

# Worldviews and the Pan Berkshire Syllabus Saga

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## Introduction

Proposition: **Religious Education most important thing to fight antisemitism.**

For the past nine years, I have devoted my professional life to RE Judaism provision.

Problem: **Integrity of RE is under threat.** Complex problem.

Related to postmodernism and a movement to *problematise* the concept of religion.

### Questions:

From a cross-cultural perspective:

What is religion?

Can we understand the religions of others?

How do we teach religions of other people?

What is the purpose of Religious Education for in the UK?

#### 1. Learning About Religion:

- Cultural literacy (Christian civilisation)
- Social cohesion / cross-cultural literacy / learning to understand people who are different.

#### 2. Learning From Religion

- Insight into what it means to be human
- Personal development / moral education (midot)
- Philosophical training / critical thinking / truth seeking / ethics

What place does nonreligion play in this?

Search for a broader category that include both religion and nonreligion, as a school subject for children.

### Jewish Perspective:

We want people to understand what it means to be Jewish in the UK

While avoiding stereotypes

But focusing on what Jews have in common so that

- (1) they have a coherent understanding and
- (2) they can empathise with Jews they meet in their adult lives

Real problem of teaching content that is not fit for purpose. Historically and now.

### Postmodernism

Affects almost all areas of academia and culture

Pedagogical approaches:

- **What to think** versus **How to think**
- **Substantive knowledge** vs **disciplinary knowledge / skills**
- Need both in balance

Deconstructivism: Questions **whether there is a \*what\* that you can think**

Religion, sex, childhood etc. are social constructs that are shaped by power structures.

Progressive idea to deconstruct these categories to gain freedom, shake off power.

**“Problematise” “narratives”**

Deconstructivism often has a point

Problem is what happens afterwards. Power vacuum.

Certain categories are necessary to communicate, to understand the world.

We need a shared concept of religion to share and learn about each other’s religions.

Narratives / concepts get reconstructed. **Who** gets to do that?

**Who controls that narrative?**

### The Problem of RE in the UK:

Post modern critique – deconstruction of religion

**Power grab** to replace it. Religion and Worldviews framework for RE.

**Casualties will be small communities / ethnoreligions** (such as Jews Hindus Sikhs) who cannot control the new narrative.

If we allow other people to construct the narratives about us, other people will not learn about who we are *authentically*.

## Berkshire Syllabus Experience

### SACRE – Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education:

- Responsible for syllabus – reviewed every five years
- I am the Jewish rep on Wokingham. Husband on Reading and West Berks
- Six councils in Berkshire have a joint syllabus
- Problems with new syllabus, complaints by all Jewish SACRE reps

### Four Groups of each SACRE must agree a syllabus (by consensus)

- Group A: Faith reps (not Anglicans)
- Group B: Anglicans
- Group C: Teachers
- Group D: local politicians
- **RE Advisors** employed to function as experts to write the syllabus

### Syllabus changes: How we got here

Previous syllabi had been very belief-heavy, which did not suit Judaism.

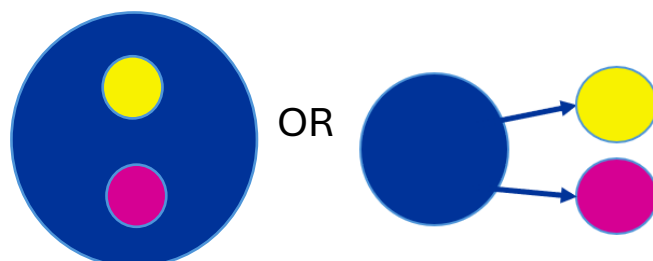
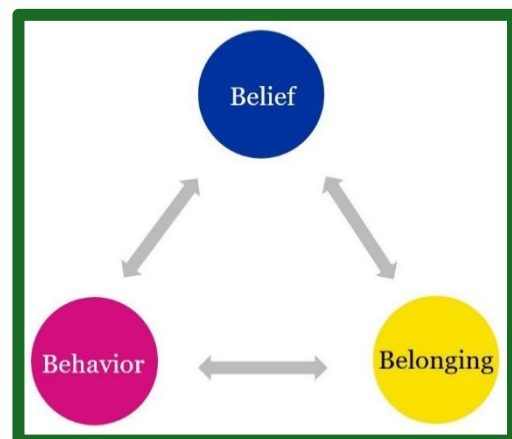
2018-2023 Syllabus : **Believing / Behaving /Belonging**.  
Worked reasonably well.

2025-2030 Syllabus: New “Religion and Worldviews”  
framework.

“A worldview is a person’s way of understanding, experiencing and responding to the world. It can be described as a philosophy of life or an approach to life. This includes **how a person understands the nature of reality** and their own place in the world.”

**Religions treated as “organised religious worldviews.”**

**Worldview = view = belief (??)**



## Problems with New Syllabus:

Jewish and Hindu representatives in Berkshire had major concerns with the proposal.

1. Focus on propositional belief (like Scientific claims):  
People assumed to be motivated by belief that x is true  
No mention of faith as faith (believing in vs. believing that)  
does not work for Judaism or Hinduism: not sets of viewpoints but ways of life, belonging.
2. Neglect of group identity / belonging (as opposed to individual)
3. Lack of adequate consultation with minority faiths by RE Advisors  
“**Trust the experts**” (RE Advisors)
4. Teaching students to conduct surveys to gather “data” – like little sociologists
5. Activities **encouraged judgments about beliefs / practices**  
Teachers instructed that children should learn to justify beliefs with arguments.

Cardinal Rule of RE:

**We are never trying to work out who is (more) correct! No proselyting!**

## Examples (these were amended in the final version):

UKS2: What do **believers** learn about God and human life from their sacred texts? (Th)

KS1: What is the story of Jesus and how do Christians remember him?

Who is remembered by Jewish people (Jews) and why? [story of Abraham]

KS3: Is there a God and does it matter?

Consider different types of evidence (e.g., physical evidence, reasoning / logic).

## Year 5

### 12.1.5 Year 5

#### WHY DO SOME PEOPLE CHOOSE TO FOLLOW A RELIGION AND OTHERS DO NOT?

This unit should be used at the beginning of the academic year and should take about 2 hours or 2 lessons.

While the unit is core, the activities and questions below are a suggested way of delivering the material. Use them as a starting point to build a unit that suits your cohort and teaching style.

Lesson 1: to identify and evaluate different reasons for believing or belonging.

Engage:

Start with a human bar chart activity around a particular belief (choose something appropriate for your class that will have varied responses). This does not need to be a religious belief. Follow this with a discussion about why they hold that belief – is it from their family or community? Is it because they have evidence? How does believing this make them feel or act? Why might they hold a different belief about this to that held by others in the class?

Broaden this out to discuss some religious ideas such as:

- Do they follow a religion?
- Why / why not?
- Is it because it is useful?

Enquire and Explore:

Conduct a survey around the school to find out how many adults and pupils follow a religious belief? Pupils need to consider what questions they will ask and then analyse the data. Are all the year groups the same? Do people's ideas change as they get older?

Use the census data from 2021 to explore religion in the local area. How does that compare to the school? What might make that different? (A church school may have a different demographic to a community school for example). Which set of data is more reliable?

Gather the list of reasons that people give for following a religion. Pupils may need to ask a wider range of people. Invite some members of the local faith communities to answer the questions about why they believe or not. Include non-religious/humanists in this. Has everyone even thought about that question? Is the answer 'because I do' sufficient?

Respond and Communicate:

Rank/sort the reasons for believing or not and explain why they think some of these reasons are better than others.

Lesson 2: To identify that the choice to believe or not is complex, and the range of factors that influence it.

Engage:

Watch the film Nobody Stands Nowhere (Theos on YouTube). As they watch, make a list of the different ideas that are presented for belief. Do they know where they stand and why? Think about a place that is special to them and what they do there: the traditions and rituals, the people they see, what they learn, what to do to get ready. How does that influence what else they do? Why do they go there? Do you go because the people are similar to you? – e.g., youth groups, children's activities or something else? (This will revise issues from Y3 and Y4)

Enquire and Explore:

Watch one of the Real People, Real Faith videos (NATRE website) – (KS2 does believing in religion make a difference in your daily life?) Look at a faith not planning to study. Are all the impacts on daily life that they mention positive?

Are the rules communities set an attraction or off-putting? Is it OK to question an authority in a place of worship or disagree/disobey? Are the rules important? Does this lead to people changing their minds about what they believe?

There are many people who don't have a good experience of religion. Are religions always benevolent?

What might an organised religion need to do to attract people? Do they need to be more supportive? Have more activities for specific age groups?

Respond and communicate:

Pupils could write a short piece explaining why people choose to follow a religion or not and what the benefits or disadvantages might be.

## Year 6:

Lesson 2: What do different people believe happens when you die? Does anyone really know the answer?

Engage:

Hold a class discussion about what is likely to happen to a person when they die. Gather a wide range of ideas and rank them according to which the pupils feel is the most likely.

## “Consultation”

- Hindus and Jews sent documents outlining our concerns in June / July.
- Worked together and recommended more appropriate key questions consistent for Judaism and Hinduism that worked for all faiths.
- Meeting with RE advisors in July, detailing our many concerns.
- Thought this would be the first of several meetings. Hoped to arrive at a consensus syllabus.
- RE advisors could not understand that we are subject experts on our own religions. (Note: All four Judaism reps in Berkshire are also educators.)
- Assured verbally that our recommended Judaism content and our recommended key questions would be adopted.
- Final draft of the syllabus in September. Informed it could no longer be revised. Syllabus pushed through the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) meetings in the autumn including Reading where it was approved without the support of Group A. (mess)

## Final syllabus

- Some improvements. Ranking of beliefs removed. Some inclusion of faith, identity. **BUT**
- Judaism content changed radically without consulting us.
- KS1: excessive focus on Abraham at expense of patriarchs and matriarchs leading to the Children of Israel. Explicitly against the request of Jewish reps. Out of line with other religions.
- **Deleted the word Israel or Children of Israel**
- UKS2:
  - Key questions (the ones we recommended) used for other religions but not for Judaism  
Key questions for Judaism are inferior to those for other religions
  - Changed key questions to emphasise difference between movements in Judaism
  - Almost no time allocated to learning substantive Judaism
  - Directly against our wishes. We wanted emphasis on what we had in common.
  - **Removed the word “Jews” or “Jew”** from key questions.
  - Removed the word “Israel” from the content recommendations.

### Final Syllabus UKS2 Key Questions

**ISLAM – IN Y5 or Y6** (unless focusing on Judaism)

**(choose from)**

What do **Muslims** learn about God and human life from their sacred texts and traditions?

What might it mean to be **a Muslim** in **different parts of the world**?

What influences the way **Muslims** respond to local and global issues of social justice?

**JUDAISM - IN Y5 or Y6** (unless focusing on Islam)

**(choose from)**

What is the role of **Jewish** sacred texts and tradition?

What might it mean to be **Jewish** in **different branches of Judaism**?

What influences the way **Jewish** people respond to local and global issues of social justice?

**SIKHI – In Y5 or Y6** (unless focusing on Hindu dharma or Buddhism)

**(choose from)**

What do **Sikhs** learn about God and human life from their sacred texts?

What might it look like to live as **a Sikh** in **different parts of the world**?

What influences the way **Sikhs** respond to local and global issues of social justice?

- Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists all can be mentioned. But not Jews.  
Explicitly against the request of the Jewish reps.  
Unique focus on what divides us, not what unites us.

### • **Obsession with differences between “movements” and with “social justice”**

We asked for these questions instead:

- What do Jews learn about God and human life from their sacred texts and traditions?
- What does it mean to live a Jewish life and how does this vary among different Jewish communities?

## Jews Don't Count

- We objected but were over-ruled as “no time”. Syllabus was forced through.
- Two SACRE meetings (as ASC) set for yom tov.  
Reading ASC on Rosh Hashanah cancelled last minute after Board of Deputies intervened!
- Atmosphere that Jews do not count.  
We are not experts in our own religion and should defer to the “experts”
- One advisor even hinted that we should keep shtum as otherwise Judaism might be taken out of the syllabus completely.
- Remember, this is not a fringe syllabus.  
One syllabus author is now top of NATRE.
- We were told that this syllabus was standard, based on the “Worldviews” framework.
- Whole experience left us very upset. Left me feeling physically sick.

## What to do?

**Where did this come from?**

**What is happening elsewhere in the UK?**

Not a fringe syllabus: **One of RE advisors now in a senior position in NATRE**

**RE Council currently producing a suggested syllabus (for across the UK).**

Problem syllabus elements came from the **Religion and Worldviews** approach.



# Worldviews Framework:

## What is it? Where did it come from and why?

### Background

#### World Religions Paradigm

- Modernist paradigm to each religion at universities
- Treated religions as self-contained, sometimes stagnant, **belief systems**
- Focus on (1) historical background: founding individual  
(2) doctrines or beliefs

#### Decolonising RE (Postmodern Critique / Deconstruction of “Religion”)

- World Religions approach is very reductive
- Not really authentic. Religions always framed in Christian terms.
- Religions cannot be understood out of relation to each other
- approved religions viewed as essentially all being the same  
– different paths to the same (Christian) TRUTH
- Ignored **diversity of lived experience**
  - “authoritative” voices selected to suit a Christian narrative of the religion
  - Other voices ignored / sidelined
- Deconstruction / **decolonisation of Religion and also of Religions**
  - “Religion” as a **colonialist** concept imposed on other cultures
  - **ISMS**: Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Sikhism... colonialist concepts

[Podcast with James Cox](#)

[Podcast with Trevor Cooling](#)

## Two simultaneous movements:

1. Religious people using religious terminology for nonreligious movements.  
Is Humanism a religion? More recently: Is gender identity ideology a religion?
2. Nonreligious academics dominate religious studies departments at universities.  
Seek to create **a new concept to encompass both religion and quasi-religious secular movements** such as Humanism.

## Ninian Smart: Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs. 1983

Major figure in the World Religions paradigm.

**Seven “*dimensions*” of religion** into which our observations can be organised.  
(originally six dimensions)

Stop *understanding* other religions in relation to Christianity (which is “superior”).

### Primary Contributions

1. Stop trying to define religion (because all definitions are reductive)
  - a. **Do not try to define religion.**  
*Phenomenological* method (observe phenomena, without interpretation)
  - b. **Avoid narratives.** “dispassionate study” Avoid narratives / become aware of your own narratives, positionality, **“structured empathy”** (Like “Nobody stands nowhere”)
2. Broader category: **Worldviews**, that includes both religion and secular ideologies

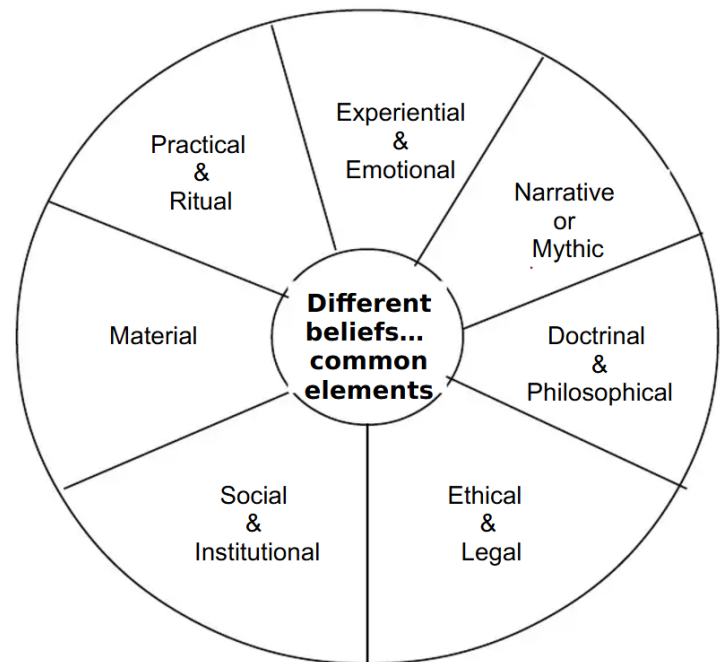
### Observations

“neutral, **dispassionate** study of different religions and secular systems –  
... worldview analysis.... treating the world’s religions on their own terms” (p. 16)

“The study of religions and secular worldviews – what I have termed “worldview analysis” – tries to depict the history and **nature of the beliefs and symbols** which form a deep part of the structure of human consciousness and society.” [full quote](#)

“The modern study of religion is about the last of these motives: **the systems of belief** which, through symbols and actions, mobilize the feelings and wills of human beings.”

On scholars within religions: **“They are themselves part of the data.** Thus, though the **Pope** is the authority for Catholics, others may know more about religions, including Christianity, than he does. For example, **it is my job, as a religious scholar, to understand religion; it is his, as a religious leader, to be religion.**” (p. 4)



## What are Worldviews in RE?

### The marketing: Worldviews is here to rescue us from “World Religions”

Presentation by Angela Hill (current director of NATRE),  
Wokingham SACRE, June 2024

Note some key features of ‘world religions’ questions:

- the focus tends to be on the communication of information, transmitting a form of settled knowledge (‘textbook’ information)
- they tend to be abstract and context-free, as if there are answers that might apply universally
- the answers may contain diversity, but the implication is that there is a form of correct answer.



Handbook p.63 © REC

A religion and worldviews approach is looking more for questions that:

- include an **interpretive element** (e.g. how do *these people* understand and apply *this*?)
- offer a **clear context** (e.g. how do *these two people/groups* respond at an *identified time and place*, and why?)
- recognise that there are **different answers that are valid** (e.g. different individuals, groups, or traditions may have different responses, and these may change across time and place)
- include an **evaluative element**, recognising that different answers may be acceptable in different contexts.

### 2018 CORE report (RE Council):

A **worldview** is a person’s way of understanding, experiencing and responding to the world. It can be described as a philosophy of life or an approach to life. This includes **how a person understands the nature of reality and their own place in the world**. A person’s worldview is likely to influence and be influenced by their beliefs, values, behaviours, experiences, identities and commitments.

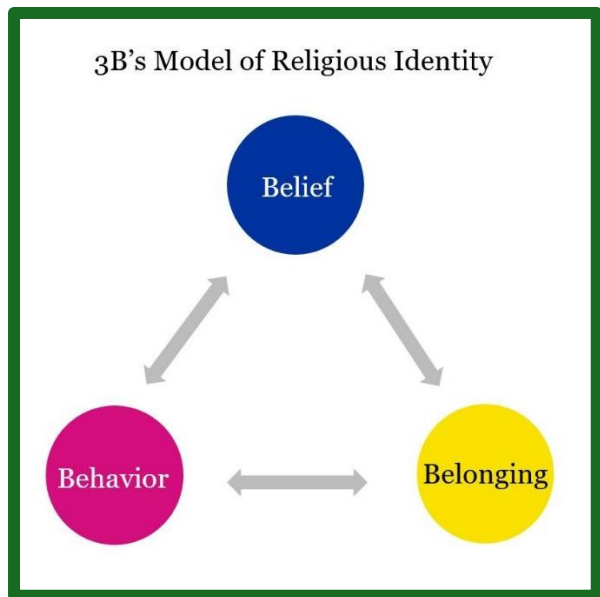
We use the term **‘institutional worldview’** to describe organised **worldviews shared among particular groups and sometimes embedded in institutions**. These include what we describe as religions as well as non-religious worldviews such as Humanism, Secularism or Atheism.

We use the term **‘personal worldview’** for an **individual’s own way of understanding and living in the world**, which may or may not draw from one, or many, institutional worldviews.

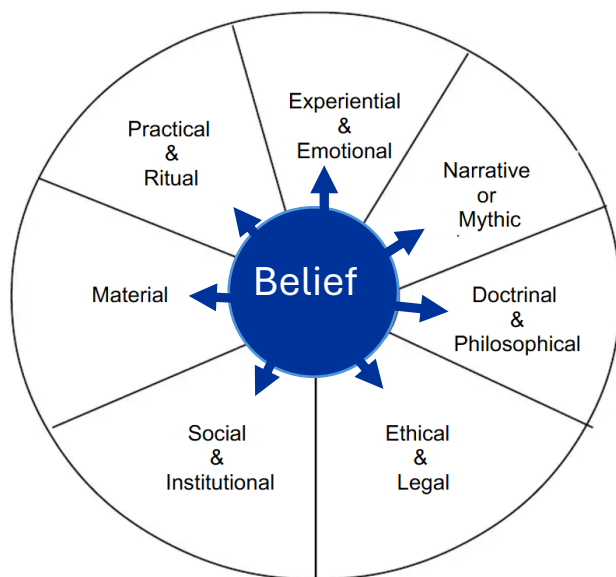
**Everyone has a worldview.**

# What really preceded Worldviews?

*Believing / Behaving / Belonging*  
 (2018-2023 Berkshire Syllabus)



*Worldviews*



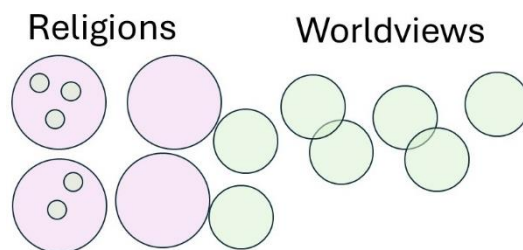
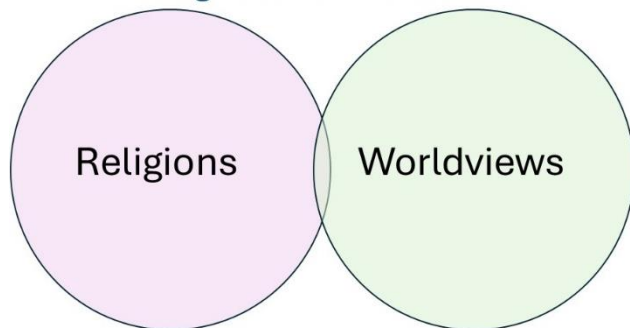
“Religious and other worldviews... Because they are **views about the world** and about the whole of life...”  
 -- Ninian Smart

**PROBLEM:** religions = worldviews = views = beliefs

*SOLUTION 1: It's "Religion and Worldviews"!*

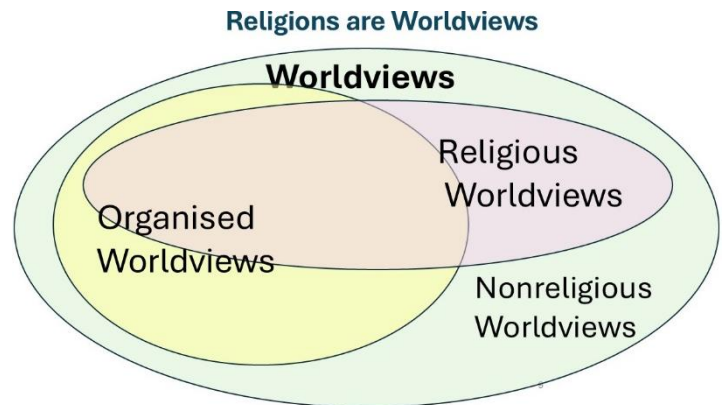
- Teach nonreligious worldviews along with the study of religions.
- Religions and Worldviews treated as distinct human phenomena, possibly overlapping, that may also influence each other.
- **Religions often contain worldviews**, or multiple competing worldviews.
- This would have real potential as a teaching approach if done properly.
- Example: Look at how political movements (environmentalism, social justice, gay rights etc.) have influenced religions, how religions influence politics, and how religious people often use religious language to express their political views.
- Political views, scientific claims, historical claims etc. can and should be debated.

## Religions AND Worldviews



## Problem with Solution 1

- Worldviews proponents reject this interpretation of “Religion and Worldviews”  
See for example [Culham St. Gabriels](#)
- Need to everything together under a single umbrella.  
A single **inclusive** concept encompassing religion and nonreligious worldviews.  
Fear of gatekeeping over what qualifies as a religion.
- All the rigorous teaching is about worldviews.
- “**Worldviews can be religious or nonreligious**”
- So some religions are “religious worldviews” and some are not???
- Teaching biased against religions that are not best understood as worldviews.
- What they mean: **Religions ARE Worldviews**. This is viewed as **inclusive**.
- In practice, Religion and Worldviews typically means a gradualist approach.  
A patchwork of Worldviews mixed with previous approaches.
- Syllabus writers are warned not to change everything at once as it may cause upset.  
See [podcast](#) with Trevor Cooling (start around 18:30)
- Pressure to move to a more rigorous approach (all Worldviews) to prepare for GCSE.



## *SOLUTION 2: Divide the definition into two. Organised worldviews are no longer views!*

(2024 RE Council Handbook)

A person’s **personal worldview** describes and shapes how they encounter interpret, understand and engage with the world. A person may have a coherent and considered framework for answering questions about the nature of ultimate reality, knowledge, truth and ethics, or they may have never given such questions much thought – but they still have a worldview, including the **beliefs, convictions, values and assumptions** that influence and shape their thinking and living.

An **organised worldview** can be understood as a ‘more or less coherent and established system with certain (written and unwritten) **sources, traditions, values, rituals, ideals, or dogmas**’ (from van der Kooij et al. 2013).

**Worldview** now means more than one thing at once. No definition of worldview.

“Personal and organised worldviews”

What does this mean?

Are teachers expected to understand that **organised worldviews are not views?**

Most RE teachers have very little subject knowledge!

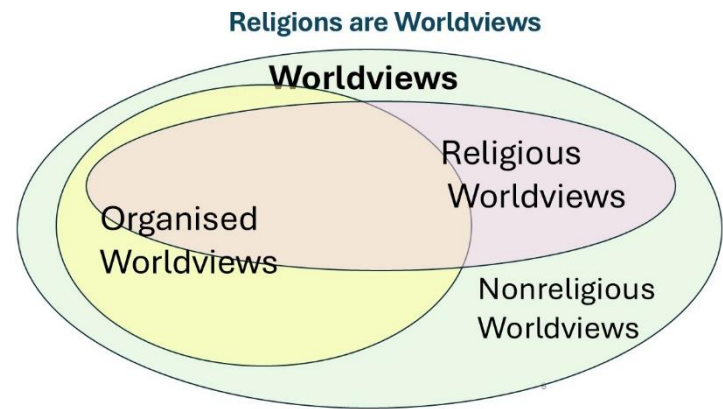
**In practice, “worldview” is really being understood to mean view of the world.**

*SOLUTION 3: Focus on personal worldviews, because that we can understand!*

- It is now all about developing the viewpoint of the child.
- Removes the cardinal rule of RE that we do not engage in persuasion / proselytising
- **Personal worldview based on “critical RE”.** (ranking beliefs etc.)

“a shift in the aim of the subject from being to teach children about religions, to now being to help them develop their own beliefs”

-- [Smalley \(2023\)](#):



Example: **KS3: Does religion help people to be good?**

Author: RE Today Advisers

The investigation implements **the principal aim of RE, which is to engage pupils in systematic enquiry into significant human questions which religion and worldviews address**, so that they can develop the understanding and skills needed to appreciate and appraise varied responses to these questions, as well as develop responses of their own.

## How is RE actually taught with Religion and Worldviews?

### 1. Shift away from traditional RE

1. See [2023 National Content Standard](#). **How to think** not what to think.
2. RE becomes **academic inquiry** to understand “how worldviews work”.
3. Learning sociological methods such as conducting surveys to obtain data on religious populations.
4. **Gradualist** approach to introducing worldviews
5. Some RE materials are still excellent. BUT Inconsistency. Framework is vague. No clear definition of “organised worldviews”
6. Creates **opportunities for people to hijack the curriculum** (politics)

### 2. Shift of focus to the “personal worldview”

1. No clear framework for teaching organised worldviews coherently.
2. [Smalley \(2023\)](#): “a shift in the aim of the subject from being to teach children about religions, to now being to help them develop their own beliefs”
3. [Cooling \(2024\)](#) purpose of RE: develop the student’s personal worldview



4. Use of **critical RE**. asking children to judge / justify beliefs ([see above](#))
5. Study of religions primarily in order to answer **Big Questions**

Example: KS3 Worldviews framework in [Surrey Syllabus](#)

Example: Templeton Foundation funded materials by RE Today [video](#)

Example: new [Barnett syllabus](#) based on the “Six Big Questions” of Ann Taves. See also [podcast](#) and [RE Online article](#)

What is real? BQ1

Where do we come from? BQ2

How do we know? BQ3

What is our situation? BQ4

What is our goal? BQ5

How do we get there? BQ6

### 3. Obsession with diversity within religions

1. Emphasis on [“lived experience”](#)

Religious communities treated as collections of individuals with their own “lived experience” – many Jewish worldviews – no such thing as “Judaism”

[Smalley \(2023\)](#): Shift “from reified, self-determined interpretations of religious traditions” to “an examination of the lived reality of people.”

“**subject is better viewed as afternoon tea...** RE therefore becomes a series of dialogic encounters with various sweet and savoury treats (religions and non-religious philosophies)”

2. Marginalisation of expert voices from within religion (recall [Ninian Smart](#))

3. Example: [Investigating Jewish Worldviews](#)

looking at various accounts from Jews on texts that inspire them.

Goal: investigate “Jewish worldviews” on “living a good life”

4. **Neglect of teaching that gives a coherent understanding** of what adherents have in common. Effect on minor religions where teaching time is limited.
5. Reality that when Jews work together, **we agree about what Judaism is** (as taught to non-Jews), and what variations need to be explained to avoid stereotyping.
6. Ironically, listing differences between orthodox, and progressive “branches of Judaism” is itself reductive. Movements treated as discrete, self-contained.... Orthodox are stereotyped.

### 4. RE being used to teach external priorities

1. Example: [Investigating Jewish Worldviews](#):

Of 32 pages, 6 on vegetarianism / animal welfare, 2 on Messiah  
Kashrut and ban on hunting mentioned but not shechita

Messiah section leaves out ingathering of exiles and was based largely on advice from [Alanna Vincent](#) a signatory of the “[Jerusalem Declaration](#)” (!)

2. **Political topics:** “[climate justice](#)” “environmental crisis” “[antiracist RE](#)”

Even if these are valid causes, someone is choosing values and projecting them onto religions. Much like World Religions!

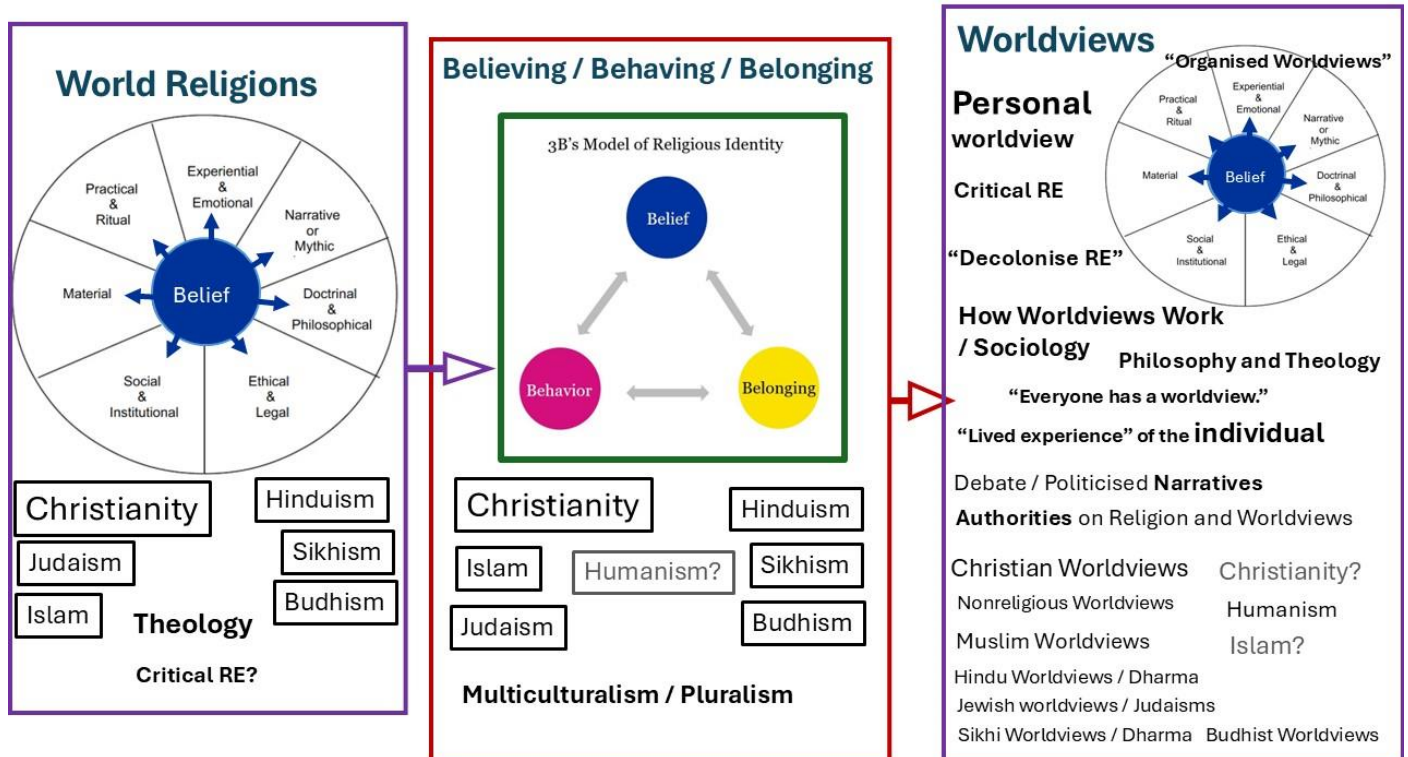
Would it be more instructive to look at how religions deal with the tension between taking care of our neighbour and love for humanity?

That we may end up loving mankind but no one in particular?

3. [2024 RE Council Handbook \(Stephen Pett\)](#): “communities’ aspirations for representation, even advocacy, must be in the service of the curriculum subject, rather than the curriculum serving the communities” (Idea is from [Ninian Smart](#))

## Lessons

### Back full circle?



- A founding individual was brought back in against our wishes
- “worldviews” syllabus obsessed with propositional belief
- lived experience of Jews is ignored by the “experts” (RE Advisors)

**Judaism is being recolonised in the name of decolonisation.**



## How do we teach RE?

- A. Much truth to the critique of the “World Religions Paradigm”
  - Yes religions do influence each other.
  - Yes diversity within traditions.
  - Yes useful to see religion as multidimensional.
- B. The solution does not need to be Worldviews.
  - Believing / behaving / belonging approach already addressed problems of reductive “world religions paradigm”
  - Religion AND Worldviews that really treats religions as distinct from Worldviews
  - Must retain Cardinal rule of RE: NO proselytising
- C. We **need concepts of religion and of religions** or we cannot understand others or be understood as cohesive traditions.
  - Deconstructing concepts without reconstructing just creates a power vacuum.
  - Focus on diversity that deconstructs religions and denies their coherent existence.
  - It should be up to us to decide if our religion is being taught too reductively.
- D. Myth that you can learn / teach without (1) narratives and (2) authority.
  - Teaching requires both narratives and authority.
  - Who controls the narrative? Who has authority?
  - Opportunism. Who gets to insert their priorities into RE?

## Narratives still exist, but their existence is denied.

- Those with the **loudest voice push their preferred narratives** and capitalise on incoherence.
- Values education that amplifies certain **political narratives** (anti-racism, environmental emergency, etc.); projecting narratives onto religions while claiming no narrative exists.
- Example: [resource](#) on religion as a source for peace or war: avoids any difficult questions
- **personal development as an individual journey of discovery is itself a worldview.**

Traditional religions are about what binds people together.

We are not just individuals with a common viewpoint.

## Authority still exists, but selectively

- Myth that focus on lived experience avoids hierarchy of knowledge.  
Some people’s “lived experience” is more equal than others’
- “Trust the experts” (RE Advisors) but not authorities within minority faiths  
Who gets to decide what values should be taught? Politics invading RE.

## Conclusion

- Worldviews is biased against Judaism because it disadvantages:
  - (1) ethnoreligions
  - (2) religions with limited class time
- **We must control the narrative about us. We are the authority.**
- Religious people can be experts on religion. Myth of outsider objectivity.
- **If people are to understand us, there must be an “us” to understand.**
- A broader multidimensional definition of religion is possible.  
Key features:
  1. connectedness (*Dveikus*)
  2. faith / loyalty (*Emunah*)
  3. A tradition that lasts across generations, adapts over history  
(quality of the great world religions, that are worth studying in RE)
- What binds people to each other within a religious / faith tradition is *not* always a common worldview.

## Action Plan

### 1. Focus on fixing the GCSE.

- Local authorities are under pressure to use Worldviews in primary.
- Fear of being “behind the times” so students will not do well at GCSE exams based on Worldviews.

### 2. Use the language of Social Justice.

- Social Justice language is often abused to pursue antiliberal political ends, but our cause really is a matter of social justice.
- Institutional bias against minority ethnoreligions. This is oppression. Use the Equality Act and the [ECHR ruling](#) often cited by Humanists.
- **Viewing religions as worldviews is recolonisation.**

### 3. We must not be afraid to assert ourselves.

- Jews need to campaign for authentic teaching about Judaism.

# Appendices

## Ninian Smart: Worldviews (quotes)

p. 1: “...human beings do things for the most part because it pays them to do so, or because they fear to do otherwise, or because they believe in doing them. The modern study of religion is about the last of these motives: the systems of belief which, through symbols and actions, mobilize the feelings and wills of human beings.” [[back](#)]

p. 2: “The study of religions and secular worldviews – what I have termed “worldview analysis” – tries to depict the history and nature of the beliefs and symbols which form a deep part of the structure of human consciousness and society.” [[back](#)]

P. 4: “People thus often think of the religious expert – Billy Graham, Pope John Paul II, the Dalai Lama, a seminary professor, a learned rabbi – as a spokesperson for a particular faith. And that is fine if what is wanted is an expression of faith or opinion starting from the particular tradition to which the spokesperson belongs. But such persons are part of the traditions for which they speak: they are part of what the modern student of religion seeks to understand. They are themselves part of the data. Thus, though the Pope is the authority for Catholics, others may know more about religions, including Christianity, than he does. For example, it is my job, as a religious scholar, to understand religion; it is his, as a religious leader, to be religion.” [[back](#)]

From Ninian Smart: *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*. 1983

## Berkshire Syllabus 2025-2030 (Links)

Initial version (that asked students to rank beliefs for how reasonable they were) available from <https://democratic.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/documents/s199166/Pan-Berks%20Syllabus%20-%20Full%20v10%20DRAFT%20v28.pdf>

Response of Berkshire Judaism Representatives in July 2024:  
<https://docs.jcob.org/RE/Judaismresponse18July2024.pdf>

Final version (that removed the word “Israel” available from <https://wsh.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/schoolshub/files/2024-11/Pan-Berks%20Syllabus%20-%20Final%20draft.pdf>

Response of Berkshire Judaism Representatives in October 2024:  
<https://docs.jcob.org/RE/JudaismfeedbackOctober2024.pdf>

# NATIONAL CONTENT STANDARD FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN ENGLAND (RE Council 2023)

## **Purpose of study** [\[back\]](#)

An education in religion and worldviews should:

- introduce pupils to the rich diversity of religion and non-religion, locally and globally, as a key part of [understanding how the world works and what it means to be human](#)
- stimulate pupils' curiosity about, and interest in, this diversity of worldviews, both religious and non-religious
- expand upon [how worldviews work](#), and how different worldviews, religious and non-religious, influence individuals, communities and society
- develop pupils' awareness that learning about worldviews involves interpreting the significance and meaning of information they study
- develop pupils' appreciation of the [complexity of worldviews](#), and sensitivity to the [problems of religious language](#) and experience
- induct pupils into the processes and [scholarly methods by which we can study](#) religion, religious and non-religious worldviews
- enable pupils, by the end of their studies, to identify positions and presuppositions of different academic disciplines and their implications for understanding
- give pupils opportunities to explore the relationship between religious worldviews and literature, culture and the arts
- include pupils in the enterprise of [interrogating the sources of their own developing worldviews](#) and how they may benefit from exploring the rich and complex heritage of humanity
- provide opportunities for pupils to [reflect on the relationship between their personal worldviews and the content studied](#), equipping them to develop their own informed responses in the light of their learning.

### **Issues:**

This is cited verbatim in most new syllabi.

Not included: Attaining a good understanding of the major religions in modern day Britain and the communities who practice them.

Not included: Learning respect for religious practices and views other than one's own.

Focus on disciplinary skills, disciplinary knowledge – **How to think not What to think**

Opaque language pointing to postmodern critique. Religion is a “problem” Not defined.

See also [RE Council Worldviews FAQs](#)

These are in statutory guidance, but

**What if this framework becomes the new statutory guidance?**

# National Statement of Entitlement (RE Council 2024)

## The NSE core statements:

Purple boxes added

### CONTENT

substantive knowledge: belief, sociology, politics

#### a. Nature/formation/ expression

What is meant by worldview and how people's worldviews are formed and expressed through a complex mix of influences and experiences.

#### b. Organised/individual

How people's individual worldviews relate to wider, organised or institutional worldviews.

#### c. Contexts

How worldviews have contexts, reflecting time and place, are highly diverse, and feature continuity and change.

#### d. Meaning and purpose

How worldviews may offer responses to fundamental questions raised by human experience.

#### e. Values, commitments and morality

How worldviews may provide guidance on how to live a good life.

#### f. Influence and power

How worldviews influence, and are influenced by, people and societies.

### ENGAGEMENT

#### g. Ways of knowing

The field of study of worldviews is to be explored using diverse ways of knowing.

belief-focused

#### h. Lived experience

The field of study of worldviews is to include a focus on the lived experience of people.

individual

#### i. Dialogue/ interpretation

The field of study of worldviews is to be shown as a dynamic area of debate.

philosophy, critical RE

### POSITION

personal knowledge

#### j. Personal worldviews: reflexivity

Pupils will reflect on and potentially develop their personal worldviews in the light of their study.

individual / critical RE

#### k. Personal worldviews: impact

Pupils will reflect on how their worldviews affect their learning.



## Comparison of “World Religions” and “Worldviews”

Presentation by Ed Pawson to Jewish SACRE reps, May 2024

### **Using NSE to develop questions and construct units of work**

Here are some examples of common questions explored in RE, in world religions paradigm mode

EYFS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What happens at a wedding or when a baby is born?</li><li>• What happens at a festival?</li><li>• What can we learn from stories from different religions?</li></ul>
KS1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Why are some stories/places sacred?</li><li>• What festivals are important in Judaism and Islam?</li></ul>
LKS2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What do different religions teach about God?</li><li>• What is the sacred text in Islam and how is it used?</li><li>• What do religious codes say about right and wrong?</li></ul>
UKS2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What do Christians believe about Jesus?</li><li>• Why do people go on pilgrimage and what impact does it have?</li><li>• What are the key beliefs and values of Sikhism and how are these expressed in the Gurdwara?</li></ul>
KS3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What does Islam/Hinduism teach about life after death?</li><li>• Is there a God? What and why do people believe?</li><li>• Are religions sources of peace or causes of conflict?</li></ul>

Boring fact collection. Black and white thinking. How can this compete with the alternative?

### **A worldviews approach to questioning**

EYFS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do different people welcome a new baby into the world?</li><li>• How do different people celebrate Christmas/Easter in our community? Around the world?</li><li>• What stories are important in our school community?</li></ul>
KS1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Why is the story of Rama and Sita special or sacred to Hindus in Britain and India, and what do they learn from it?</li><li>• How do Jews/ Muslims in our area celebrate Hanukkah/Eid and why are they special times?</li></ul>
LKS2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Where do Muslims/Christians find out about God, and do they all agree what God is like?</li><li>• What role does the Torah play in the lives of at least three Jewish people, and why?</li><li>• What is the ‘golden rule’, where is it from, and how is it put into practice by people from different religious and non-religious worldviews?</li></ul>
UKS2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How and why does the life and teaching of Jesus influence the lives of Christians and their communities in different ways today?</li><li>• What is the role and impact of the Gurdwara on the lives of Sikhs and on local communities in our area/Britain?</li><li>• How far does Humanism function as an organised non-religious worldview?</li></ul>
KS3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who believes in life after death, who doesn’t, and what difference does it make to how they live?</li><li>• How have different Christians understood the idea of Jesus as God? How is Jesus viewed in other worldviews?</li><li>• How and why have Christians, Muslims and/or Buddhists played a role in conflict and peace in the 21st Century?</li></ul>

Interesting, but focused on beliefs / theology or social sciences. Where is belonging? Group identity? Fragmented teaching about the Torah in Judaism. Why choose a focus on Jesus or life after death?

## Personal Worldview and Critical RE

Critical RE was developed by Andrew Wright in the 1990s. Pre-dates “Worldviews”.

Originally a response to moral relativism. The need to challenge religious beliefs if they are bad.

### Andrew Wright: [Critical Realism](#) (Critical Religious Education)

We need to take seriously the truth claims of others. There is a truth out there. The vast majority of religious people, the vast majority of atheists are saying: this is the way the world actually is. This is ultimately how reality is structured. **Not enough for RE to just teach us how to live together harmoniously. It needs to address the issue of truth.**

### Smalley (2023):

“paradigm shift” “a shift in the aim of the subject from being to teach children about religions, to now being to help them develop their own beliefs” [[back](#)]

### Developing the personal worldview of students Cooling (2024):

“Pupils should therefore learn that claims to knowledge are interpretive judgements influenced by our personal worldview and critical appraisal is required to test their validity. The **educational goal is then that pupils learn how to make informed, reflective, scholarly and reasoned judgements as to truth** such that they are prepared for adult life in a world where there is much diversity and controversy around questions of truth between the many religious and non-religious traditions.”

### How do students make judgments as to truth? (Trevor Cooling)

Trevor Cooling suggests the solution is **Critical Religious Education**

#### *Concept cracking.*

“The **key skill is enabling students to become critical evaluators of truth claims from the competing world religions**. They have to make decisions about which of these truth claims, if any, they believe to be true. This is arguing against the post-modern and relativistic world view of 'all beliefs are equally valid'.”

#### *Knowledge in a religion and worldviews approach in English schools*

“Pupils should therefore learn that claims to knowledge are interpretive judgements influenced by our personal worldview and critical appraisal is required to test their validity. The **educational goal is then that pupils learn how to make informed, reflective, scholarly and reasoned judgements as to truth** such that they are prepared for adult life in a world where there is much diversity and controversy around questions of truth between the many religious and non-religious traditions.” (p. 6)

## RE Today [Curriculum](#) example:

Part of a series. Also see:

- [KS3: Does religion help people to be good?](#)
- [KS2: Does it make sense to believe in God?](#)
- **[KS3: Is religion a power for peace or a cause of conflict?](#)**

Cited by [NATRE](#)

Wright [argues](#) (skip to 11:46) that it is colonialism to insist that RE students are tolerant of the beliefs of others. [[back](#)]

## Templeton Foundation

Main funders for “[Big Questions](#)” series by RE Today.

Philosophy explained in this [video](#) including Sarah Lane Cawte and Stephen Pett.

RE before Worldviews is caricatured as being reductive. One Judaism, Islam, etc. and reliance on experts. Importance of including Jews, Muslims etc. who do not practice their religions and nonreligious students.

This new RE encourages children to ask questions. Bridging Science Education and RE.

“Equip children to answer the big questions in life”

“Everyone has a worldview”

“Dialogic teaching enables children to have a view, as long as it’s reasoned. It focuses much less on the right and wrong. ... **They are able to change their minds, change other people’s minds within the class.**”

## KS3: How can people express the spiritual?

Author:

RE Today Advisers

£15.00

The investigation implements **the principal aim of RE**, which is to engage students in systematic enquiry into **significant human questions** which religion and worldviews address, so that they can develop the understanding and skills needed to appreciate and appraise varied responses to these questions, as well as develop responses of their own.



## Lived Experience

### Smalley *Journal of Religious Education* (2023) 71:213–224

“Therefore, given that total knowledge of all major world faiths is an impossible undertaking, shifting the emphasis of study from reified, self-determined interpretations of religious traditions to one which gives cumulatively sufficient understanding of the relationship between the teachings and doctrines of organised worldviews and the beliefs, practice and experience of adherents through an examination of the lived reality of people potentially offers a way to ensure relevance and rigour for the subject”

“I have wondered ... whether the **subject is better viewed as afternoon tea**, rather than a single pie. This shift of metaphor captures much of **what Cooling (2020, 2022) have been trying to describe as a paradigm shift**, as the Worldviews approach moves the subject away from the problematic World religions paradigm, which is prone to become overcrowded and presents reified, positivist versions of selected world faiths. To understand what an afternoon tea is, one doesn't have to repeatedly consume all of the elements. But **having had several opportunities to try out the various cakes and sandwiches, one comes to understand what an afternoon tea is.....** RE therefore becomes a series of dialogic encounters with various sweet and savoury treats (religions and non-religious philosophies)—via different ways of knowing—to build up knowledge of individual expressions of these, but aiming to understand what it means to ‘inhabit a worldview’, about the existential nature of different ways of being, about what it means to be human.” [[back](#)]