction'. It is not impossible that they also come to see that 'these two kinds of moral education are intimately related'.⁴ Whether or not they find any of this brilliant, or even merely deeply interesting, it is nevertheless a not entirely misinformed guess that their tutor may have already encouraged them to read (in translation) something of what Aristotle had written about how moral virtues are acquired through repetition in

The things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them...men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts'.⁵

And having reflected on all this, the students may end up turning over in their minds the possibility that ethics might, after all, be just a matter of acquiring good habits, the right ethos. At this point, the theology or religious studies student might conceivably be interested to discover what MacIntyre has to say about all this in relation to one classical Christian tradition, and puzzle over the 'Stoic ancestry'⁶ of much Christian ethics in distinction to the Aristotelian vision. They might be tempted to try to think through whether it really means that a 'strict Aristotelian, such as Aquinas' is, in fact, the 'highly deviant medieval figure' that MacIntyre would have him to be.⁷

Moreover, they might be encouraged, gently, to think about the practice of their own studies, the acquisition of good scholarly habits, the trial-and-error business of reading, thinking, and writing, and thereby become the sort of self-reflective learners that are able to grasp why their lecturers appear to be so keen to get them to write essays and sit exams, and why, when they mark such work, they tend to value independent, critical thought, whatever that may be. If they take this intellectual path, they will find that there have been many before them who have already noticed such potential connections, and have explored the territory with some rigour. No surprises here, perhaps, as some of Aristotle's own thinking about education, and indeed, about the problems of education has been preserved in the *Politics*:

All do not take the same view about what should be learnt by the young, either with a view to plain goodness or with a view to the best life possible; nor is opinion clear whether education should be directed mainly to the understanding or mainly to moral character... whether the proper studies to be followed are those which are useful in life, or those which make for goodness, or those which advance the bounds of goodness'.⁸

If they disregard what he has to say about cold plunges into mountain streams,⁹ they may nevertheless be interested in his assertion that 'the first principle of action is leisure', and that the proper use of leisure is the cultivation of the mind, a kind of intellectual enjoyment for its own sake. Education is sought 'not as being useful or necessary, but because it is liberal and noble'.¹⁰ But it presumably always represents a balance between the reception of taught instruction and the practice of habitual exercise.

If one allows this, then one begins to see a model of how means and ends can be brought together in the teaching of theology and religious studies. Such a model is the subject of this paper, which basically views the theology and religious studies curriculum as, amongst other things, a tool for fostering critical thinking with constant reference to the content of the subject. In addition, I will suggest that Aristotelian ideas about the importance of practice to education can be developed into a suitable learning and teaching strategy, or pedagogical tactic, to help foster critical thinking amongst students. And as this is a paper about practical means, the following discussion draws on aspects of my own practical theology of education, my concrete experiences of lecturing in a university, and reports on the action which has emerged from my reflection on how some things can be done better. In saying this, I believe I am expressing agreement with Rowan Williams' observation that "'Learning about learning" is ? equally a learning about doing'.¹¹

Reflective Practice and Action Research

What follows may be conceived as an interim report on the preliminary results of what Schon has called 'reflective practice',¹² and what others, following the social psychologist Kurt Lewin,¹³ have called 'action research'. A brief summary of the potential of action research for teaching theology and religious studies has recently been provided by

Rebecca O'Loughlin as part of a wider study of pedagogical and discipline-specific research methods, and the following remarks are meant to develop some of the results of her work.¹⁴ Broadly, action research represents the application of the insights championed by a longstanding movement of educational theory which first emerged in the UK 'in opposition to the development of a curriculum technology which stressed the prespecification of measurable learning outcomes'.¹⁵ As John Elliott says, the 'fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge. The production and utilization of knowledge is subordinate to, and conditioned by, this fundamental aim'. The key question being asked by a reflective practitioner, or action researcher (at least as it applies to me), is, 'How do I become a better educator of students following a programme of theology or religious studies?' From the student perspective, the key question is, 'How do I become a better student of theology and religious studies?' How often do we explicitly encourage students to discuss this question? Essentially, this is all about improving practice. As such, it is vital to note what Elliott goes on to explain:

The improvement of a practice consists of realizing those values which constitute its ends, e.g. "justice" for legal practice, "patient care" for medicine, "preserving the peace" for policing, "education" for teaching. Such ends are not simply manifested in the outcomes of a practice. They are also manifested as intrinsic qualities of the practices themselves. For example, if the teaching process is to influence the development of students' intellectual powers in relation to curriculum content, then it must manifest such qualities as "openness to their questions, ideas, and ways of thinking", "commitment to free and open discussion", "respect for evidence", "a care to foster independent thinking" and "an interest in the subject matter". Teaching mediates students' access to the curriculum and the quality of this mediating process is not insignificant for the quality of learning.¹⁶

The thing that should be leapt on here is the relationship Elliott describes between the development of intellectual powers and curriculum content, the fostering of independent thinking and interest in subject matter. Rather than any conceptual divide between transferable skills and subject content, the idea is to view educational practice 'not simply in terms of educational outcomes', but, instead as 'the manifestation within the practice itself of certain qualities which constitute it as an educational process capable of fostering educational outcomes in terms of student learning'.¹⁷

This, of course, does not?and cannot?mean that 'transferable skills' simply replace 'subject knowledge' as the content of the very 'learning outcomes' of which the action research movement is so critical. For the purposes of the current paper, it needs to be said that I am not arguing for the inclusion of an abstracted, stand-alone, 'critical thinking' or 'transferable skills' course module within the theology and religious studies curriculum. One cannot practice the piano without a sense of musicality and the musical instrument in front of you. One cannot learn to play theology and religious studies without a sense of criticality and the subject matter in front of you.

Admittedly, 'action research' is not beyond criticism. But it can be argued that it is a method which appropriately compliments the discipline of theology in particular. I want to argue that action research can be conceived as a proper response to what Rebecca O'Loughlin has described as 'theologians' questions about teaching and learning'.¹⁸ I do not just mean, to take one example, that the model of 'Participatory Action Research' inspired by the work of Paulo Freire is intrinsically related to Latin American liberation theology in the 70s,¹⁹ that Freire himself developed his educational praxis with reference to Christian theology and philosophy,²⁰ or, for that matter, that it is possible to trace connections between what liberation theologians describe as 'base communities' and the 'communities of practice' found in action research (for a European equivalent, see Lange's *Sprachschule für die Freiheit: Bildung als Problem und Funktion der Kirche*).²¹ I do not even mean that attention could also be drawn to the fact that action research is increasingly featuring in programmes of ministerial and practical theology, (something suitably reflected in the literature on practical theology),²² or even that practical theologians like Swinton and Mowat are now comfortable with the idea that, 'Practical Theology is fundamentally action research',²³ for the connection also exists at another level. More than just suggesting that reflection on the teaching of theology and religious studies can itself be

conceived as an exercise in practical theology, and that subject pedagogy is something which academic practical theologians should attend to, I also want to say that the Aristotelian basis of action research means that it is possible to acknowledge a fitting compatibility between the sort of pedagogic reflective practice here envisaged and to take a suitably prominent illustrative example the broader methodological principles of Thomism seen in a wider scope. Would a contemporary Thomist, reflecting on the problems of teaching theology, inevitably end up with a particular bias in favour of action research?²⁴ Quite possibly. Hugh Walters has noted that, so far as Thomas Aquinas is concerned, the task of education 'is to ensure the active participation of the learner ? stimulated through a questioning approach'. As Walters also notes, 'all of which sounds very modern'.²⁵ It is. It is possible to view at least some aspects of Thomist educational philosophy as a prefigurement of Freire, and to see Freire in continuity with aspects of action research in contemporary educational theory. If these continuities are allowed, subject matter, teaching methods, and lecturer and student practitioner reflection can be located within one methodological framework. This is called taking a holistic view, a picture of the integration of form and content in the practice of teaching theology.

But without circling off into a discussion of, say, whether Milbank's Theology and Social Theory can be made relevant to learning and teaching issues (I think it can!), and, in addition, putting to one side for present purposes the ever ongoing and endlessly fascinating debate about the distinctiveness of theology and religious studies, at this point, something might appropriately be said about the Aristotelian nature of action research. The following remarks are just to round off what I have been saying about the potential links between Thomism and action research, and are not meant to suggest that teaching and learning has to be done from a Thomist perspective. By no means. But the linkages seem so strong, that a little more comment is called for (especially considering the importance of Thomas Aquinas to so much recent British theology, at least). Such would seem to be required if only to develop a sense of just how and why this approach is fitting.

In explanations of action research, reference is often made to Bultmann's one time pupil, Gadamer.²⁶ But as John Elliott has observed, Gadamer's theory of understanding is deeply indebted to the Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy:

In developing his theory of understanding Gadamer draws on the Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy and fuses it with Heidegger's theory of hermeneutic interpretation. In the Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy phronesis is a form of reflection concerned with translating universal ethical values into concrete forms of action in a particular situation values are realized in, rather than as a result of, praxis. Moreover, their meaning can only be grasped as a concrete form of action. Phronesis co-determines the means and ends together by reflecting on the former in the light of the latter and vice versa. The outcome of such reflection ? a concrete form of practice ? constitutes an achievement of understanding in which both interpretation and application have been integral features of the process.²⁷

If such is allowed as a general statement of the capacity of action research to express the principles of Aristotle's ethical theory, then it should be noted that it becomes perfectly possible if one is so disposed to give an account of reflective practice on education in Thomist terms. One could view what it means to be a good teacher or a good student in the light of what Thomas has to say about the virtues as learned habits, and what he has to say about the practical intellect and speculative intellect.²⁸ But such reflection lies outside of the scope of this study.

Praxis and Personal Development

It becomes hard to divorce practical theology from personal development, and the following remarks are intended to address this area of contemporary education theory and policy. Simultaneously, however, I also want to address another issue which arises from the model I am describing, namely, that of the potential prescriptiveness of educational praxis which might arise from the implementation of my model. Let me say at once that this is not

conceived as a means of dogmatic programming whereby a student passively receives not only the doctrine but also the thought-process of the teacher.²⁹ I have argued elsewhere, following the lead of Josef Pieper, that Thomas's return to the illustrative example I have been exploring should not be thought of as a dogmatic thinker, but as the sort of questioning, critical thinker for whom theology is a process of wonder, enquiry and discovery.³⁰ A sense of puzzlement is intrinsic to the task of theology, so long as theology is conceived of as a response to a sense of mystery given as Christian grace. Viewed in the light of mystery, openness, not closure, is the key habit of mind which needs to be learned in theology. This, again, provides a point of contact with some recent writing on reflective practice and educational theory. So John Elliott has drawn attention to Geoffrey Hinchcliffe's distinction between pedagogy and education. To quote Hinchcliffe:

Whereas the former (pedagogy) has specific objectives, the latter (education) is underpinned by the idea that the outcome of education is open (like a good conversation) ? (and) must be left, in part, to the interaction between learners and teacher.³¹

Elliott proceeds to focus on Hinchcliffe's connection between good education and conversation.³² He draws a link here with what Rowan Williams has to say about the need for 'conversational space' in our educational system: 'A good educational institution would be one in which conversation flourished'.³³ In terms of philosophy of education, much can be said of this. It is reminiscent of Pieper, Oakeshott and Rorty. Take Oakeshott, for instance (so very different in political terms to Freire, and in theological terms to Thomas), for whom, as Fuller says:

Whatever metaphysical ground one might introduce to explain the experience [of poetic impulse and contemplative delight], it is the acknowledgement of the experience itself which can be shared and delineated through a conversation between among those who have enjoyed it, despite disagreements that might arise about where the experience comes from or where it may lead. Conversation of this sort expresses for Oakeshott the central character of human existence ? the civility of the agreement to disagree ? and thus also the importance for us of the institutions of teaching and learning, the places where conversationality is explicitly given priority.³⁴

In sum, a key part of Oakeshott's philosophy of education is this: that the 'philosopher potentially forces the practitioners of an activity to become self-conscious, putting them on the road to becoming selfcritical where they may undergo the philosopher's own experience of puzzlement'.³⁵ Notice the reference to practice here. Richard Rorty provides another example of a philosopher of education stressing the importance of conversation. For Rorty, liberal education means acquiring an ethos of conversational edification (if students dislike the Thomist vision of liberal education grounded on a particular metaphysics they can therefore develop antimetaphysical alternatives with reference to Rorty).³⁶ Good, traditional stuff like this recommends a practical recovery of something like the old Oxford tutorial system as a means for fostering good conversation. It also makes possible interpretation of Personal Development Planning in a subject-specific context.

Personal Development Planning can be viewed as an exercise whereby the student takes possession of the transformative capacity of education by providing an account of their own subjective encounter with learning, and the changes it has wrought in them. More than just providing the context for understanding the value of their studies, Personal Development Planning also provides space for reflection on the ethos of learning, and an acknowledgement of type of Aristotelian practical wisdom relevant to education. Consider how well this compliments, for instance, Maritain's philosophy of education as expounded in his classic text, *Education at the Crossroads*.³⁷ Maritain locates education within the sphere of ethics and practical wisdom and views it as a mechanism which allows people to fulfil their own personhood. The shaping of the human being with reference to sound judgement and moral virtues is difficult to separate from notions of spirituality. In theological perspective, Personal Development Planning has the

potential to become a form of spiritual exercise.³⁸ It is also an ideal place for reflection on the performance and practice of learning, the practice of being a student of theology or religious studies.

Practice and the Performance of Theological Study

Before describing what happens when the curriculum is designed in such a way that attention is given to dialogical conversationality and the rehearsal and performance of the skills necessary for academic theology, I want to briefly explain how such models of learning and teaching are also conceivable within the context of ecclesial theology. By ecclesial theology, I mean theology located within the community of faith rather than in a liberal arts, university context. Perhaps the dichotomy is a false one, as very often university theologians spend their time analysing the sorts of theology which arise from ecclesial communities. However the relationship of church and university is conceived, it is right to say that ideas of theology and learning and teaching are not restricted just to the sphere of the modern educational institution. A theologian who has nothing to do with universities on a professional level may still find that it is necessary to think through the practice of theology as a form of education, and moreover, see education as an important aspect of the spiritual life. Inasmuch as spirituality is connected with discipleship, following the teachings of the Rabbi Jesus, it is also something which includes a grappling with education.

Nicholas Lash has explored the theme of the church as a school in various books. For instance, he writes of the churches as 'schools of Christian wisdom?richly endowed projects of lifelong education',³⁹ as 'schools of holiness'.⁴⁰ Moreover, he conceives of doctrine in educational terms:

Doctrine is an activity. It has its place in the family of activities that go under the general heading of "teaching and learning." It is an aspect of pedagogy. Christian doctrine, therefore, is an aspect of Christian pedagogy. But pedagogy?is by no means confined to the classroom or the seminar. If Christianity is a school for the production of persons in relation to the unknown God through the discipleship of the crucified, then there is nothing that we do and suffer, think, or feel, or undergo, which may not contribute to schooling. It follows that there is no single activity, or cluster of activities, which alone counts as "Christian teaching".⁴¹

Ways of thinking about learning and teaching in the university can therefore also be informed, perhaps unexpectedly, by theologians who base theology in the confession of faith groups and ecclesial communities. Take, for instance, what Stanley Hauerwas has to say about the pedagogy of faithful performance. Hauerwas' understanding of the performance of faith compliments the current discussion because, as Swinton and Mowat imply, it corresponds to various aspects of practical theology understood as action research.⁴² In his book *Performing the Faith*, Hauerwas outlines his vision of the rehearsal and performance necessary to Christian identity formation:

Neither performance nor improvisation is an instance of simple, undifferentiated doing. Rather, they are timeful, disciplined, ruled unfoldings of action. As such, they require attention, alertness and concentration, all of which bespeaks the hard labor of patience intrinsic to Christian faith. This kind of attention, of course, is not something that can be mastered or attained once and for all, but requires continual practice, repeated rehearsals, ongoing performance, fresh improvisations.⁴³

Hauerwas is speaking of performance in the context of the worshipping community, of course, and not primarily about educational institutions. Nevertheless, his basic understanding of the performative activity of the church is explained with reference to education, and it is clear that he thinks of the church as, in some sense, a school of faith. Worship?becomes a kind of performance before the performance, a preparation beforehand for whatever witness the church might be called upon to give. Being schooled in the basic rhythms and movements that constitute Christian faith

means that the church's witness is more than something spoken, debated, written about, discussed; it is a faith that is enacted, performed, fleshed out.⁴⁴

Hauerwas proceeds to say that 'Being disciplined in obedience is perhaps the key virtue of a good and faithful performer'. He cites Lash's idea that the churches can be seen as 'schools of stillness, of attentiveness; of courtesy, respect and reverence; academies of contemplativity'.⁴⁵ This draws forth the following remarks from Hauerwas:

'Patient listening and attentiveness are skills that are exercised, honed, and refined in Christian community?Attentive listening cannot be had without its two inseparable companions, obedience and patience'.⁴⁶

He draws attention to what Rowan Williams calls 'repentent attention'⁴⁷ towards others?the attention that allows for conversational interpersonal transformation?or, in Hauerwas own words, 'reverence toward one another and receptivity to God'.⁴⁸

It is tempting to view this as a spirituality of the ethos of peaceful, polite conversation which complements the conversational ethics implied by Oakeshott's vision of academic culture, or of Freire's notion of transformative dialogue. So much is fleshed out by Lash:

Learning to tell the truth takes time, attentiveness and patience. Good learning calls, no less than teaching does, for courtesy, respect, a kind of reverence: reverence for facts and people, evidence and argument, for climates of speech and patterns of behaviour different from our own. There are, I think, affinities ? between the courtesy, the attentiveness, required for friendship; the passionate disinterestedness without which no good scholarly work is done; and the contemplativity which strains, without credulity, to listen for the voice of God.⁴⁹

Insofar as it might become appropriate for students to explore what they think the spiritual dimensions of their academic study could be, the insights of Hauerwas, Lash and Williams could provide suitable aids to reflection. This is especially appropriate considering that the QAABenchmark Statement may be interpreted as inviting the possibility of such reflection insofar as they invite reflection on personal development. Whatever the subject, the acquisition of knowledge and understanding is usually transformative at some level, changing a person's perspectives and often their attitudes. The nature of TRS means that studying the subject may have a profound impact on the student's life and outlook. The experience of studying may contribute to a student's personal development, transforming horizons by engaging with cultures and societies other than their own, whether ancient or modern. It may foster lifelong quest for wisdom, respect for one's own integrity and that of others, self-examination in terms of the beliefs and values adopted for one's own life, and not least, the challenging of prejudices. The multidisciplinary nature of much TRS also means that students have breadth of vision and intellectual flexibility.⁵⁰

Indeed, such material, together with further reflection on the practice of studying theology and religious studies, would not be out of place in a theology student's PDP. The point is that theology and religious studies provide a special opportunity to integrate personal development planning into the learning outcomes of the curriculum. Moreover, it is even possible to do theological reflection on why personal development portfolios are appropriate assessment tools for academic, moral and spiritual reflection.

Application to Curriculum Design

So far I have tried to make transparent the intellectual principles which have arisen from my experience of theological teaching practice in a university setting, and which have been set to work on curriculum design with the goal of delivering an enhancement of the quality of the learning and teaching experience coherent with the subject matter of theology and religious studies. It makes clear some of the thinking behind how I have tried to deliver better theological teaching with reference to theological reflection upon theological teaching practice. Whether this is called practical

theology or action research is not the issue; either way it remains the case that I have allowed practice to inform principle.⁵¹ Through this, importantly, I have clarified the very practices and principles that help me decide what should be done (as such, I am not just telling you about my practice, but how I decide to change my practice). So how have I applied this to programme development at Canterbury Christ Church University?

For one thing, I have created space in the curriculum to discuss the above with students, that is, involve them in the conversation about the curriculum and their studies. Just as important, however, are the accompanying learning and teaching strategy, and, as might be expected, the accompanying Personal Development Planning system. But let me go on to explain this in greater detail in the following sections which reflect the content of the Revalidation Document of 2007.

New Pedagogical Strategy

For the 2007 Revalidation of the Theology and Religious Studies programme at Canterbury Christ Church University, the curriculum was changed to include an increased emphasis on issues of student progression and the facilitation of graduate skills. The academic year 2007-08 therefore saw the introduction of a pedagogical strategy to address the educational needs of students. As for the previous revalidation of 2002, study skills and transferable skills continued to be reflected in all modules. This time, however, the department identified the need to make direct reference to the subject content and rationale of theology and religious studies in the process of training all students in study skills, acclimatising them to the academic context of their studies, and facilitating academic literacy. At the planning stage it was intended that this change would help facilitate widening participation by, for instance, adapting to and meeting the educational needs of students from traditionally under-represented groups, including those who may not have successfully undertaken forms of assessment in their earlier education that prepares them for assessment in the higher education context. Graduate skills were therefore included in all modules and are systematically encouraged, identified and monitored.

It was decided that it was desirable to encourage students, as they engage with each component of their programme of study, to integrate these skills into their academic work and think about their relevance to their everyday lives. In addition, therefore, it was crucial to seek ways to support the student experience by the enhanced integration of graduate skills into progressive modules in which selected graduate skills become a more pronounced element of module aims, learning outcomes, learning and teaching strategies, and assessment. The essential idea was to get students to rehearse academic writing about theology and religious studies on a weekly basis?to practice the performance of theology, if you like?submit such work for peer review and discussion, and thereby gain the skills and subject knowledge they need whilst being involved in a conversation about the curriculum and the value of their studies. The most straightforward way of doing this is represented by the core modules which are essentially about marrying subject content with graduate skills and are assessed by PDP. I will therefore close this paper (which, admittedly, is only a preliminary, interim report) with the module outlines themselves, and report on the experience of running these modules at another stage of the action research project.

Module Title: Studying Problems in the Philosophy of Religion

Module Code: MREMD1PPR

Level: HE1

Credit Rating: 20 Credits

Duration: 200 hours of student learning time

Teaching Hours: 40 hours

Module Aims:

The aim of this module is to develop graduate skills through the study of key themes in the Philosophy of Religion. It will act as a bridging unit for first year undergraduates who may have studied aspects of philosophy at AS and Alevel. It also aims to enable students to gain a basic knowledge of the major philosophical problem studied.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this module students should be able to demonstrate:

- A sound knowledge and understanding of selected philosophical problems;
 - That they can use established techniques to search, retrieve and manage information, and present the results of their work in a written form using appropriate academic conventions;
 - An understanding of how their studies contribute to personal development;⁵²
 - That they can benchmark and reflect on their own progress with reference to feedback from tutors and peers.
- 53

Indicative Module Content:

Students will be introduced to selected significant problems in the Philosophy of Religion. Students will engage with these arguments through studying selections from primary texts in translation. These may include texts from the following illustrative list: Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Anselm's *Proslogion*, Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. The course will introduce the student to the history of scholarship on each. The key themes of each text will be discussed and subjected to academic criticism.

Through this study, students will develop their ability to gather and select material from libraries and electronic sources. They will develop their ability to think independently, critically and creatively in an academic context. They will develop their ability to communicate their ideas in a manner appropriate to the university context.

Learning and Teaching Strategies:

The course will involve a series of seminars which will focus on the experience of studying selected philosophical problems at Level 1. Seminars will facilitate the development of selected graduate skills relevant to this level (for example, finding and evaluating sources, thinking academically, and presenting work), and also introduce students to key resources (for example, induction to VLE). This will be supported by lectures that will introduce key themes, texts and ideas. Seminars will be based on discussion of students' written work (formative assessment for sections of portfolio). Study skills issues may be supplemented by material from the Student Study Support Unit. The teaching and learning strategies will be chosen to underpin the graduate skills associated with this module. Feedback on graduate skills not assessed formally will be given in tutorials and seminars.

Assessment:

1 x 5000 word portfolio: 100% [Learning outcomes 1), 2), 3) & 4)] The portfolio will provide structured evidence of students' progression in relation to learning outcomes and graduate skills. It will involve a degree of formative assessment, as students are required to submit sections of work (seminar papers which observe academic conventions) for review by peers and their tutor in seminars.⁵⁴ Such formative work, together with students' reflection on feedback, and reflections on relevant personal development, will form the basis for work submitted for summative assessment.

It is anticipated that appropriate sections of work for this portfolio may be used to support and enhance students' completion of PDPs.

Indicative Assessment Tasks:

Formative work:

Individually, write a 1000 word summary of Aquinas' Summa Theologiae, 1.2.3. In small groups, peer review each others' work, and produce a portfolio record of the review process (this may include the use of small group forums in a VLE). As a group, select one piece of work for review by the tutor, along with a short note explaining the reasons for its selection. Individually, write a short reflective log on feedback from the tutor.

Summative work:

Select the best short pieces you have produced for this module, up to a total of 4,000 words. Write a 1,000 word reflective piece that refers to these pieces and the process of formative work entitled, 'What makes a good philosophy of religion essay?' Assemble your work into a portfolio, including relevant selections from the formative process as appendices.

Illustrative Bibliography:

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Marius, R. and Page, M.E. (2005) *A Short Guide to Writing about History*. New York: Pearson.

McCabe, H. (1987) *God Matters*. London & New York: Mowbray.

Pattison, G. (2001) *A Short Course in the Philosophy of Religion*. London: SCM Press.

Swinburne, R. (1996) *Is there a God?* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Module Title: Philosophy of Academic Culture and Religion

Module Code: MREMD2PCR

Level: Level Two

Credit Rating: 20 Credits

Duration: 200 hours of student learning time, 40 hours taught time

Academic Responsibility: Ralph Norman

Module Aims:

Building on the Level 1 module, 'Studying Problems in the Philosophy of Religion', this module aims to acclimatize students to the academic context of Theology and Religious Studies through an articulation of the purposes of the discipline in the university.⁵⁵

Intended Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course students should be able to demonstrate:

- Critical knowledge of selected key theories of the academic context of Theology and Religious Studies;
- An informed evaluation of the worth of their own university studies in Theology and Religious Studies;
- An understanding of the transformative potential of studying Theology and Religious Studies, including the disciplines' contribution to personal development;⁵⁶
- That they can monitor and enhance their own progress as students with reference to feedback from tutors and peers.⁵⁷

Indicative Module Content:

Students will evaluate the importance of their studies and the significance of critical approaches. Questions considered may include: Why is asking a critical question important? What is the value of an education in the liberal arts? Should education be for its own sake? What are the implications of university studies to other aspects of life (cultural, political and spiritual)? Study of these questions may be supported by engagement with texts on academic culture and religion from the following illustrative list: Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Aquinas' *Commentary on Metaphysics*, Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, Heaney's *The Redress of Poetry*, Newman's *The Idea of a University*, Pieper's *Leisure the Basis of Culture*, Eagleton's *After Theory*.

Learning and Teaching Strategies:

The course will involve a series of seminars which will focus on the academic context of Theology and Religious Studies, and facilitate the development of selected graduate skills relevant to this level. This will be supported by lectures that will introduce key themes, texts and ideas. Seminars will be based on discussion of students' written work (formative assessment for sections of portfolio).

The learning and teaching strategies will be chosen to underpin the graduate skills associated with this module. Feedback on graduate skills not assessed formally will be given in tutorials and seminars.

Assessment:

1 x 5000 word portfolio: 100% [Learning outcomes 1), 2), 3) & 4)] The portfolio will provide structured evidence of students' progression in relation to learning outcomes and graduate skills. It will involve a degree of formative assessment, as students are required to submit sections of work (seminar papers which observe academic conventions) for review by peers and their tutor in seminars.⁵⁸ Such formative work, together with students' reflection on feedback, and reflections on relevant personal development, will form the basis for work submitted for summative assessment.

It is anticipated that appropriate sections of work for this portfolio may be used to support and enhance students' completion of PDPs.

Illustrative Question for Assessment:

Formative work:

Individually, write a 1,000 word reflective piece entitled, 'What is the most personally transforming text I have read on this course, and why?' In small groups, peer review each others' work, and produce a portfolio record of the review process (this may include the use of small group forums in a VLE). As a group, select one piece of work for review by the tutor, along with a short note explaining the reasons for its selection. Individually, write a short reflective log on feedback from the tutor.

Summative work:

Select the best short pieces you have produced for this module, up to a total of 3,000 words. Write a 2,000 word essay that refers to these pieces and the process of formative work entitled, 'Why and How should Religion be studied in a University Context?' Assemble your work into a portfolio, including relevant selections from the formative process as appendices.

Illustrative Bibliography:

Arcilla, R.V. (1995) *For the Love of Perfection: Richard Rorty and Liberal Education*. New York & London: Routledge.

Arnold, M. (1994) *Culture and Anarchy*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Arthur J., Walters H., Gaine S. (1999) *Earthen Vessels: The Thomistic Tradition in Education*. Leominster: Gracewing.

Carr W., ed. (2005) *The Routledge Falmer Reader in Philosophy of Education*. London & New York: Routledge.

D'Costa, G (2005) *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy and Nation*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Eagleton, T (2003) *After Theory*. London: Penguin.

Frei, H.W. (1992) *Types of Christian Theology*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Heaney, S. (1995) *The Redress of Poetry*. London: Faber & Faber.

Hill, G. (2003) *Style and Faith*. Counterpoint Press.

Hughes, T. (1995) *Winter Pollen*. London: Faber & Faber.

Ker, I. (1990) *John Henry Newman*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Lash, N. (1979) *Theology on Dover Beach*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.

Newman, J.H. (1996) *The Idea of a University*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Pieper, J. (1998) *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*. South Bend, Indiana: St Augustine's Press.

Pieper, J. (2001) *Scholasticism*. South Bend, Indiana: St Augustine's Press.

Rorty, R. (1982) 'Hermeneutics, General Studies, and Teaching', *Synergos* 2 Fall, pp. 1-15.

Turner, D. (2002) *How to Be an Atheist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Warne, R.R. (1998) '(En)gendering Religious Studies', Studies in *Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 27 pp. 427-36.

Zack, N. ed. (2000) *Women of Color and Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Module Title: Individual Study

Module Code: MREMD3DSS

Level: HE 3

Credit Rating: 40 Credits

Duration: 400 hours of student learning time

Teaching Hours: 15

Academic Responsibility: Ralph Norman (appropriate tutors to be assigned)

Module Aims:

This module aims to enable the student, under the guidance of a tutor, to undertake an extended piece of work based on his or her own research. Further, this module aims to foster academic literacy through engagement in academic discourses, challenging conventional thinking and presenting new perspectives.⁵⁹

Intended Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, students should be able to demonstrate:

- A detailed, critical, and sophisticated knowledge of the topic of their individual study;
- A detailed knowledge of and critical engagement with relevant primary and secondary sources from both classical and contemporary scholarship, relevant to the questions studied;
- An ability to choose, design and pursue a topic based on individual study;
- Take initiative and personal responsibility for their own independent work and its contribution to their professional and personal development.⁶⁰

Indicative Module Content:

Involving independent research and the writing of a 8000 word dissertation under the direction of a supervising tutor, this module enables students to work for an extended period on a single writing project of their own devising (subject to tutor's approval). The module fosters students in the research, organizational, scholarly, and writing skills of

graduate researchers in the field.

Learning and Teaching Strategies:

Individual tutorials with assigned tutor, plus group seminars on research skills.

Students will be given an introduction to the individual study during the course option sessions of Level 2. By the end of Level 2 students will have to produce a proposal for their Individual Study, after which they will be assigned an individual tutor. Each student will have the equivalent of 5 hours tutorial time throughout the duration of the study, the first of which will be before the end of the summer term (in year 2) to agree an initial plan of work and reading. Apart from individual tutorials, students will also receive four sessions of research skills training to equip them for this piece of work. Additional module content will depend on the topic chosen, but the 10 hours of teaching may consist of seminars on the following indicative issues: an introduction to the general aims and learning outcomes of the individual study; guidance with the creation and development of a bibliographical essay; development of a thesis or argument; review of draft outline and draft chapters; critical comments on a first draft. In this way, every student who writes an individual study will be guided in the same formal structures and requirements, whilst being free to develop their own subject matter in a topic consonant with their pathway.

Assessment:

8000 word dissertation: 80% [Learning outcomes 1), 2), 3)]

2000 word portfolio: 20% [Learning outcomes 3), 4)]

The portfolio will provide structured evidence of students' progression in relation to learning outcomes and graduate skills. It will involve a degree of formative and diagnostic work (for instance, short bibliographical essays), as students are required to submit sections of work for review by their tutor. Such formative work, together with the students' reflections on relevant professional and personal development, will form the basis for work submitted as summative assessment. It is anticipated that appropriate sections of work for this portfolio may be used to support and enhance students' completion of PDPs.

Illustrative Bibliography:

Although this will be specific to each Individual Study, general research skills work will be consulted.

Allison, B et al. (1996) **Research Skills for Students**. London: Kogan Page.

Berry, R (2000) **The Research Project: How to Write It**. London & New York: Routledge.

Blaxtor, L. et al. (1998) **How to Research**. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Giltrow, J. (1990) **Academic Writing: How to Read and Write Scholarly Prose**. Broadview Press.

Harmon, C. ed. (1996) **Using the Internet: Online Services and CDROMs for Writing Research Papers and Term Papers**. Neal- Schuman.

Mills, P. (1996) **Writing in Action**. Routledge.

Preece, R.A. (1994) **Starting Research: An Introduction to Academic Research and Dissertation Writing**. Pinter.

Turabian, K.L. (1982) *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations*. Heinemann.

Turley, R.M. (2000) *Writing Essays: A Guide for Students in English and the Humanities*. Routledge.

Watson, G. (1987) *Writing a Thesis: A Guide to Long Essays and Dissertations*. Longman.

Endnotes

1 MacIntyre, A., *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1985) p. 149.

2 MacIntyre, Ibid., p. 152.

3 MacIntyre, Ibid., p. 154.

4 MacIntyre, Ibid., p. 154.

5 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 1103a33f; trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) p. 29.

6 MacIntyre, Ibid., p. 168.

7 MacIntyre, Ibid., p. 178.

8 Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Barker, rev. Stalley, (Oxford: World Classics, 1995), VII, ii, 1-6, 1337a.

9 Aristotle, *Politics*, VII, 17, 3.

10 Aristotle, *Politics*, VIII, 3, 1-13.

11 Williams, R., *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 132.

12 Schon, D., *The Reflective Practitioner* (London: Temple Smith, 1983); Schon, D., *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (London: Jossey-Bass, 1987).

13 Kemmis, S., *The Action Research Planner* (Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University, 1981).

14 O'Loughlin, R., 'The Relationship Between Pedagogical and Discipline-specific Research Methods: Critical Perspectives' in *Discourse: Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies*, Vol. 7, no. 2, Spring 2008, pp. 67-120 [p. 69, pp. 110-11].

15 Elliott, J., *Action Research for Educational Change*, (Milton Keynes : Open University Press, 1991)p. 51; Stenhouse,L., *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development* (London: Heinemann, 1975).

16 Elliott, Ibid., pp. 49-50.

17 Elliott, Ibid., p. 50.

18 O'Loughlin, R., 'The Relationship Between Pedagogical and Discipline-specific Research Methods: Critical Perspectives' in *Discourse: Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies*, Vol. 7, no. 2, Spring 2008, p. 76.

19 For an illustration of Freire's influence on liberation theology, see Gutierrez, G., *A Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM, 1974), pp. 91-92 and pp. 233-35. Freire's work has been described as 'one of the most inspiring

aspects of the theology of liberation' in Cumming, 'Education', in Rahner, K., ed., *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1975), p. 426

20 The theological dimensions of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) are very significant, but rarely discussed by secular educationalists. Freire himself states that he thinks 'Christians and Marxists' are likely to be the most receptive readers of the book (p. 17); the third chapter opens like a theological treatise on the Logos, creation, re-creation, love, humility, faith and hope (pp. 60-65); relevant ecclesial documents and conversations with priests are cited (pp. 113-14, 132, 150); Niebuhr and Chenu are quoted (pp. 51, 139-40); references are made to teaching as incarnation and communion (p. 100); a link is drawn between demythologization and liberation (p. 56, cf. p. 74). Most striking, perhaps, is the spiritual tone of Freire's description of liberation in terms which resonate with the baptismal childbirth imagery of Romans 6:3-9 and 8:18-24: 'Liberation is?a childbirth, and a painful one?born in the labour which brings the new man into the world' (p. 25). Freire's more explicit theological writings are also notable: see Freire, P., 'Education, Liberation and the Church', in Astley, Francis & Crowder (eds), *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 169-86; Freire, P., *Pedagogy of the Heart* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), pp. 101-07.

21 The connection between the 'Iglesia Popular de Comunidades de Base (Popular Church from the Base)' and the 'Movement of Education from the Base' has been noted in Finger, M., and Asún, J. M., *Adult Education at the Crossroads: Learning Our Way Out* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2001), pp. 82-83. Further, in a European context, Freire's liberative vision of education has been applied to a German church congregation in a major practical theology study: Lange, E., *Sprachschule fur die Freiheit: Bildung als Problem und Funktion der Kirche* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1980).

22 In terms of relevant literature on practical theology, see Swinton, J. & Mowat, H., *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM 2006); Heitnik, G., *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans 1999); Conde-Frazier, E., 'Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice' in *Religious Education*, 101:3, Summer 2006, pp. 321-29. See also Graham, E., *Transforming Practice* (London: Mowbray, 1996).

23 Swinton, J. & Mowat, H., *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM 2006) p. 255.

24 It is important to note that Thomism is here simply being used by way of illustration. I have no intention of suggesting that Thomism is the only example that could be discussed here, and definitely do not think that all teachers of theology and religious studies should beholden to this one particular Christian theological tradition. 25 Walters, H., Arthur, J., and Gaine, S., *Earthen Vessels: the Thomistic Tradition in Education* (London: Gracewing, 1999), p. 30.

26 On the relationship between Gadamer and Bultmann, see Gadamer, H., *Philosophical Apprenticeships* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985); Jones, G., *Bultmann: Towards a Critical Theology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 157- 62.

27 Elliott, J., *Reflecting Where the Action Is*, (New York: Routledge, 2007)p. 107.

28 An exploration of some of this territory, together with a relevant discussion of MacIntyre and education, is to be found in Walters, H., Arthur, J., and Gaine, S., *Earthen Vessels: the Thomistic Tradition in Education* (London: Gracewing, 1999).

29 These remarks are intended to provide some response to Rebecca O'Loughlin's caveat about action research, namely, 'An approach which requires academics to impose their ideas on a situation with a view to changing it may give rise to concerns about imperialism and colonialism among TRS scholars' (O'Loughlin, 'Pedagogical and

Discipline-specific Research Methods', p. 111). With respect to Freire, a case can be made that the dialogical model developed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to encourage the students to think of themselves as equal partners with the teachers, and hence emancipate them from intellectual imperialism, is an obvious way to try to overcome the problem.

30 Norman, R., 'Abelard's Legacy: Why Theology is not Faith Seeking Understanding' in *Australian EJournal of Theology*, 10, Pentecost, 2007.

31 Hinchcliffe, G., 'Education or Pedagogy?' in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 35:1, 2001, p. 31. Cited in Elliott, J., *Reflecting Where the Action Is*, pp. 170-71.

32 Elliott, J., *Reflecting Where the Action Is*, (New York: Routledge, 2007) p. 172.

33 Williams, R., *Lost Icons*(Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), p. 89.

34 Fuller, T., 'Introduction' to Oakeshott, *The Voice of Liberal Learning*(Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), p. xxix.

35 Fuller, T., 'Introduction' in Oakeshott, M., *The Voice of Liberal Learning*, p. xxvi.

36 See Arcilla, R. V., *For the Love of Perfection: Richard Rorty and Liberal Education*(London: Routledge, 1995).

37 Maritain, J., *Education at the Crossroads*(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943).

38 On the connections between education and spirituality, see Groome, T.H., *Educating for Life* (New York: Crossroad, 2000); Palmer, P.J., *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper Row, 1983).

39 Lash, N., *Holiness, Speech and Silence*(Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 5.

40 Lash, N., *Ibid.*, p. 51

41 Lash, N., *Easter in Ordinary*, (London : SCM, 1988) pp. 258-59.

42 Swinton, J. & Mowat, H., *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*(London: SCM 2006) pp. 4-5.

43 Hauerwas, S., *Performing the Faith*(London: SPCK, 2004), p. 97.

44 Hauerwas, *ibid.*, p. 98.

45 Lash, N., 'The Church in the State We're In', *Modern Theology*13:1 (January 1997), p. 121-37; p. 131.

46 Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, p. 100.

47 Williams, *Open to Judgement*, p. 200.

48 Hauerwas, S., *Performing the Faith*(London: SPCK, 2004) p. 100.

49 Lash, N., *Holiness, Speech and Silence*(Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004),pp. 62-63. See also Lash, N., *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 85; Lash, N., *Believing Three Ways in One God*, (London : SCM Press, 2002) pp. 10-11.

50 QAA, *Benchmark Statement: Theology and Religious Studies*, 2007, 1.13.

51See Elliott's discussion of Oakeshott on the priority of rational action over rational principle in Elliott, J., *Reflecting Where the Action Is*, (New York: Routledge, 2007) p. 172.p. 100-01.

52QAA, *Benchmark Statement for Theology and Religious Studies*, (2000) 1.5.

53See *Graduate Skills checklist for Level 1*.

54CCCU, *Assessment Handbook: Enhancing Practice*, (2005) 2.9.55 CCCU, *Policy on Graduate Skills*, (2006) 9b.

55CCCU, *Policy on Graduate Skills*, (2006) 9b.

56QAA , *Benchmark Statement for Theology and Religious Studies*, (2000)1.5

57See *Graduate Skills checklist for Level 2*.

58CCCU, *Assessment Handbook: Enhancing Practice*, (2005) 2.9.

59CCCU, *Policy on Graduate Skills*, (2006) 9c.

60QAA , *Benchmark Statement for Theology and Religious Studies*, (2000) 1.5.

[Return to vol. 8 no. 1 index page](#)

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