

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACY: A REFLECTION ON
HABERMAS' RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR
COLOMBIA.

by

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Abstract

This thesis engages with Jurgen Habermas' recent contributions on religion and liberal democracy as an analytical platform for the consideration of Religious Education (RE). Specifically, this work assesses the feasibility of this philosopher's formulation of the *epistemic agreement between religious and secular citizens* as a paradigm for the curricular and pedagogical formulation of this subject. This is followed by a comparison of Habermas' thought in these matters with recent formulations about toleration, liberal education and the philosophy of indoctrination, respectively. The theoretical convergences extracted from this exercise will highlight possibilities of an analytically non-indoctrinatory, weakly-perfectionist, liberal modality of RE that can address toleration's contemporary challenges concerning minorities' representation. This synthetical effort leads to a historical reconstruction of RE in Colombia, particularly in connection with its main juridical, sociological and pedagogical tendencies. The conclusions of this section – which highlight the morally conservative emphasis increasingly characterizing the subject in Colombian education - lays the grounds for the application of a thus envisaged Habermasian modality of RE to this country's educational system. The consequences of this implementation will finally result in the suggestions of reforms for the development of an unbiased, religiously pluralist and epistemically informed RE subject years 8, 9, 10 and 11 of Colombian secondary education.

To Marcela, wondrous destiny which I could have never dreamt of...

And to Sergio, unfathomable mystery of pure love.

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Introduction

a. Statement of the problem

Today, the relationship between *education* and religion is necessarily a problematic one. Considered especially since the Enlightenment as an introduction to *established* knowledge for the development of the learner's thinking capabilities, education became increasingly attached in the modern era to a notion of "objectivity", especially as demanding scientific and verified truths for the deployment of its purposes (Gray, 2008). Under this perspective – which strongly shaped the historical emergence of *public* education in the Western world in the late nineteenth century (Katz, 1976) – political, metaphysical and other non-scientifically established doctrines progressively became moralistic gears of the – mainly scientific and technical – general instructional endeavour. *Education* increasingly acquired then the connotation of a purposeful and systematic familiarisation of the child with the knowledge and skills required for the emergence of the entirely rational, autonomous, *adult* citizen of the Republic. In the historical transition from private and religious philanthropy to the institutionalisation of state intervention and the systematic addressing of social problems via specialised bureaucracies, non-scientific forms of discourse – such as religion and patriotism – were incorporated into the curriculum of the thus conceived *public schools* especially as concessions to the need for moral and psychological stability in its beneficiaries. Although later historic developments soon engendered the need for infusing especially basic education with strong nationalist feelings as a token itself of republicanism, the rationalist ethos lingered on as a constitutive heritage of the Enlightenment in the materialisation of the public curriculum. Thus, despite the conversion of the state school into a nationalistic device for the ideologisation of new generations (Markham, 2010), a classically modern understanding of the curriculum could still be viewed as the source of the awkwardness experienced by religious, moral and other *extra-academic* subjects, especially in the context of an increased secularisation of state and society.

This privileging of technical-scientific disciplines in the construction of the curriculum – as the hallmark of the constitutive influence of Enlightenment thinking on *public education* – can also be seen, from a sociological perspective, as part of education's socialising role of inculcating newcomers with the long-cherished (and naturalised) ideals of the adult community (Durkheim, 1956). Under socially and culturally complex circumstances, revolving around

industrialisation and the consolidation in the West of the nation-state, institutionalised education incorporated the dual source of strictly academic and *societal* (which included not only patriotic but also capitalist, workforce-training content. Thus, an epistemically ambiguous situation emerged for public schooling in which established disciplines of knowledge coincided with different, culturally relevant provisions for the configuration of the curriculum. This situation, iconised by the Napoleonic *écoles populaires* and the prominence of patriotic history in their centralised curriculum (Markham, 2010), evidenced precisely the societally instrumental character inherent in education itself, particularly as a tool for the self-reproduction of the adult community. Under modern circumstances, this socialising function of education exhibited correspondingly the constitutive duality between objectively established *forms* and societally relevant *fields of knowledge* – as in the Hirstian conceptualisation – in the constitution of the public curriculum, allowing for the emergence of epistemically hybrid forms of general study programmes in which both academical and culturally pertinent considerations performed constitutive roles. Revealing thus the complexity of the socialising facet of modern educational provisions, public education has adopted multiple facets in Western liberal democracies, exhibiting mixed curricula in which academic and industrially oriented training coincide with the dispensation of different sorts of deeply held values of the adult generation.

In this context, philosophical positions have emerged to argue for the reform of the public curriculum, distilling it from some of its non-academic features, such as the religious ones. On the other hand, claims for the conscious and explicit harmonisation of the liberal educational provision with private, religious ones have also made their way in the public debate. In the light of the latter call for epistemic and sociological self-awareness in educational modernity, this research is intended thus as theoretically addressing the locus of Religious Education – *RE* – in the curriculum of public schooling in liberal democracies.

In this regard, RE certainly proves to be an inexorably contentious issue for liberal democracy. Significant to the perspective of both the separation of Church and state, on the one hand, and cultural rights to self-determination of religious communities, on the other, religion will necessarily stand out as a controversial element in contemporary state schooling. Seen not infrequently as a legacy from the pre-modern era when civilising ideals answered to (unquestioned) metaphysical and religious world-views, RE will necessarily raise important controversies in liberal schooling. From a different, more believing perspective, on the contrary, this subject could be viewed as a *natural* channel for the inter-generational reproduction of deeply held beliefs and moral teachings, and as such as an indispensable tool

for the upbringing of the newcomers. From either the side of classical liberal views on knowledge and religious belief or the philosophical shores of liberal education and indoctrination, RE will emerge as a genuine *problem* for educational philosophy. In this respect, this work is conceived as addressing some of these concerns, mainly as they are found in the works of some relevant authors from each of those perspectives. The main aim of this thesis, as will be seen, is to consider the implications of these arguments for a conception of a RE modality that could prove compatible and insightful for liberal democracy.

To achieve this purpose, this thesis relies mainly on the late thought of Jürgen Habermas. Concerning this main analytical source, this work will consequently focus on this philosopher's view on the role of religion in the public sphere, developed in the context of his recent theoretical positioning between the extremes of a naturalist simplification of communicative phenomena – with its consequential endorsement of radical secularism in the political field – and the authoritarian and conservative-religiously motivated attacks on liberalism. In particular, I focus on Habermas' posited necessity of fostering an epistemic and ethical understanding between religious and secular citizens as a pre-requisite for the persistence and evolution of liberal democracy. By recalling the main tendencies in the incorporation of Habermas' work into educational philosophy and RE, this research aims mainly towards the outlining of a RE modality that potentially harmonises with the aforementioned Habermasian statement, and simultaneously with relevant philosophical discussions on the issues of toleration, liberal education and indoctrination. In the first case, five recent formulations of religious tolerance (Jay Newman, Susan Mendus, Anna Elisabetta Galeotti, Lori Beaman and Denis Lacorne) are addressed, to be finally revised against Habermas' own stance on this same issue¹. Concerning liberal education, we review Paul Hirst's and Meira Levinson's contributions as two important theoretical sources for the comprehension of this concept. Consecutively, the conclusions derived from these explorations are examined against the analytical discussions on indoctrination developed in the Anglo-Saxon analytical context of the post-Second World War era. As will be shown, relevant conclusions can be extracted from

¹ This analytical engagement with toleration as one of the core banners of political liberalism will frequently refer to John Locke's foundational formulation in this field, without properly engaging with it, however. Although contemplated in early versions of this thesis, a more detailed addressing of this important source for the comprehension of religious tolerance was omitted, especially because it would inevitably lead to the specification of Locke's epistemic underpinnings regarding reason and revelation, along with his theological background - see in this last respect the comprehensive account by Frost (2003, pp. 138-168). For similar reasons, particularly also in view of this thesis' word-length restrictions, a complete synopsis on the evolution of Habermas' thought was also omitted from the first chapter, given mainly the intrinsic complexity of that summarising enterprise.

these sources for the comprehension of a RE modality in harmony with a Habermasian inspired modality of RE.

b. Empirical scope

This research is also intended to provide insights for the formulation of guidelines for a public policy on RE in Colombia. To achieve this aim, it develops a revision of the situation of this academic subject in that country. Regarding RE, this South American nation offers a complicated scenario in which modernising and secularising tendencies combine with strongly traditionalist and confessional ones, as will be explored in the fourth chapter of this work. The convergence of these tendencies configures an ambivalent situation in which state neutrality and the official recognition of religious pluralism coincide with substantial margins of mono-doctrinal teaching and moral instruction in public school. The review of this case will offer to this work the possibility of materialising theoretical educational insights concerning a socio-educational context in which a further harmonisation between religious traditions and the secular state can be achieved. It is hoped then that the analysis of the Colombian historical and institutional framework for RE can provide potential practical suggestions for the weakly liberal orientation of the RE subject in this country's educational system. Similarly, this empirical exploration is also envisioned as offering an analytical platform for the specification of the modality of RE here explored. The formulation of these proposals is attempted in the *Conclusions* section, where the recapitulation and synthesis of the theoretical discussions are deployed along with the outlining of the main educational orientations for the Colombian case².

c. Research questions

This research can be viewed as answering mainly the following question:

- Can an RE modality be conceived as a) contributing to the Habermasian objective of fostering epistemic understanding between religious and secular citizens; b) corresponding with central tenets of liberal education; and c) providing relevant insights for its enhanced harmonisation with the Colombian constitutional foundations?

² This choice of national case-study responds also to an original purpose on my part of corresponding to the public character of one of my sponsor bodies (*Colciencias*, the Colombian government's Administrative Department of Science, Technology and Innovation), and of offering some research-based insights into this subject that could be applied to Colombia as my native country.

To address this problem, the following sub-questions were also asked:

- What are the main features of the Habermasian understanding of the role of religion in the public sphere?
- What are the main tendencies in the appropriation of the Habermasian ideas in educational thought and the field of RE?
- What are the main characteristics of contemporary concepts of toleration, liberal education and indoctrination?
- What are the distinguishing traits of the history and present situation of RE in Colombia?
- Can these formulations be harmonised with a modality of RE that contributes to the promotion of the Habermasian secular-religious epistemic understanding and to an improved political liberalisation of this subject in Colombia?

d. Objectives

The primary purpose of this work could be summarised as the exploration of the possibility of a Habermasian-inspired modality of RE that could face the analytical challenges posed by philosophical positions on liberal education, indoctrination and tolerance.

Consequently, specific objectives can be formulated as follows:

1. To consider critically Jürgen Habermas' formulation of the epistemic understanding between religious and secular citizens as a theoretical approach to RE.
2. To identify the main tendencies in the educationalist and religious educationalist interpretations of Habermas' work.
3. To analyse contemporary formulations on tolerance, liberal education and the philosophy of indoctrination as relevant markers for the formulation of an RE modality compatible with the Habermasian approach to the subject.
4. To reconstruct the main tendencies in the history of RE in the Colombian educational system and to evaluate possibilities for applying the previously explored modality in this academic area.

e. Methodology

This work is characterised by a search of secondary literature. This option is conceived as corresponding to the main objective of offering a synthetic proposal with potentially practical characteristics. In this respect, this research can be viewed as an exercise in applied philosophy of education and social theory, with a reliance on historical and empirical considerations for outlining its conclusions. For this reason, this work dedicates considerable length to theoretical and philosophical discussions, particularly for the development of the main ideas and for the grounding of its final recommendations. For the same reasons, it does not include a comprehensive and exhaustive review of its main theoretical sources. Although important comments and controversies are reviewed and reconstructed respectively, the performing theories are revisited as sources for the logical configuration of the RE proposal outlined here. Thus, this work offers itself as a critical examination of relevant authors on the subject in combination with a synthetic and a more applied objective of delineating educational reforms on the matter. Correspondingly, the main argument is made in relation to an RE modality that contributes to the Habermasian objective of fostering epistemic understanding between religious and non-religious citizens. It is in the light of this objective that the other sources are reviewed, specifically as providing important arguments, contexts and insights for its realisation.

Correspondingly, this work focuses on an essential facet of Habermas' thought, especially in connection to its implications for RE in liberal democracies. However, this concern is developed in relation to other authors' relevant contributions concerning the same subject. This exercise is developed with the objective of deriving practical implications from these theoretical discussions, and of testing such implications with respect to other relevant theories and an empirical context of application. Consequently, this research will continuously introduce the Habermasian discussion when alternative contributions have already been discussed, as in the cases of toleration, liberal education and indoctrination. In this sense, this work will permanently address its primary theoretical source, without restricting it to one of its sections. Accordingly, it will explore possible intersections of different theories regarding one central problem, i.e. RE under liberal-democratic circumstances. This methodological design is deployed here as supplying a plural analytical perspective for the consideration of the central problem of this work. Ultimately, this research portrays itself as an attempt to envisage a form of RE that can contribute to Habermas' prominent theoretical formulation of a historic-political

problem in relation to important ethical criteria derived from other relevant sources. These additional instances, as will be seen, are here conceived as providing both theoretical and empirical considerations for the assessment of the educational modality here derived.

f. Thesis structure

The following chapter summaries guide the substance of this work:

Chapter one: an outline of Habermas' conception of the relation between religion and the public sphere, and his general view on socialisation and ego-identity. This gives way to a reconstruction of the Habermasian insights on education, accompanied by a revision of the recent literature on the appropriation of Habermas by educationalists and religious educationalists in particular. From this examination, the possibility of a RE modality that potentially sides with Habermas' view on the *learning processes* is considered.

Chapter two: recent positions on religious toleration in the figures of Jay Newman, Susan Mendus, Anna Elisabetta Galeotti, Lori Beaman and Dennis Lacorne. In the conclusions section, the insights extracted from this analysis are compared with Habermas' view on religious toleration, and some elements are concluded concerning the previously envisaged modality of RE.

Chapter three: Paul Hirst's and Mira Levinson's formulations on liberal education. By providing an analytical context for the formulation of the previously mentioned modality of RE, these accounts of liberal education will illustrate fundamental political safeguards to be considered under a non-perfectionist understanding of fundamental rights and liberties. This exercise is followed by the outline of the leading positions in the philosophical debate on indoctrination. In a similar vein, the review of this discussion will highlight important analytical inputs for the modality of RE discussed here, some of them on an explicitly Habermasian line.

Chapter four: history and current state of RE in Colombia. This chapter is composed of a historical, a legal and a contemporary-empirical section. This outline is conceived as providing grounds for the identification of the constitutive socio-religious trends in this country. It is expected that this account will contribute to setting out the societal and institutional context for the application of the RE modality considered here.

Conclusions: this section summarises the main features of the RE modality proposed here. Similarly, it develops prospective suggestions for its application to the Colombian context, considering the results offered by the previous sections.

g. Rationale

This research emerges from the interest in exploring the potential of religious education for the cultivation of democratic citizenship, particularly in strongly religious contexts. In this respect, a starting point is constituted by the conviction that religious belief exhibits epistemic characteristics that are relevant for cognitive development, including the consolidation and enhancement of reasoning processes in the individual. It is this thought which guides the exploration of relevant frameworks of political philosophy concerning education in a liberal-democratic state. This critical revision is oriented by the search for an epistemically fair approach with respect to the cognitive dimension of religious belief and world-views. In this line, the exploration of crucial formulations on toleration, liberal education and indoctrination relates to the preoccupation with the contemporary liberal harmonisation of a RE modality thus conceived. In this manner, RE is envisaged as potentially fostering important characteristics of rational thinking while simultaneously contributing to the preservation of different religious inheritances under a (non-perfectionist) liberal political framework.

According then to the perspective adopted here, the preservation of fundamental liberties under a democratic regime will not require the epistemic invalidation of conceptions of the good. This insight becomes especially relevant particularly in connection with world-views considered as *metaphysically* grounded. Consequently, the non-perfectionist interpretation of political liberalism explored here will highlight the assumption of a procedural conception of justice to which the pursuit of political autonomy leads (much in the Rawlsian line). This guiding view would allow for the agreement on fundamental ethical principles without impinging on the epistemic specificities and with this on the irreducibility of societal pluralism. This form of societal understanding will hence divert from the assumption by the liberal state of perfectionist or ideologically charged stances on religious belief.

In this manner, RE is viewed here as a central instance for the implementation of such non-perfectionist liberalism, allowing for the deployment of the formative potential of religious belief under ethical safeguards concerning the cultivation of autonomy. These safeguards – revolving strongly around the mutual recognition of epistemic, ethical and political pluralism

and the need to adopt a cognitively *open* stance towards it – will provide ethical and legal boundaries for the appropriate deployment of the educational features of different religious beliefs. In this respect, this thesis' justification finds grounds in the intention to promote diverse modalities of agreement on ethical minimums – instead of on moral maximalism – in conditions of vast and indissoluble moral and epistemic diversity. This fundamental stance – which also avoids the alternative extreme of neutrality towards illiberal ethics and discourses – nourishes then this investigative attempt towards a thereby conceived modality of RE. Finally, for a context characterised by the hegemony of confessional and conservative teaching – such as the one manifested by the Colombian RE subject in its current state –, the possibility of a modality for this area that strives for the harmonisation of liberal and religious educational provisos offers particular interest. Given especially the shortcomings of the secularisation of moral and religious education in that country, the envisaging of this socio-institutional scenario of application offers valuable insights for a contextualised comprehension of RE along Habermasian lines.

First Chapter: Habermas and Religious Education

1. Introduction

Discussions about Religious Education (RE) frequently go beyond educational considerations. Not only in popular media, where it is accompanied by political concerns on indoctrination or parental educational rights, but also in educational literature, the role assigned to religion in modern democracies is a prominent consideration when addressing this subject. In this sense, RE is more than a mere pedagogical issue to be resolved inside a humanistic or liberal dominant educational framework. Indeed, its apparently inherent need for educational justification speaks not only about different comprehensions of the *religious* category but also about the tensions around curriculum-building in liberal democracies. In this respect, RE's constitutive contestability contrasts with the status of scientific knowledge as the established source of truth and objectivity in modern, secular societies. It is precisely the objectivity of science against which RE appears primarily as an epistemically uncertain subject. In this sense, it is common to find in the academic literature on RE important debates and references to its possible educational rationales, particularly concerning its contribution to religious, moral or citizenship education. It is in this respect that different frameworks for RE (Jackson, 1997, p. 121-142) have had to deal with issues of fundamentalism, moral relativism, tolerance, religious commitment and either-facts-or-values-based education as critical factors in their democratic justification. In this sense, perspectives on the role of religion in contemporary pluralistic democracies are still crucial to understand the different possible modalities of RE.

It is in this same direction that this research takes inspiration from the thinking of Jürgen Habermas. In particular, we explore his understanding of the role of religion in the public sphere. This is conceived as providing a relevant framework for informing a modality of RE along these lines. In this, we follow an emergent line of thought for the characterisation of this academic subject as based on Habermas' recognition of the ethical and moral potential of religious traditions. Similarly, we explore some trends of the Habermasian influence on educational thought. This review will be developed to gather relevant insights for the contextualisation of the aforementioned Habermasian general comprehension of religion to RE. In this respect, this combination of exegetical sources is conceived as providing two related but different theoretical contexts – as will be seen below – for the identification of a relevant Habermasian influence for RE.

2. Habermas on religion in the public sphere

Habermas' specific engagement with religion is pointed out (Mendieta, 2002; Adams, 2006; Bohman & Rehg, 2017; Ungureanu & Monti, 2017) as exhibiting at least three important variants: a *sociological* one, approaching religion as a societal force of a prominent integrative force³; a *philosophical* one, addressing theological challenges to secular philosophical reasoning⁴; and a *philosophical-political* one, concerning especially the role of religious voices in the public sphere⁵. Especially in connection with his recent interest in cosmopolitanism and the constitutional materialisation of discourse ethics, the third perspective is seen as offering a synthesis of the sociological and philosophical ones, especially by dealing with the adequate epistemic recognition of religion as a relevant moral source for post-secular societies. Consequently, the Habermasian comprehension of religion in liberal democracies will offer a theologically and sociologically informed account of this subject, in relation also with the normative conditions of deliberative legitimacy in this political system. In this respect, this work will concentrate on this facet of the Habermasian work, with occasional reference to the previous ones where the treatment of the subject so demands it.

For Habermas (2002, 2006, 2008), modern reason needs to overcome the consideration of religion as a mere historical fact lacking any form of relevance for liberal democracy. On the contrary, contemporary political thought, in particular, should acknowledge its genealogical bonds with religious humanism and the universalistic ethos of some monotheistic religions⁶. In Habermas' view, this reflexivity will allow political philosophy to recognise the ethical potential of religious traditions as sources of solidarity for civil society. In this way, liberal democracy will be able not only to comprehend its own historicity but also relocate itself towards those religious traditions that it has come to harbour. For Habermas, this would enable democratic institutions to muster religious traditions to the process of interpreting historical

³ Relevant considerations in this regard can be found especially in the second volume of the *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984).

⁴ Here the essays included in *Religion and Rationality* (2002), the engagement with Ratzinger in *The Dialectics of Secularisation* (2005) and the controversies developed in *Postmetaphysical Thinking II* (2017) will exhibit relevance.

⁵ See here especially *Religion in the Public Sphere* (2006) and *Between Naturalism and Religion* (2008) and the discussion with theologians in *An Awareness of what is missing* (Habermas, 2010).

⁶ "I defend Hegel's thesis that the major world religions belong to the history of reason itself. Post-metaphysical thinking misunderstands itself if it fails to include the religious traditions alongside metaphysics in its own genealogy" (Habermas, 2008, p. 6).

realities, particularly in the form of a widened public deliberation. This process would then provide relevant insights for the historical actualisation of liberal democracy, which is understood by Habermas as a necessarily unfinished project. Thus, this convergence of sources for political imagination would contribute to the envisaging of liberal democracy's potential future configurations. As the case of cultural rights illustrates, not only religious claims for recognition but also religious voices in the public arena can act as relevant sources for institutional designing in this political system, especially given the increasingly complex and diversified character of modern societies. This analytical stance would thus imply for RE, among other things, the assumption of a non-reductionist approach to religious belief as its subject matter. As will be developed further below, this apprehension of the cognitive characteristics of religion would constitute a salient feature of the incorporation of recent Habermasian insights into RE.

For public deliberation to perform as plural dialogue, Habermas states that cognitive assumptions must be established among participants. This epistemic background is posited as enhancing understanding among citizens, especially concerning the recognition of the diversity of world-views and conceptions of the good. So, if reciprocal engagement is to transcend the superficial level of mutual denigration, Habermas states that in particular a clear and unbiased perspective towards religious discourse must be adopted on the part of secular citizens. This means not exclusively relying on religion instrumentally merely as a means to foster tolerance and democratic virtues – indeed a prevalent perspective in the British Non-statutory National Framework (1994). On the contrary, it entails considering religious traditions as the bearers of a semantic potential for a progressive understanding of Modernity. This consideration of the cognitive dimensions of religious belief, beyond its doctrinal surface, is essential for Habermas in order to take full account of the epistemological and political implications of religious diversity for modern democracy (Habermas, 2008, p. 6). However, he also states that for the democratic state to fulfil its duty to preserve the doctrine-free character of the modern public arena, it should request of religious voices the willingness to subject their contributions to a "translation" into an ideologically *neutral* language. This "translation" - referred to by Habermas as the corresponding cognitive modification on the side of religious citizens - does not imply that religious voices are not to be heard publicly. Such a move would impose a hegemony of a-religious discourse in public forums by means of a pretended "incompatibility" between democracy and religion. On the contrary, the translation will be a consequence of religious citizens' awareness of the pluralism of beliefs and non-beliefs that constitutes the

addresses of public utterances in modern societies. This recognition is formulated by Habermas as bringing about significant cognitive modifications in the religious believer's perspective, particularly in the direction of further ethical rationalisation and the adoption of a pacifistic stance towards proselytism (Habermas, 2002, p. 150-151).

Therefore, in Habermas' view, aggressive laicism on the part of non-religious citizens should give way to a shared epistemological pluralism in which both they and their religious counterpart acknowledge the cognitive implications of alterity and modify their discursive attitude accordingly. This possibility would allow all citizens, but especially the religious ones, to address intelligibly the diversified audience of contemporary public opinion in modern democracies, which is no longer bound by any all-encompassing metaphysical narrative. It would also allow the state to maintain a level of openness to different voices without compromising its neutrality. By this willing adaptation to the epistemic and cultural circumstances of civil society – instead of, for instance, a state ideological censorship – deeply spiritually motivated initiatives could renew, for example, the roots of civic solidarity, highly cherished by republicanism. This widening of cognitive inter-comprehension between religious and secular citizens would also enhance the adaptability of public decision-making processes towards the challenges posed by the mutable political life of modern society.

3. Religion and knowledge

For Habermas, the need for recognition of societal pluralism is bounded with a conception of democratic legitimacy in which citizens cease to be merely passively subjected to the law and recognise themselves as its authors. This regulative ideal underlies Habermas' thought on religion and democracy, particularly by sustaining the posited need for the widening of deliberation as representatively encompassing all incumbents. Similarly, and as stated above, the contingent character attributed by him to liberal democracy renders it dependant on multiple possible contributions for its historical perpetuation. For Habermas, this implies that citizens, regardless of their respective ideological or religious background, need to acknowledge the centrality of institutional deliberative procedures that guarantee pluralism as a requisite for public participation. In this manner, public debate can effectively promote political ownership among an ideologically and religiously diverse public opinion, something that will enhance the adaptability of the democratic regime to the changing circumstances of historical societies.

However, in Habermas' thought, this "contingency" affects not only liberal democracy but also knowledge itself. Here Habermas, relying mainly on a Wittgensteinian perspective, embraces a de-transcendentalising perspective on reason that takes account of the ontological connection between language and the experience of *objectivity* (2008, pp. 35-36). This view implies conceding a pivotal explanatory role to the linguistic and cultural world-view as a necessary background for the diverse forms of knowledge (pp. 29-30). Correspondingly, an ontological connection between intersubjectivity and objectivity will endorse in Habermas a perspective on knowledge as necessarily embedded in contexts of meaning. Thus, Habermas' de-transcendentalised comprehension of reason and knowledge will highlight the importance of linguistically-based systems of logic and structures of perception as the necessary background for the validity of statements about the world that could be verified in the form of knowledge (2008, p. 172). Consequently, and although not in the sense of an objective and propositional discourse on reality, theology could be seen as a systematic comprehension of reality whose logical conditions of possibility lie in the particular conceptual and linguistic coordinates of the religious world-view⁷. This possibility would not imply however the granting to theological discourse of an epistemic status analogous to that conceded to secular science in modern societies. On the contrary, Habermas states that, in order to live harmoniously in liberal democracies, religious traditions should acknowledge the centrality of scientific knowledge when addressing controversies of public interest. In this sense, the political primacy conceded to secular science constitutes one of the cognitive modifications that the religious believer needs to undergo as a legitimate interlocutor in a non-metaphysically bounded civil society. On this basis, nonetheless, Habermas' political priority moves from the centrality of secular knowledge in deciding public controversies – something he considers as an a priori condition to the mere liberal coexistence of religions – to the ways in which communication and exchange between faiths and with secular state and culture could be established on the basis of an adequate epistemic recognition. This, for him, constitutes an urgent task for the subsistence of liberal democracy.

Moreover, one fundamental prerequisite for this recognition to take place is the widening of the perspective on rationality, in order to de-centralise it from secular or scientific thought and to grant it, though under a different label, also to religious doctrines. This assumption –

⁷ In this respect, Habermas' de-transcendentalising epistemology relevantly states that "the presupposed objectivity of the world is so deeply intertwined with the intersubjectivity of reaching and understanding about something in the world that we cannot transcend this connection and escape the linguistically disclosed horizon of our intersubjectively shared life-world" (Habermas, 2008, p. 43).

Habermas states – constitutes a fundamental condition of human communication. Hence, secular citizens need to acknowledge the importance of non-secular rationalities, particularly as an essential interlocutor of the ethical-normative debate of democratic deliberation. Correspondingly, for this recognition to take place, religious contributions must acknowledge the metaphysical heterogeneity of the audience and the resulting need to accommodate them via the "rationalist" translation alluded above. Conceived thus mostly for the process of communicative will-formation, Habermas' consideration of the role of religion in the public sphere finds correspondence in a post-metaphysical view of knowledge itself that de-transcendentalises it and highlights its socio-cultural conditions of possibility. This comprehension allows Habermas to question positivist objectivism and naturalism, simultaneously avoiding a bare relativism that would indiscriminately equate science and religious belief. This epistemic stance supports in Habermas a conception of religiously inspired public contributions as compatible with liberal-democratic deliberation and with the ideal of a citizenry characterised by critical thinking and openness towards alterity⁸.

For Habermas, then, correspondent cognitive modifications must constitute the result of the convergence of different doctrines of the good into the deliberative regime of liberal democracy. If the array of those doctrines is to be contemplated through the divide of secular/religious, then both the de-transcendentalisation of reason – on the part of secular citizens - and the translation into secular language – on the religious side – should feature as the consequences of their genuine engaging in communicative interaction. This possibility in turn not only leaves space for religious voices to participate in the public debate – *granted* the translation previously alluded to – but especially demands of secular citizens an understanding stance towards religious contents, their specificity, rationality and potential application to political reform. Both epistemic stances by these two types of citizens, however, cannot for Habermas be *produced* or merely *forged* among the population of a free republic that understands itself in terms of *rights*, as he recognises⁹. Habermas considers this cognitive

⁸ As in political debates regarding secular ethics (Habermas, 2008, p. 87-88).

⁹ “Insofar as the liberal state demands that its citizens cooperate with one another in spite of their ideological differences, it must *presuppose* that the cognitive attitudes that this requires from both the religious and the secular sides are the result of historical learning processes. These kinds of learning processes involve more than merely contingent changes in mentalities that “occur” independently of rationally reconstructible insights. But neither can they be produced and steered through the media of law and politics. The liberal state depends in the long run on mentalities that it cannot produce from its own resources.” (Habermas, 2008, p. 3)

adjustment process as un-steerable by modern liberal democracy alone, especially as it – at least in the sense in which it occurred in the Christian West – expressed itself in the form of the Edict of Nantes and became itself a condition of possibility for further developments in the same direction. Regarding its capacity as a state power supported on the pretended universality of Human Rights and the rule of law, Habermas suggests that analogous cultural transformations cannot possibly be fostered by liberal democracy.

This position on the ontological independence of civil society concerning legal and political dynamics constitutes a distinctive feature of the Habermasian formulation of discourse morality as underlying the liberal-democratic state (Habermas, 1998, pp. 251-252). According to this view, the deliberative instances of public opinion, which rely on the communicative thresholds established between different life-worlds, must in Habermas' view feed legislatures and state action, instead of being derived from them. This organic comprehension of liberal democracy nurtures then in Habermas a view of cultural hybridisation as an autonomous process, particularly with respect to the coercive means of a state-form that obtains its legitimacy from the institutionalised process of deliberation underlying public will-formation. Correspondingly, the *learning processes* alluded to must constitute in Habermas' view a legitimate expression of civil society's initiatives towards mutual epistemic understanding between religious and secular citizens, in this case. In this respect, at least two different perspectives can be brought about when considering the consequences of this Habermasian contention for a corresponding comprehension of RE. The first one would point to liberal democracy's reflexive acknowledgement, as a historical state-form, of its dependency on those doctrinal trajectories inside preceding world-views, something which would in itself inhibit the liberal state's capacity to exert any influence upon them. The second one would relate to liberal democracy's ethical impediment to engaging with any form of *production of mentalities* without incurring by doing so a political contradiction with its *pre-political foundations* (Habermas, 2008, p. 101-113), especially concerning freedom of thought. Even though perhaps in Habermas' conception of the historical ontology of the modern liberal state both arguments dialectically overlap, they have different implications for a conception of an RE that engages with epistemic recognition between secular and religious citizens. Be it on the side of liberal democracy's ontological inability to sensitively approach notions of sacrality that precede and constitute it, or in a self-defeating light via the violation of its liberal philosophical foundations, a question remains regarding the role of public education, and specifically of public RE. In this sense, we will review first some recent exegesis on the aforementioned remarks by Habermas,

to proceed to the analysis on Habermas' comprehension of subjectivity and of democratic education in order to elucidate possible comprehensions of these *learning processes* and *production of mentalities*. As will be seen below, this interpretative effort will provide relevant outlines for the development of a RE modality in line with Habermas' thought concerning democratic citizenship.

4. Some Exegesis on Habermas' view on the *cognitive process*

The previous formulation by Habermas on the non-coerceability of the cognitive processes necessary for the fostering of epistemic understanding between religious and secular citizens constitutes in this respect a late development of his thought about religion and liberal democracy. More recently (2010, 2011, 2017, 2018), Habermas has insisted on the importance of the post-metaphysical recognition of religious world-views and doctrines as encompassing a significant semantic potential for post-secular societies. In this respect, contemporary philosophy would need to address religious traditions as *sui generis* sources of social solidarity and with this of relevant insights for civil society's continuous self-configuration. This insight implies that those belief systems would exhibit significance for liberal democracy not only as matrices for the structuring of citizens' life-worlds (that is, as *doctrines of the good*) but also as carrying potentially pertinent intuitions for institutional reform and design (as *doctrines of the right*). In highly pluralised contexts such as those of contemporary, post-secular societies, this would imply for the liberal state the adoption of an epistemically open stance. This means that deliberation among different existential perspectives can be viewed as carrying meaningful potential not only for the subject under discussion but also for the institutional setting of deliberation itself. This is the reason why Habermas formulates the aforementioned *rational translation* as a logical requirement, placed primarily upon religiously inspired stances on the shared life, for the preservation of the state's independence and impartiality towards religious diversity. This *soft* stance of contemporary liberal-political philosophy on political participation by religious citizens would be based for Habermas also on the acceptance by de-transcendentalised reason of its genealogical ties with religious traditions. This connection would point to the gradual emanation of philosophical reasoning specifically from the ethical revolution posed upon ancient world-views – strongly characterised by the crystallisation of mythical-ritual complexes – by the prevalence of prophetism during the Axial Age. According to this view, however, post-metaphysical reason would have to avoid recognising itself as the ultimate stage of this process of intellectual transformation (that is, in the form on a

unidirectional *evolution*). Contrarily, it would have to recognise the historical simultaneity and multiple paths traversed by reason in religious traditions, giving rise to spiritual renovations, in some cases with potential implications for socio-political transformations.

As can be seen, Habermas conceives cultural hybridisation as a process endogenous to civil society, based exclusively on the rational persuasion derived from uncoerced deliberation. Thus, *learning processes* – such as those previously sketched for religious-secular understanding – would exhibit a *natural* rejection of political means different from those of deliberative rationality. In this sense, liberal democracy would rely in this respect on the outcome of institutionalised communicative procedures as its source of political legitimation. This feature would deprive the constitutional state of the legitimate means for driving its deliberative procedures in determined directions. Thus, for Habermas, forms of epistemic understanding between citizens from different cultural backgrounds cannot necessarily be intervened upon by a state-form based on the recognition of fundamental rights to political liberty, mainly because doing so will involve impinging on those same rights. In this respect, *learning processes* will point from this perspective to the outcome of a form of discourse ethics characterised by egalitarian universalism and fair representativeness of societal pluralism. This would imply the avoidance of both established clericalism or scientistic secularism as institutional frameworks for public deliberation, especially as they would inhibit the necessarily uncoerced character of its liberal-democratic variation. Similarly, it would call for the elucidation of normative validity-claims (such as those addressed by legislation) from the perspective of metaphysically-unbounded practical reason as the basis for collective will-formation in post-secular societies.

In this respect, it is important to highlight the historically recent character of the preceding Habermasian formulations on the relation between religion and liberal democracies. This addressing of the role of religious claims to normative validity in the constitutional state was developed by Habermas after the formulations of communicative action (1987) and the rationality inherent in the notion of the *rule of law* (1996). Consequently, Habermas has elaborated on the place of religion in his normative theory of democracy as an acknowledgement of both the genealogical importance of mythical-ritual systems of meaning in the emergence of philosophical thinking and the empirical contemporaneity of the subject. Thus, recent formulations by Habermas on religion have highlighted the importance of recognising the *ad hoc* rational progressions of religious world-views in history – primarily via theological diversification – and their nature as bearers of semantic potentials that are

necessarily foreign to post-metaphysical thinking. Simultaneously, Habermas has insisted on the need for *rational* translation as an unavoidable requisite for the rational intelligibility of those potentials in a cosmologically and epistemically pluralised audience. Thus, the recent Habermasian deepening on religion can be seen as providing an anthropologically and philosophically-informed reconstruction of religious transitions under the framework of the emergence of philosophical reasoning and its political formulations around fundamental rights and thus of constitutional democracy. Hence, late developments on the Habermasian synthesis can be seen as addressing the cognitive conditions of the epistemic understanding necessary for the advent of mutual learning processes between secular and religious reasoning.

The original 2008 formulation of the non-coerceability of cognitive changes seems not to have been extensively commented on since it was written. Besides some self-legitimizing conservative quoting¹⁰ and one application to the philosophic-juridical debate¹¹, Habermas' editor and commentator Eduardo Mendieta has highlighted it as its author's remark on the importance of mutual recognition between secular and religious citizens for the survival of constitutional democracy. For him, it exemplifies Habermas' assertion of the need by post-metaphysical thinking to recover and translate the almost untraceable ethical and moral contents of major religious traditions in order to widen its perspective on reality (Mendieta, 2014, pp. 237-238). For Mendieta, Habermas' understanding of religion goes in parallel with a historical comprehension of reason. According to this understanding, reason has developed as a historical force that has permeated both religious traditions and the social conditions of living via an increasing instrumental and ethical rationalisation, in the direction suggested by Weber. In this way, Habermas characterises the modern condition as one intensively defined not only by the prevalence of instrumentally rational action but also of ethical harmonisation within

¹⁰ The American Harvard Law Professor and former Ambassador of the US to the Holy See between 2008 and 2009, Mary Ann Glendon, has quoted it as a representative of the recognition by the “best secular thinkers in Europe” of the importance of religion as a cohesive factor in heterogeneous societies and as antidote against the excess of science, bio-engineering and abortion rights (Glendon, 2012). From this source, American pro-religious liberty litigant Kevin J. “Seamus” Hasson has also cited it, along with Glendon’s own words, to support similar claims in his book entitled *Believers, thinkers and founders: how we came to be one nation under God* (2016). The same has been done by the President of the National Council of Churches in Australia, Catholic Bishop Michael Putney (2012), although with a more ecumenical tone.

¹¹ In the fields of comparative law, the Canadian professor H. Patrick Glenn has also mentioned it in an article on *The Ethic of International Law* (Glenn, 2012) as an authoritative statement about the inextricable embeddedness between constitutional law and ethical and moral traditions. Additionally, Glenn considers it representative of a critique of a descriptive legal positivism in which a significative threshold of adherence to the law would be the sole criteria of legal validity, independently of “the interwoven fabric of law and ethics that has preceded it” (Glenn, 2012, p. 250).

religious doctrines, in Mendieta's view. Therefore, modernism would not constitute a mentality that would replace religion with anti-metaphysical rationalism. On the contrary, the advent of modern reason would have invigorated religious traditions themselves with the catalyst of prophetism and a more critical theological stance, which on occasion would have proved themselves corrosive for a dogmatic traditionalist. This dialectic between faith and reason would have even engendered *objective* moralities – like Human Rights – and, inside religious traditions, charismatic renovations in the direction of ethical rationalism. In this sense, the *learning process* between religion and reason would be related, in Mendieta's view, both with religion's self-critical attitude on the role of science and religious pluralism for the structuring of its public utterances, and with secular philosophy acknowledging its historical intertwining with religious thinking.

One exegetic variation comes from the South Korean educational scholar Duck-Joo Kwak (2012), who applies Habermas' conceptualisation of post-secular thinking to the pedagogical conception of "self-transformation" through education. For her, the crisis of modern education is related to what she portrays as its detaching from a cosmological or onto-teleological perspective on which the knowledge of the order of things leads to a meaningful ethical insight to guide one's own life. In her view, this situation, brought about primarily by the historical advent of modern rationalism, has deprived education of its moral force, leaving it adrift in a sea of totalitarian calls and empty technocratic management. In this regard, Kwak calls for an overcoming of narrow secularist perspectives. For this, she musters both Habermas' and Charles Taylor's contributions to the understanding of *the secular* as potential post-metaphysical grounds for the learning of virtues.

In Kwak's view, Habermas' middle position between secularism and fundamentalism leads him to adopt an epistemic position that can be viewed as open to learning from religion concerning its ethical and hope-related potential for civil society in liberal democracies (Kwak, 2012, p. 8). For her, this stance is also supported in Habermas' thought in the conviction that the liberal state depends for its survival on the character of mind-sets that this political system *cannot produce from its own resources* (p. 8). Habermas' formulation of the centrality of the learning processes points then, in Kwak's interpretation, to his view of the importance of a public sphere in which epistemic and cognitive modifications might take place as a result of meaningful communicative interaction. In this respect, communicative processes like these would be for Kwak essentially impossible to be state-driven given especially their historical precedence over – and ontic difference from – political liberalism. Thus, this historical uncertainty would have

to be addressed, in Kwak's perception, by an educational modality that aims for self-transformation as its explicit fundamental goal. This connection would ground the possibility of existence for a pluralistic public arena in which citizens will voluntarily engage as a tool for their human development. Then, an educational modality that promotes liberal-like goals without relying for that on coercive means will in this respect fill this vacuum by providing substantial cultural grounds for a deliberative public sphere. In this respect, the specific value-content and methodology of these educational guidelines – characterised in this case by the promotion of human freedom through autonomy-fostering pedagogies – would ground their non-state character, independently of whether the liberal state endorses those guidelines or not. Hence, a modality of *education for self-transformation* – as Kwak conceives it – would provide liberal democracy with an independent source with which to engage in order to pursue its survival and evolution.

As can be seen, both commentators remark the epistemic emphasis invested by Habermas on the proposal of the *learning processes* between religious and secular citizens. Accordingly, Mendieta will remark that the reciprocal cognitive opening to be achieved between these two types needs to be located in Habermas' broader horizon of his comprehension of de-transcendentalised reason and the philosophical potential of religious traditions. In this context, Kwak's interpretation could be seen as insisting on the importance of Habermas' specific preoccupation for the democratic state's limited scope of ethically-consistent pedagogical action. In this sense, Mendieta's emphasis on the active role of reason in modern forms of religion undoubtedly harmonises with Kwak's view of the public arena as the best possible place for the development of the *learning processes*. Hence, these two commentators of Habermas' most recent formulation on the place of religion in liberal democracies will correspondingly highlight the Habermasian de-transcendentalised epistemology and his comprehension of the ontological independence of the public sphere with respect to – and despite its historical relatedness with – the liberal-democratic state. Thus, a deep comprehension of the *learning processes* would have to approach religious manifestations under the light of modern reason's diversity of historical paths. Similarly, this view would have to consider the importance of public deliberation, particularly as a constitutive element of those *processes* themselves. However, a question remains if we desire to relate them with RE, which would necessarily concern Habermas' understanding of education itself and of its possible relations with a postulated *production of mentalities*, particularly in the ethical framework of the liberal state. In this sense, Habermas' views on subjectivity and education could shed some

light on the role of formal education on the promotion of the *learning process*. From here, valuable insights can be extracted for the formulation of a RE modality in connection with Habermas' general comprehension of religion in a liberal democracy. This identification will be attempted in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

5. Habermas and subjectivity: socialisation and ego-identity

Relying on both Durkheim's¹² sociology and J. H. Mead's psychology, Habermas' conception of subjectivity will find ground in a pragmatic philosophy of language. Under this light, the socially patterned uses of personal pronouns will engender further constructions of identity, in harmony also with validity criteria and logical statements that are held within world-views. Habermas' line of thought regarding subjectivity, as was highlighted in the previous pertaining section, considers here both the importance of the linguistic functions for the emergence of the *self*-instance and its later consolidation through the apparition in the conscience of a system of interiorised expectations towards Mead's *generalised other*. This process, in turn, would engender personality in the individual as an internalisation of normative patterns in the community. Habermas then de-ontologises Durkheim's *conscience collective* to interpret it from a socio-linguistic viewpoint in which the early and gradual incorporation of communicative structures plays a pivotal role in identity construction processes. This interpretation leads to considering Durkheim's societal states in the individual as a result of the effect of *symbolically mediated* and *normatively guided* interactions in consciousness during the early stages of life. In this sense, *socialisation* acquires a linguistic meaning in Habermas, providing an ontogenetic framework for the conception of a *socialised mindset*, in harmony with the different margins of individuation in communities but also with the tacit and explicit moral agreements and shared world-views.

¹² In Durkheim, classically, socialisation is conceived as the institutionalised and collectively arranged mechanism through which the adult generation directs significant margins of the cognitive and affective patterns of the younger generation, engendering in them the “social being” that society itself requires in order to survive. For Durkheim, education can be thus comprehended as the institutionalised socialisation of the newcomers by the adult society (see Durkheim, 1956, p. 28). For Habermas, however, the Durkheimian understanding of subjectivity is still too classically attached to an abstract formulation of human nature as logically preceding concrete forms of rationality. As he explains in chapter V of the *Theory of Communicative Action* (1987), Durkheim's intuition on the imprint on the individual by society is thought still metaphysically as engendering a whole new psychological self over the physis tendencies derived directly from human biology, incurring in a philosophical dualism as a logical foundation of his early sociological anthropology.

In this respect, for Habermas *subjectivity* needs to be understood in the light of the cultural and collective shaping of the individual character through the filter of collective mentality. When debating the naturalistic account of consciousness rendered by contemporary neuroscientific research (2008, pp. 151-180), Habermas stresses the link between the genesis of abstract rationality in the individual and his permanent acquaintance with the collective repository of representations and procedures which are stored primarily in the form of language. Correspondingly, human ontogeny towards self-consciousness is conditioned in Habermas' view to the availability of cultural resources for the individual. It is this engagement with the system of representation which gradually stimulates the individual's analytical capabilities and progressive mental development, leading in the direction of further stages of self-awareness and identification. In a particular sense, this process rehearses for Habermas the dialectical interdependence of language and rationality in human phylogeny, particularly given the strong ontological dependency of subjectivity on culture and socialisation (2008, p. 170).

In his 1979 essay *Moral development and ego identity*, Habermas addresses the interconnection between the individual's processes of identification, on the one hand, and her engagement in social roles and expectation-structures, on the other. In this work, he finally proposes a model of individual development in consonance with Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development. In this view, the adoption of social roles works as a trigger of the expansion of the child's system of expectations, prompting the engagement with more abstract definitions of behaviour beyond the immediacy of adult sanction and reward. In this model, further cognitive development is conceived as leading to the questioning of moral maxims and the engagement in ethical discussion during adolescence (Habermas, 1979, p. 84). This process of gradually increasing abstraction of the symbolic contents handled by the human mind is what allows the understanding of the development of the cognitive faculties towards the materialisation of reason and later of personhood. In this scenario, the gradual incorporation of such symbolic contents in the individual mind is what progressively engenders in it the traces of subjectivity through the patterning of cognitive and emotional features. In Habermas' thought in this work, the thus developed psychic structures are necessarily mediated by the individual's engagement with social-interactive situations that trigger the access to those contents. Later, the depositing of such interactive processes leads to the emergence of the *ego* instance primarily through the self-conscious apprehension and adscription of role-definitions. This process points then to

prompting configurations of *identity* through adherence to symbolic and role-based models with a higher threshold of independence from particular contexts¹³.

In this sense, *subjectivity* – understood as the psychic scenario of the multiple identifying processes of ego – is considered by Habermas here as profoundly entangled with the cultural roots of the community. Habermas later emphasised this connection through what in the *Theory of Communicative Action* (1987) he refers to as language's mediation in the ontogenesis of reason. From this perspective, common psychological features in a human group can be seen as genetically connected with its specific cultural patterns, with the latter permanently infused in the mind-set via socialisation. From this process, individuation will gradually emerge as a derivative result. This reconstruction leads the Habermasian perspective towards a conception of an ontological permeability of the subject concerning the collective. This feature is highlighted precisely through the notion of *subjectivity* as the distinctively human feature that sustains reason and cognition. It is precisely the intersubjective condition of human beings, and its communicative deployment, which in Habermas' view engenders cognition and the discursive dimension of reasons. In this respect, the relative autonomy of this specifically communicative space – particularly with respect to its organic substratum – is seen by Habermas as increasing over time, thus gradually granting rationality and communication considerable thresholds of independence from biological determinations. In this sense, reason is conceived by Habermas as socially and culturally embedded and ontologically interwoven with the genetically coded process of the development of human faculties, on the one hand, and with the linguistic and communicative context that structures cognition and subjectivity in particular directions, on the other. This socio-genetic embeddedness, especially in modern contexts characterised by the high valuation of freedom of thought, is conceived by Habermas as leading to further margins of individuation through intellectual emancipation from the shaping influence of circumstances (Habermas, 1979, p. 99).

It can be said then that Habermas' comprehension of subjectivity is necessarily non-essentialist. This characteristic implies that in his thought this concept is historically dependant on particular contexts of societal signification that intertwine with the genetically encoded development of human capacities to engender processes of ego-identity formation in individual

¹³ “Identity is produced through socialization, that is, through the fact that the growing child first of all integrates itself into a specific social system by appropriating symbolic generalities; it is later secured and developed through individuation, that is, precisely through a growing independence in relation to social systems.” (Habermas, 1979, p. 74)

members. In this light, *mentalities* are for Habermas malleable sedimentations that, unavailable to the isolated individual will, are however shaped historically by societal forces that find their epistemic, cognitive and emotional reflection in collective mind-sets and in their related individual self-images. This view constitutes for Habermas a realistic landscape that disbelieves in an idealistic pretension of a will totally autonomous of its delineating circumstances. However, it also holds perspectives of freedom – contrary to naturalistic accounts of thinking rendered by the technologically boosted contemporary natural sciences – in the linguistic dimension of reasons that can drive will with nothing other than the intrinsic coherence of arguments. In this manner, the theoretical problem of the possibility of freedom can be thought of from this perspective as entangled with the *learning* possibilities opened by the relative autonomy of language from biological and sociocultural determinants. This interpretive line provides space to consider enlightenment and educational dimensions not from rationalist perspectives that reify them as the final victory of reason over tradition, but from socio-linguistic understandings that enable learning and reflexive processes through collectively shaped subjectivities¹⁴.

This Habermasian comprehension of subjectivity could then provide a perspective that, holding a genetic intertwining of reasoning faculties, identity-constructions and world-views, would illuminate religion's multiple possibilities of socialising significance. Consequently, this could contribute to the articulation of the purposes of a RE modality regarding the Habermasian post-metaphysical understanding of reason and the role of religion in the democratic public sphere. For this, a Habermasian-inspired comprehension of education can help us further draw the place of RE's learning possibilities in the scenario of processes of institutionalised socialisation. To this specific topic, we will now turn.

6. Habermas and education: critical enlightenment

6.1. Habermas on education

It must be said that Habermas has not treated education as a separated and specialised area of research, apart from some particular focus on higher education themes and problems

¹⁴ In this same direction are learning processes conceived by the aforementioned commentator Mendieta (2002, p. 20).

(Habermas, 1987). This is related mainly to his accentuated sociological perspective that understands it as an integral part of broader societal processes of institutional reproduction. As Murphy and Fleming (2010) point out, Habermas generally refers to education's sphere of meaning especially in terms of *learning processes* and concerning modifications of the ontological assumptions sustaining the individual's life-world. As Fleming (2010) points out, *learning* is comprehended in the Habermasian view as intrinsic to the human condition, in particular as this is constituted by symbolically mediated interaction. Thus, and as Habermas himself expresses it in *Legitimation Crisis* (1976) about the "automaticity" of the mechanisms of societal evolution, "not *learning*, but *not-learning* is the phenomenon that calls for an explanation at the socio-cultural stage of development" (Habermas, 1976, p. 15). In this respect, this structural disposition towards cognitive transformations would find support in the Habermasian comprehension of human rationality as communicatively constituted. This comprehension implies that the development and deployment of reasoning faculties in history would lead to permanent modifications of the stock of validated knowledge and of the correlated forms of self-understanding. Thus, the inhibition of this intrinsic openness towards epistemic and cultural changes would be related in Habermas' view to societal circumstances pointing towards the uncritical subjugation to the *force of the circumstances*. As we will see next, this form of intersubjective alienation of the learning disposition inherent in the human condition would also be related to the uncritical accumulation of information and expertise, especially as it constitutes an uncritical learning form disengaged from the subject's problematisation of his field of experiences. This reflexive involvement with interlocutors' life-worlds will emerge then as a core criterium of a Habermasian-inspired conception of education, especially in the form of the pursuit of a critical widening of the subject's vital perspectives.

The themes of enlightenment and reflexivity are to be found in early Habermasian considerations regarding political emancipation, particularly in the critical-theoretical tradition. In *Legitimation Crisis* (1976), Habermas stressed the importance of discursive participation as a critical criterion in any awareness-raising process concerning, for instance, the contradictions of late capitalism and structural causes of poverty. In this respect, an understanding reached through argumentation among deliberative citizens is highlighted by Habermas as a token of any learning process and thus as a core educational value. This assessment is based on the consideration of this form of agreement as a platform for multi-lateral processes of self-reflection and with this for the realisation of the critical potential of knowledge, be it either instrumental, interpretive or critical itself. According to Habermas,

deliberative politics represent a grounding of reason in social practices, allowing for the emergence of forms of dialectic intertwining between theory and praxis. As a consequence of this process, reflexive frameworks for action and knowledge-construction will emerge, avoiding their mutual marginalisation and the consequent emergence of political apathy. In this manner, education is seen from the Habermasian perspective as constituting a chapter of the grounding of rationality in communicative practices, thus fostering reflexive practices, especially in connection to addressing of validity claims¹⁵. Hence, critical emancipation of citizens – which could be considered a central theme of Habermas' insights on education – is enhanced by this non-coercive dialogue in which full participation is guaranteed through the democratisation also of the cognitive resources that support it, as will be highlighted below. This core feature, in turn, renders the process "critical" in the sense of enhancing the reflexive self-understanding of participants. This result would be achieved, as stated above, through the binding force of argumentation, enabling the simultaneous possibilities of active learning and praxis-transformation.

Relatedly, Habermas addresses educational considerations regarding what he calls the *juridification* and bureaucratisation of school and family relations in the second volume of *Theory of Communicative Action* (1987). In his work, the extension of regulatory procedures over the life-world – brought about chiefly by the welfare state – is portrayed as engendering a colonisation of communicational practices by legal and administrative rationality. For Habermas, this process of technocratic imposition of discourses and logics of action has resulted in a loss of the communicational potential inscribed in educational and other non-state, interactional dynamics. Habermas claims that this transformation of the life-world, paradoxically, goes in parallel with the conceptualisation of education as a service – subjected thus to market mechanisms – instead of as a universal right. Habermas argues then for a de-juridification of pedagogical communication, liberating thus its dialogical possibilities via the promotion of pedagogical innovation.

In a university-related work, Habermas advances the claim of complementing the technologic shift in higher education in Germany with more philosophical content-related courses (1987, p. 6). In this work, Habermas emphasises the importance of reflexivity in the production of

¹⁵ “Non-reflexive learning takes place in action contexts in which implicitly raised theoretical (technical) and practical validity claims are naively taken for granted and accepted or rejected without discursive consideration. Reflexive learning takes place through discourses in which we thematise practical validity claims that have become problematic or have been rendered problematic.” (Habermas, 1976, p. 15)

knowledge in all its forms (p. 8). In this scheme, philosophy is considered a promoter of epistemic self-awareness among the different disciplines for the production of knowledge. Habermas then claims that, via philosophical education, a rationalist ideal of critical enlightenment could be pursued, understood as the self-elucidation of the cognitive and political conditions that surround and coerce science and the different forms of knowledge. The achievement of this goal would unavoidably require, in Habermas' view, the means of democratic debate, in particular as they are governed only by the binding force of argumentation. In this way, student engagement with the different forms of the taught content can be promoted, fostering its critical appropriation through learners' awareness of the meaning of that content concerning their life's perspectives. In this way, political autonomy can also be promoted through higher education, mainly via the strengthening of students' deliberative character and the communicative transformation of their life-world.

As can be seen so far, a critical modality of education in Habermasian terms would offer a comprehension of the learning process as an actively engaging affair that requires direct participation as a core element for the development of reflexivity. Without this central feature, any learning process would be viewed from this perspective as acquiring a mechanical character that does not cross the boundary of the life-world of learners. Additionally, in an open dialogue with, for instance, the religious world-views inhabiting life-worlds, a Habermasian critical education would also necessarily involve a political sensitivity to the cognitive properties and normative content of those world-views. This epistemic openness would find grounds in a discursive conception of subjectivity as based not in universal neuronal patterns but symbolically mediated interaction. As was highlighted in the previous section, it is in this light that we can understand the consideration of the importance of ontological certainty in children's development of rational faculties. According to this view, religious and other traditional forms are not necessarily incompatible with the development of critical-thinking skills. On the contrary, such forms of cultural embedding would provide substantive ethical horizons for the complete intersubjective development of individual rationality and self-awareness. This cultural background can be seen from this perspective as an indispensable platform for the attainment of more critical and self-conscious forms of subjectivity, providing opportunities for the complete emergence of liberally and democratically consistent forms of ego-identity. Thus, considering the risks of normative fundamentalism and cognitive closure implicit in religious socialisation, a Habermasian-inspired form of critically-oriented education can be seen as able to find support in – and even to cognitively reshape tendencies coming

from – these forms of cultural embedding of individual identity. This compatibility between critical education and religious socialisation would be based in turn on the former’s potential for articulation with the rationalist tendencies inscribed in different religious trends of thought. An illustration of this can be found in Habermas’ comprehension of prophetism as a recognition of the latency and development of reason in religious traditions. Thus, the acknowledgement of socialising and ethical relevance to religious world-views would not lie for Habermas either in a metaphysics that grants existence to religious dogmas or in a timid form of liberalism that musters religious traditions with the exclusive objective of counteracting religious radicalisation. On the contrary, this understanding would recognise the potential of different doctrinal developments among religions for a liberal, critical public education oriented to the active fomenting of both rational autonomy in the subject and mutual understanding in epistemically diverse communities.

6.2. Habermas and the educational literature

Having commented then on Habermas’ explicit allusions to education, we will now attempt to track the Habermasian proto-educational themes of *learning processes* and *critical enlightenment* in the educational literature. This overview will help us delineate the appropriation of Habermasian thought by educational thinking and its consequences for RE.

6.2.1. Ewert (1991)

With the aid of a computer-assisted bibliographical revision, Ewert (1991) provides a comprehensive overview of the Habermasian influence on English language educational thought. By dividing his exploration into three main areas (knowledge interests, communicative action and legitimation crisis), this author traces the scope and extent of the appropriation of Habermas’ work by educational thinking until the early nineties (including Young’s work mentioned below). Ewert’s main conclusion is that the most critical facets of the Habermasian influence are those associated with critical theory, particularly concerning the proviso of a philosophical base for the critique of the prevalence of instrumental rationality and technocratic hegemony in curricular design and educational organisation in general. Correspondingly, the sociology of education is quoted by Ewert as the area with the highest incorporation of Habermas’ work. This influence has taken the form particularly of critical appraisals to contemporary tendencies in education and a revindication of educational practice

as a domain of knowledge-construction. Thus, educationalists can be said to have appropriated Habermas primarily via the critical analysis of societal tendencies in connection with the historical structuring of educational systems. Over this landscape, active calls have been made for strong communicative engagement with learners, something which would necessarily require the underlining of their deliberative capabilities as a requisite for the fostering of their critical thinking.

6.2.2. *Young (1989)*

The Habermasian topic of educational enlightenment is remarked by the Australian scholar Robert Young. In his monograph *A Critical Theory of Education* (1989), this author develops a thorough revision of Habermas' actual and possible contributions to education, highlighting the implications of his theory especially for classroom praxis and direct educational communication. In Young's view, modern education exhibits, especially in its industrialised Western cases, a structural crisis of legitimation. This crisis stands in correspondence with the general analogous one exhibited by the nation state in economically and ideologically globalised societies. According to Young, in this context, education has lost its credibility as a meritocratic mechanism of social mobility as it has strengthened its bonds with global capitalism. Because of this, education has progressively subordinated the different manifestations of culture to the all-encompassing world-view of profit and productivity, something which has contributed to the perpetuation of the structural segregation of disadvantaged sectors of society. In this scenario, political ideologies of the late twentieth century tried to compensate for this lack of legitimacy of education with political strategies of different kinds. To do so, they made education a privileged area of intervention, trying to fill the vacuum of credibility through a stronger form of indoctrination. Either on the side of right-wing nationalism or leftist totalitarianism, the state school became a disseminating tool of the established ideology, also as a mean of regaining public legitimacy. Correspondingly, here is where, in Young's view, the enlightened ideal of freedom granting through the cultivation of reason – which underlies the formulation of public education – finally found the limit of its plausibility, specifically in the multiple materialisations of school as a primarily ideological institution. For Young, the school became then an indoctrinatory socialising device instead of a promoter of rational autonomy through the study of knowledge.

For Young, however, this totalitarian character of schooling is associated not exclusively with the curriculum and classroom-teaching but especially with the form in which these contents are taught. Here Young refers mainly to which he addresses as “traditional teaching”. In it, students are treated as passive subjects with absolutely no control of the cognitive agenda of the class, which would be characterised by a fixed and unquestioned set of knowledge. Correspondingly, such a set-up will be mobilised through the privileging of the didactics of questions and answers. This strongly established educational framework does not allow pupils, in Young’s view, to establish a significant connection between their knowledge and life-world. For this reason, learners will not experience meaningfulness in their learning, as the requisite free transformation of their self-understanding will not take place. Young’s endorsement of more active pedagogies does not lead him, however, to a rejection of children’s immersion in a *culture of origin*. On the contrary, his criticism of *traditional pedagogy* involves possible ways of engagement between critical teaching and cultural and religious traditions. In his view, such engagement can occur insofar as the pedagogical act holds the perspective of fostering pupils’ learning abilities instead of focusing on the lesson’s content as their primary goal and criteria of effectiveness¹⁶. For Young, the critical paradigm in adult/child communication in this respect can be identified in Habermas’ comprehension of psychoanalytic therapeutics. Due to its communicational teleology – as oriented towards the patient’s self-liberation via aetiological awareness –, psychoanalysis provides in Young’s view the communicative paradigm for a Habermasian-inspired education. By promoting self-awareness of the different types of vital conditionings, educators could then transmit cultural traditions and simultaneously foster pupils’ critical thinking and learning abilities. For Young, this can be done without destroying the *ontological certainty* offered by those cultural traditions, especially in the early stages of learning.

6.2.3. Harkin (1998)

Harkin (1998) also addresses the Habermasian derivations to education from the perspective of a defence of what he considers the *modernist* project in this field. This author portrays this as the honest pursuit of educational progress despite the postmodern criticism of any

¹⁶ Although Young stresses that “ego autonomy, in its full sense, implies both freedom from repression and from complete immersion in the normative world of one’s own culture of origin” (1989, p. 110), he highlights this right after discussing the importance of conventional morality in the development of cognitive and moral reasoning (Young, 1989, pp.108-109).

teleological discourse. In this respect, Harkin highlights communicative action as containing a feasible pathway for the cultivation of rationality beyond the essentialisation of the individual knower and the concealment of its constitutive power-relationships. Thus, for Harkin, the Habermasian emphasis on language usages provides a tool for endorsing a modality of education in light of the pursuit of the subject's autonomy concerning its determining circumstances. This view will allow for the affirmation of the learner not only as *ends in themselves* but especially as a deliberative member of a community of knowers that grounds their enquiries. Thus, communicative action - primarily via its pedagogical implementation in classroom language - would provide for the author a *road not yet taken* (p. 433) on educational fields, particularly as it would found a conception of educational mediation as informed by the promotion of autonomic thinking.

6.2.4. *Sorde-Martí (2004)*

Another educationalist appropriation of Habermas can be found in Sorde-Martí (2004). For this author, educational considerations naturally derive from social theory, especially in the case of the inter-disciplinary Habermasian approach, a feature that justifies for Sorde its pedagogical relevance. After a general account of the evolution of Habermas' work, this author highlights the emphasis on communicative rationality and discourse morality as providing a robust framework for the analysis of educational practices. Correspondingly, Sorde will highlight Habermas' formulation of the world-disclosure function of language as providing a relevant platform for conceiving educational communication as a tool for cultural resignification in learners. This characteristic will provide opportunities for rendering education more inclusive. Sorde also stresses the Habermasian critique of the marketisation and technocratic bureaucratisation of the life-world as an insightful framework for considering pedagogical scenarios. Via the implementation of discourse ethics' communicative conditions, learning processes are portrayed by this author as able to achieve stages of autonomy-promotion in subjects, fostering with that intersubjective awareness and critical thinking on reality. These dynamics will allow then for deploying of educational practices in a sense different to reinforcing performance and thus to social reproduction. In this regard, Habermas' thought is viewed by Sorde as providing relevant insights for education in general, especially in the direction of a greater democratisation of knowledge and critical-analytical skills, and towards a more comprehensive exercise of citizenship.

6.2.5. *Englund (2010)*

Englund (2010) assigns Habermas to the tradition of deliberative democracy and assesses his influences on education as not necessarily univocal. However, he argues in favour of considering Habermasian neo-pragmatism as leading to the recognition of the educational need to cultivate abilities on perspectivism and argumentation, especially as these are seen as able to produce significant changes in learners' judgements and discriminations. Englund sees an educational potential along these lines as residing in a communicational situation oriented to the elucidation of validity claims. In this respect, Englund considers that Habermasian thought exhibits relevant educational features. Englund also defends the state character of public education, particularly as providing a communicative instance independent from private-parental determinations. Thus, schooling can be seen from this perspective as pluralistic and open to the challenging of family values when they counteract the cultivation of dispositions for independent thinking. Englund recognises however that state education runs the risk of becoming paternalistic, discouraging the assumption of political agency by its direct beneficiaries.

Regarding this, Englund considers that, historically, greater access to education – associated with the extension of the welfare state – has been accompanied by what he considers as a more significant political traditionalism, particularly concerning the overwhelming role of the state over that of citizenship. For Englund, this situation has contemporarily evolved towards greater segregation (in connection with trends that he associates with identity politics and multiculturalism in education) and a reduction of the distributive features of the state. He portrays this historical landscape as impinging upon autonomy-oriented formation, mainly due to the current privileging of the educational rights of parents. For Englund, these trends can be counteracted then by the promotion of deliberative communication in schools, based on the shared values of honesty, respect for others, the reaching of understanding – conceived as the ultimate aim of discussion –, the thorough exposition of differences and the importance of comprehending alternative viewpoints on the same issues. Therefore, in his view, the application of Habermasian thought to education can be seen as embedded in the progressist Deweyan tradition, which has been – for Englund – abandoned in educational practice. Englund considers however that the relation between deliberative communication and education is contingent, and that the implementation of this paradigm to teaching and learning must be decided by the teacher's sound judgement (which this author connects to the

Aristotelian virtue of *phronesis* or prudence). In this view, both the contents and the process of classroom argumentation need to be considered against the level of cognitive complexity achieved by students, along with other relevant factors. Similar to the disposition mentioned above towards the criticism of the outcomes of parental socialisation that are antagonistic to autonomic thinking skills, this discretionary element means that authoritative dispositions and utterances by teachers also can and need to be challenged, although Englund does not offer guidelines for the materialisation of this proviso. Englund then assesses deliberative communication, in its institutional-educational dimension, as not demanding total equality among interlocutors, particularly concerning the stated discretionary prominence of the teacher's position in the classroom.

6.2.6. *Joldersma and Deakin Crick (2010)*

Joldersma and Deakin Crick (2010) propose a Habermasian-inspired model of lifelong learning, thought of as counteracting what they perceive as the prevailing economic emphasis of the literature on this field (Joldersma and Deakin Crick, 2010, p. 142). For them, a complete exercise of democratic citizenship would then require the general comprehension of citizens as learners, leading to their further empowerment in a critical-analytical direction. Thus, the application of discourse ethics to education would lead to the endorsing of a lifelong learning model in which multilateral and comprehensive deliberative engagement exerts a primordial influence. These authors summarise the principles informing this model as contained in seven dimensions: *a person's sense of their ability to learn and change*, leading to the learner's diachronic self-understanding; *the critical curiosity needed for learning*, as promoting autonomous engagement with the educational process; *meaning-making*, understood as the bridging of the taught content with the learner's life-world related experiences; *resilience*, fostering tolerance to frustration and a broad exploration of learning possibilities; *creativity*, relying strongly on perspectivism and imagination; *learning relationships*, interpreted as the acknowledgement of the necessary balance between isolation and social-connectedness in the learning process; and, finally, what the authors call *strategic awareness*, thought of as the promotion of the learner's recognition of the particularities of his/her own learning process and thus of his/her meta-cognitive self-understanding.

6.2.7. *Martin (2012)*

Another application of Habermas' ideas to education comes from Martin (2012). For this author, educational ideals and policies necessarily fall into the domain of public moral concerns. In this respect, education necessarily demands public deliberation as its source of legitimacy. Correspondingly, curricular and other educational designs need to call for particular conceptions of educational value, especially in a scenario of discursive engagement towards the reaching of binding agreements. Martin then evaluates R. S. Peters' claim regarding the analytical foundation of education on the "worthiness" criterion and rules it out in favour of a more comprehensive, shared conception of educational value itself, especially in a post-metaphysical world. This assessment is based on the consideration of Peters' formulation as necessarily restricted to ethical concerns, and thus as unfit for the public morality-character of educational value. Martin then addresses Habermas' discourse morality as an analytical framework for the definition of the ideal conditions for educational agreements in epistemically pluralised societies. In his evaluation, Martin reaches the conclusion of the importance of realising the ideal of inclusive deliberation as the locus of liberal legitimacy of educational concerns. This contention led him to the consideration of the analytical and expressive skills necessary for participation in public deliberation, especially as they provide a safeguard against the imposition of ethical models on new generations. Thus, the complete materialisation of the conditions for deliberative legitimation on educational grounds would then call for the democratisation of the cognitive capacities for the exercise of argumentation, particularly as enabling incumbents to assess the reasons offered by the counterpart in an epistemically acceptable way. In this manner, common schooling appears for Martin as a vehicle for the promotion of adequate deliberative dispositions in learners, a form of instruction that will support the future exercise of their political autonomy by providing the intellectual resources needed for engaging in considerations of public morality, of which the educational ones are an example. This pondering of the generational factor in matters of deliberative inclusion is posited by Martin as derived from the application of discourse ethics to the public understanding of education. Similarly, this socialisation-related contention is deemed by its author as a *complex-proceduralist* position on the political-philosophical analysis.

6.2.8. *Crioni, Gomes and Soares-Zuin (2015)*

Crioni, Gomes and Soares-Zuin (2015) compare Adorno & Horkheimer's perspectives on late capitalism on the one hand and Habermas' on the other, as an interpretative vehicle for

underlining their respective educational considerations. In this context, the authors highlight Habermas' formulation of the legitimation crisis of the post-welfare state as central for his comprehension of the thresholds of human freedom inscribed in the communicative validation of truth-claims. Instead of arriving at a pessimistic historical landscape characterised by a totally administrated society in which the ideological veil imposed upon the exploitation of labour has become the dominant form of consciousness, Habermas' argument would lead towards the defence of the public sphere as the locus of rational deliberation and then of the margin of intentional civic reformism. Regarding education, the authors highlight the importance of recovering Habermas' criticism of the juridification of social interaction as providing grounds for the recognition of the importance of actors' self-regulation over the state's. In this respect, reciprocal engagement in terms of validity claims would serve as the instance for the autonomous exercise of citizenship and human freedom in a context characterised by tendencies towards the colonising extension of systemic forces over the life-world. Thus, discursive exploration of knowledge-claims and the normative basis of human interaction would constitute the Habermasian key insights for educationally concerned perspectives, according to the authors. In this line, the authors remark on the need for an argumentatively reached consensus¹⁷ as a foundational Habermasian intuition for the envisaging of educational policies that contribute to the continuous legitimation of the public sphere and its related liberal-democratic institutions.

6.2.9. *Conclusions on the reviewed literature*

As may be seen, the appropriation of Habermasian thought to education has exhibited important tendencies since the nineteen-eighties. Among those, two in particular can be highlighted. One is related to the application of the critical theoretical perspective on educational themes. In this field, curricular design has emerged as a prominent contentious area, especially with the presence of a robust Habermasian call for the consideration of practitioners as knowledge-builders. In this respect, the different forms of the Habermasian knowledge-interest have provided a relevant nomenclature for the denunciation of the heterogeneity of cognitional interests constituting the curriculum. Consequently, not only technical-managerial (represented mainly by the natural sciences) and hermeneutical-comprehensive (represented by the historical disciplines and the humanities), but also the

¹⁷ On a relevant critical discussion on the character of consensus-building as an overarching objective of Habermas' *discourse ethics*, see Jeziarska (2019).

critical-emancipating areas of knowledge would be required to be present in the formation of new generations, the latter being mobilised by the teachers' pedagogical and practical knowledge. In line with this, educational practice is viewed by this literature as providing a relevant scenario for the materialisation of the liberational knowledge-interest in learners, in particular via a critically-informed, deliberative pedagogy that fosters autonomic thinking throughout the curriculum. This interpretation provides grounds for the criticism of traditional, question-answer pedagogies as automatically fostering cognitive dependency in learners, as in Young. This critique would also be addressed to the predominance of a performance-related approach to education, based on the technical-scientific interest and defining learning success exclusively as the demonstration of the possession of the correspondent knowledge and skills. Against this background, a critical form of education is viewed as promoting self-aware modes of learning, further fostering autonomic trends and habits of thinking, and with this a solid formation for liberal-democratic citizenship. This insight can be seen as encompassing a strong tendency in early educational appropriation of Habermas' work, especially concerning its critical-theoretical heritage and developments.

Another critical, relatively more recent trend, is informed mainly by the communicative emphasis of Habermas' work since the *Theory of the Communicative Action* (1981). In this area, educational themes have been addressed primarily as pointing towards consensus-building procedures in pluralist societies. This perspective has correspondingly problematised curricular design under the light of an irreducible multiplicity of conceptions of the good. This scenario, which automatically renders problematic a shared moral formulation of educational value, is framed then as compatible with a deliberative institutionalisation along the lines of Habermasian discourse ethics, as in Martin. Thus, reciprocal communicative engagement – in terms of elucidation of normative validity-claims – is viewed as providing a procedural solution for the political problem of moral consensus-building in diversified contexts. This Habermasian insight is viewed then as central for the formulation of educational policies in late-capitalist societies, characterised by an interconnected global pluralism and the institutionalisation of liberal democratic regimes in the West. Educationally, this view also leads towards a heightened consideration of the importance of the formation of new generations into deliberative skills and dispositions that guarantee the availability of cognitive and communicative resources for their future exercise of civic rights. In this respect, this interpretation of Habermas identifies a constitutive tension between education for autonomy and an accentuated version of multiculturalism in which parental rights perform a dominant

role in children's education. In this respect, a balance is proposed between individual autonomy and socio-cultural awareness concerning educational ideals, as proposed, for instance, by Joldersma and Deakin Crick. This contention is based on the view of autonomy promotion in education as relying on the communicative embeddedness of rationality and identity formation, acknowledging thus the constitutive character of cultural socialisation for the emergence of autonomic thinking in the individual. This analytical trend connects with the former one also via the Habermasian criticism of juridification of educational relations, as in Crioni-Gomes and Soares-Zuin. This school *statalisation* of the life-world – brought about in Habermas' view mainly by welfarist policies – is then viewed as a vehicle for the administrative suffocation of pedagogical innovation and ethically informed communication.

In the following, we will address the appropriation of Habermas in the recent RE literature. We will try to interpret the findings there in light of the tendencies identified in this section.

6.3. Habermas and RE¹⁸

6.3.1. *Miedema & Bertram-Troost (2008)*

An application of Habermasian ideas to RE can be found in Miedema & Bertram-Troost (2008). For these authors, the Habermasian comprehension of religion leads to its consideration as a potentially positive force for the democratic-liberal consolidation of the public sphere. Based on the view of contemporary political trends (such as the waves of immigration experienced by late twentieth century Europe and the growing of anti-religious sentiment after the 9/11 events), Miedema & Bertram-Troost underline the importance of considering a “religious dimension of citizenship” itself. This notion is held by the authors particularly as prompting an epistemic sensitivity towards alternative world-views and conceptions of the good, and with this their more thorough inclusion into liberal political culture. For Miedema & Bertram-Troost, this opening constitutes a necessary feature of contemporary democracies as they increasingly incorporate alien political experiences anchored in different cultural backgrounds. From these premises, the authors proceed to portray schooling as occupying an intermediate position between the public and the private spheres. This particular locus will

¹⁸ Classically, Robert Jackson (2004, p. 21) quotes Habermas as an exponent of the modernist paradigm for the understanding of society, which privileges a reflexive and reformist position towards the products of Western reason.

provide this institution with the opportunity to foster processes of recognition and reciprocal learning among pluralist citizenship. Thus, the preparation of new generations for multicultural coexistence and genuine communicative engagement in the twenty-first century's globalised society justify in their view the call for stronger links between civic and religious education, a connection based for the authors on both the promotion of democratic citizenship and the subjects' particular dynamics of identity-construction. For the authors a modality of educational policy on the subject along these lines would visualise the – for them – constitutive connection between political and pedagogical issues.

6.3.2. *Fabretti (2013)*

Fabretti (2013) also explores the application of Habermasian concepts to RE. For this, this author relies mainly on a revision of the different accommodations for RE to be found across Europe and, analytically, on the notion of the *post-secularist society*. For Fabretti, this Habermasian sociological category exhibits heuristic relevance because it is based on the acknowledgement of a) religious plurality as a constitutive feature of contemporary society; b) the public-deliberative nature of the religious voices constituting that diversity; and c) the desirability of religious *pluralism*, understood as the pursuit of peaceful coexistence and cultural enrichment under liberal-democratic political conditions. Fabretti also contrasts the notion of *post-secularism* with that of *multiculturalism*, arguing in favour of their complementarity as pointing towards the need for overcoming a narrow, secularistic comprehension of modernity. In this same line, Fabretti insists on the Habermasian posited need for *complementary learning processes* as highlighting the intercultural dimension beyond the mere tolerant coexistence of different conceptions of the good. She addresses then the locus of RE in this scheme, formulating it as a central institution for the achievement of those *learning processes*. Fabretti argues then in favour of a non-confessional approach to RE, consonant with the need for an unbiased multi-religious curriculum for this area. With this aim, this author assesses the notions of *learning about* and *from religion* and leans finally towards the latter as providing an appropriate educational framework for the inter-religious and religious-secular cognitive intertwining encompassed by the *post-secular* category. With this in mind, Fabretti suggests some guidelines for a conception of RE in a *post-secular school*. For her, this subject must be characterised by the combination of both phenomenological and more theologically informed approaches that illustrate the religious point of view as a source of potentially moral insights for democratic citizenship.

6.3.3. Davis (2011; 2014)

Relying on the Habermasian formulation and ethnographic accounts on the matter, Davis develops the notion of the *post-secular child* as offering insights for the deconstruction of the modern comprehension of childhood. In his view, the romantic comprehension of *the child* centred around notions of moral innocence and vulnerability set the background for not only the deployment of generative technologies of power on children – in the form of popular education – but also their liminal interpretations as privileged mediators of the sacred – such as the *spiritualist ones*. From these modernist manifestations, imaginaries around childhood will offer in the contemporary world signs of a renewed attention to this central social category as encompassing a decisive stage for the shaping of the adult personality. This cultural and media focus on childhood – embedded in psychoanalytic comprehensions of especially early infancy – will in Davis' eye give rise to the epistemic de-centring of this category, particularly in connection the emergence of institutionally diversified sources of specialised knowledge on this subject. Correspondingly, this lack of meta-narratives on childhood will seal the post-secular understanding of this category, differentiating itself though from post-modernist scepticism regarding this notion's heuristic potentiality by the exploration of any relevant semantic potential among pre-modern and alternative sources of meaning – including religious ones – for its configuration. On this basis, educational possibilities could be envisaged that may insightfully answer to the contemporary simultaneity of epochal comprehension – and their moral and educational significance – of childhood.

6.3.4. Loobuyck (2015)

Similarly, Loobuyck (2015) develops an application of the Habermasian post-secular concept to the field of RE. Despite accepting that Habermas himself has not addressed education as a matter of analysis, Loobuyck also considers that the *post-secular* category offers essential insights for educational concerns. Among these insights, Loobuyck emphasises the demand for reciprocal and complementary learning processes. In this sense, the achieving of mutual epistemic understanding – and with this of potential normative modifications inside each perspective – appears for Loobuyck as a constitutive requirement of any society's self-understanding as *post-secular*. In line with this, he asserts that RE can and needs to play a distinctive role in the bringing about of those learning processes. In order to better support this claim, Loobuyck relies on a three-level model for the comprehension of those processes:

institutional, resembling the ethical transformations towards a greater religious tolerance experienced by early Modern Christianity under liberal institutions; *theological*, as those represented by the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council; and *attitudinal*, derived from the pluralist coexistence of different religious perspectives and doctrines of the good. Loobuyck considers the last stage as the most desirable one under post-secular conditions, particularly concerning the need for religious-secular understanding experienced by these types of societies. However, both the *institutional* and *theological* levels are considered by him as important preconditions of the *attitudinal* one, providing an infrastructural scenario for state action. Here is where RE can exert a significant influence on the achieving of the respective learning processes, according to Loobuyck. He then proceeds to underline the notion of *Learning from Religion* as better encompassing the pedagogical position for aligning RE with the *learning processes* as a form of educational achievement.

Similarly, Loobuyck upholds a non-confessional and compulsory RE subject in religiously integrative forms of schooling as an adequate educational setting for the consideration of this academic area under a Habermasian perspective. He also considers that RE must integrate with that of citizenship-education and that it must be based exclusively on religious studies, which in his view rules out any form of teaching of Intelligent Design or Creationism. Loobuyck does not discard the potential public financing of confessional RE in separate schools, as long as safeguards regarding egalitarianism and tolerance are observed. Finally, Loobuyck then remarks that the implementation of this particular pedagogical provision would imply different consequences in secularist educational systems – leading to the higher visibility of the RE subject – and in confessional ones – pointing towards the pursuit of more non-confessional approaches to this academic area.

6.3.5. *Franken (2018)*

Franken (2018) addresses the current situation of Islamic RE in Belgium from a Habermasian perspective. To do so, this author relies mainly on the notions of *post-secularism*, *complementary learning processes* and *reflexive religion* as providing a framework for the comprehension of the multifaceted role that religion can play in contemporary societies. Franken holds the view of religion and philosophy as able to incorporate ethical reasonings from each other, a process with the potential to prompt cognitional transformations on both perspectives. Correspondingly, religious faith can be seen as capable of adopting self-critical

stances, especially concerning matters of ethics and public morality, as the early modern examples illustrate. For Franken, this comprehension of religion, in particular, is connected in Habermas' thought to the aforementioned widened view of religion's possible functions in a contemporary, post-secular society. Either in the form of the promotion of religious terrorism, the fulfilling of self-esteem and existential stabilisation, constitutional socialisation or educational enrichment of the political culture, religious faith needs to be seen as a contemporary intellectual formation that faces political modernity and other products of modern reason in a varied manner. In this respect, promoting those outcomes of this religious-modernity encounter that prove compatible with peaceful coexistence, reciprocal learning processes and the continuous enrichment of modern democratic life becomes a salient concern. Franken states then that – from the Habermasian perspective – there are substantial grounds for the claim of an objective, pluralistic and critically oriented mandatory RE subject for common schooling in liberal democracies. This proviso is envisioned by Franken as compatible with state-run or private education. In the latter case, however, certain safeguards revolving around greater state control must be observed in order to guarantee its liberal compatibility. This view would imply especially the regulation of curricular design (including the delivery of a mandatory “core curriculum”), teacher-training provisions and textbook-related materials.

6.3.6. Conclusions on the reviewed literature

As can be seen, the appropriation of Habermas by the RE literature has highlighted some common features derived from his recent formulations on the post-secular society. A particular emphasis has been placed upon the presence of RE in the basic curriculum. In this respect, the mandatory character of this area has been advanced on the grounds of the relevance of the religious dimension for the integral exercise of liberal-democratic citizenship. This correspondence has been portrayed as based on Habermas' recognition of the religious-secular reciprocal awareness as constitutive elements of the public sphere in post-secular societies. As Loobuyck points out, a mutual epistemic understanding across this divide would represent a fundamental feature of this type of society, allowing for transversal processes of consensus-building. In this respect, RE emerges as a central pedagogical instance for the equipment of new generations with a vital facet of the knowledge, skills and personality-dispositions for their subsequent involvement in public deliberation as liberal-democratic citizens. Correspondingly, a solid connection between civic and religious education is posited (as in Miedema & Bertram-Troost), without incurring with it the assimilation of these two subjects. This trend can be seen

in the common defence of the compatibility of the *learning from religion* approach with respect to Habermasian formulations concerning liberal-democratic citizenship. It would mean then that the mandatory presence of a separate provision for religion and religious phenomena would constitute a fundamental dimension of the liberal curriculum for common schooling, supplying general education with a central field of formation for the human and political development of new generations.

A second consensus emerges concerning the need for a multi-religious and non-confessional approach to the RE subject. Regarding this, the reviewed authors point to the importance of instructing religious diversity in an unbiased and impartial manner. This feature can be seen as reflecting a fundamental attitude towards religious diversity in post-secular political conditions. This pedagogical perspective does not exclude, however, more theologically-informed approaches to an RE subject thus conceived, especially if the formation provided is to surpass the level of objective information on religious diversity. As we will see, this element gains particular importance in the light of the epistemic understanding to be achieved between religious and secular citizens, particularly of the pre-comprehension of the alternative point of view as *rational*. In this respect, the revised literature exhibits a shared concern (as in Loobuyck) on the mono-confessional colonisation of the RE subject, especially in the form of apologetics or doctrinal proselytism. This interpretive trend also coincides with the shared support for the implementation of a multi-religious, unbiased and theologically-informed modality of RE in confessional schooling. In the authors' view, private educational provision of a religious type can be harmonised with a post-secular, public one through the presence of pedagogical guidelines redounding to a more significant regulatory role of the state (as in Franken). In such an arrangement, religious nurturing via private schooling would be viewed as not only compatible with but also necessary for the fostering of critical and autonomous modes of thought in citizenship. By providing a central socialising mechanism for the reproduction of a grounding culture that is representative of an essential segment of the population, religious schooling could be seen then as a constitutive component of the institutionalisation of the procedures for the achievement of liberal-democratic legitimacy. A significant challenge will reside in the harmonisation of this particular educational proviso with post-secular educational guidelines in terms of knowledge and understanding of religious pluralism (considering especially the three-tiered learning processes sketched by Loobuyck). This view would imply – in a Habermasian vein – the promotion of reflexive modalities of

religious belief via the institutionalisation of the academic and pedagogic study of religion in common schooling as a constitutive facet of liberal-democratic citizenship.

6.4. Section conclusions

As explored above, Habermasian thought can be conceived of as exhibiting a foundational connection with educational concerns. Firmly embedded in the theoretical critical tradition of the Frankfurt School, Habermas' intersubjective comprehension of human rationality offers relevant insights for the consideration of educational situations. One of those insights, which has also been highlighted in the literature, corresponds to the claim to overcome any form of extrinsic determination of the curriculum. In this respect, a critical Habermasian influence on education is constituted by the aspiration to derive the political consequences of education from the epistemic tendencies inscribed in the different forms of knowledge themselves. In this respect, the educational ideal of critical enlightenment would correspond to a product of the learner's reflexive engagement with the taught content, and particularly as a consequence of her autonomous consideration of the analytical and synthetical conundrums posed by the different areas. This formulation, in which a classical-enlightened, rationalistic ideal strongly reverberates, is resumed by Habermas under the light of the linguistically oriented philosophical analysis. This change of perspective results then in a recognisable emphasis placed upon collective deliberation as an important axis of any learning process. In this same line, Habermas himself will insist on the importance of reaching the life-world threshold of significance as a token of any criterion of communicational efficiency. Educationally speaking, this would translate itself into the need for the promotion of inclusive, deliberative involvement, oriented to the elucidation of truth-related and normative claims. In this manner, processes of appropriation of the taught content could be achieved, primarily via the unveiling of its margin of meaningfulness to the learners' life-perspectives. This comprehension of education would then render it as embedded with broader learning-related processes associated in turn with the linguistic and communicational constitution of cognition, reason and the human condition in general. In this respect, a critical Habermasian insight on education would be the critical-theoretical analysis and criticism of the different forms of alienation of the human capability of learning and self-transformation, including also the technical-strategical reification of education itself.

Concerning religion, this critical perspective addresses education as de-centred from a secularist comprehension that would consider it antagonistic to non-scientific and metaphysically-related forms of learning. As the literature on the subject highlights, Habermas' de-transcendentalised approach to reason will allow for an understanding of religious nurturing as not necessarily opposed to the formation of rational judgement in pupils. On the contrary, the role of providers of ontological certainty of, for instance, religious world-views would make them potential allies of a critical modality of education, one oriented towards the promotion of autonomic thinking. In this regard, rights-preserving, liberal educational guidelines and procedures would constitute a natural companion of the argument in favour of the harmonisation of private and public religious provisos, especially as providing adequate institutional safeguards against the risks of illiberal indoctrination and proselytising through public education. As highlighted in the literature, this will result in a more significant regulatory role of the state in educational matters, ensuring that the curricular inclusion of the religious dimension of democratic citizenship respects the freedom-granting, liberal-political framework.

However, there persist some tensions, particularly concerning a multi-religious curriculum and separate religious schooling. In this respect, the literature commonly stresses the importance of conceiving of RE as an integrative force among an increasingly segregated population, especially along religious lines. To this perspective, then, the existence of exclusionary, religiously based, educational institutions appears potentially as posing the risk of perpetuating a dangerously deep divide among citizens. This trend is also related in the literature with what is perceived as an increasing process of socio-religious marginalisation, associated in turn with the growing claims around multiculturalism on educational grounds. In this regard, the formulation of a Habermasian-inspired, critical and mandatory RE subject gains relevance in this field as counteracting especially the connected perils of religious and secularistic radicalisation, more than separate religious schooling in itself. In this sense, the obligatory character of this area of the curriculum is viewed then as a potential cognitive antidote to the illiberal possibilities inherent in a religiously and educationally pluralist civil society. In combination also with liberal educational guidelines mentioned above, a mandatory RE subject along these lines is viewed here mainly as a means to promote ethical agreements among the educational community, instead of as ends in themselves.

Consequently, regulatory-oriented actions by the liberal state (as the two cases just mentioned here) need to be understood in a Habermasian-educational guise as fostering their subjects' critical appropriation of their content, transcending thus a merely passive subjugation to what they might perceive as no more than a *de facto* political authority. In this sense, liberal-democratic deliberation – here extended to the educational realm – is viewed from a Habermasian perspective necessarily as a source of legitimacy for institutional coercion since it provides a communicational instance by which subjects can shape the conditions of their coexistence. This interpretation leads to the consideration of the dynamics of inclusive dialogical engagement – as prompted by regulatory procedures – as self-justificatory in liberal-democratic terms. In particular, the evident character of this rationale would reside in those practices' particularity as engendering deliberative instances for the subjects to recognise and reflexively self-identify with the norm's ethos and subsequently to self-recognise as its authors. This recurrent motif of Habermasian political philosophy would represent in this respect a central interpretative background for the consideration of the liberal-democratic state's regulatory role in interactional dynamics, and particularly as to the aforementioned inscribed dangers of *juridification* of education, family life and other communicational realms embedded in the crossroads of different life-worlds.

7. Chapter conclusions

7.1. Religion and reason

This chapter addressed the theoretical perspective of Jürgen Habermas, particularly his considerations on religion, subjectivity and education. Regarding the first topic, the de-transcendentalised approach to reason stands out as constitutive. It mainly implies that – following especially Kant and Wittgenstein – the objective status of metaphysical assertions needs to be seen as unverifiable by reason alone unless a rationalist epistemology is assumed. Habermas' remark on the ontological and operative dependence of reason on its respective nurturing epistemic world-view exhibits relevance in this respect. Correspondingly, a non-transcendental rationality would be present in multiple contexts of thought. In Habermas' view, the challenges faced by the liberal state would lie not in a rationalist conversion of all faiths and philosophies, but instead in the reciprocal adoption of comprehensive attitudes that allow for the recognition of rationality between religious and secular citizens. This comprehension

would pave the way for the establishment of a learning dialogue across this divide, fostering thus cognitive transformations among the pluralised citizenship of modern liberal states. Habermas portrays this effective establishment of the communicative preconditions for the achieving of understanding between epistemically diverse perspectives as the product of *learning processes* that are critical and urgent for the historical survival of liberal democracy, itself a necessarily unfinished project, according to him.

As stated before, Habermas' perception is one of the need of fostering such a mutual recognition between religious and secular citizens, for which specific mindsets in that direction must be promoted by the secular liberal state. He finds this fostering, however, extremely difficult. The principal two reasons for this that can be identified are to be found either in the genetic dependence of the liberal state itself on the religious and philosophical trajectories that preceded it or in the apparent inconsistency between any form of *production of mentalities* and the fundamental right of freedom of thought. In this way, thus, the educational problem of autonomy gains relevance here as the means to renew and foster a politically crucial, mutual epistemic pre-understanding between citizens as a condition for the emergence of subsequent forms of normative agreements subjected only to the outcome of interlocutors' uncoerced deliberation. Consequently, the religious-secular mutual attribution of reasonability as a precondition of communication would point in the Habermasian view to the outcome of genuine educational processes, understood as the deep communicative engagement between different perspectives. As historical examples evidence, these manifestations of intercultural insemination are considered by Habermas as insignia of a learning process that modifies existential perspectives and identity-formations via communicational exchange.

This problematisation is further explored in this work by revisiting Habermas' insights regarding subjectivity. According to them, ego-identity must constitute a malleable product of culturally patterned interaction. Communication, in this respect, would provide the dialectic grounds for the ontogeny of abstract reasoning and thus of cultural manifestations in nature. Relying on a linguistically revised notion of *socialisation*, *education* will emerge thus under the light of a *production of mentalities*-approach, prompting dynamics of self-identification towards specific, epistemically-patterned directions. From this perspective, hence, a state could be thought of as having a wide margin of influence on the cognitive patterns of its citizens through education, shaping – by means of academic contents – decisive contours of the cultural imaginaries and socio-affective features of every young generation. And if Habermas effectively shares this socio-genic perspective of subjectivity – which makes it highly

dependent also on institutionalised socialisation—, then it is also possible that the ownership by the liberal state of the resources to foster such religious understanding among citizens is ontologically grounded precisely on the socio-cultural embeddedness of human conscience and cognition. This possibility would allow for the conception of subjectivity not as an individual phenomenon but as a cultural product that reflects the main ideological traits of the host community, and as such as malleable by the influences of the social realm in which it is collectively nurtured.

In this sense, Habermas' previously quoted assertion about the *learning process* can be seen from the angle of his conception of subjectivity. This option would enable us to conceive such *production of mentalities* as a conceptual possibility for the understanding of education as an institutionalised chapter of a broader process of socialisation, and thus as a mechanism by which the adult society transfers contents and perspectives to new generations. From this view, then, the ontological openness of subjectivity, grounded in the logic of human communication, would ground the conception of education as a *production of mentalities* that engenders fundamental traits of individual thinking according to societal guidelines. *Education* can therefore be thought of also as a form of communicative socialisation and therefore as constitutive of a process of *production of mentalities*, according to which an older generation deliberately shapes the cognitive development and the reasoning process of new ones in the epistemic directions marked by the shared world-view and required by the subsistence of the social group. Formal education and the different philosophies of education – understood as the purposeful process of *human cultivation* – would constitute then the privileged means to provide those *rational reconstructible insights* referred to by Habermas as required for the *learning processes* to foster the *changes of mentalities* in the direction required for the survival of the modern liberal state. Nevertheless, a question remains regarding the other possible sense of Habermas' aforementioned assertion on the educational limits of the liberal state.

7.2. The production of mentalities

According to this last view, modern public mass education, though inspired by rationalistic and individualistic enlightened ideals, served in reality as a societal device for the early indoctrination of citizens with national ideologies (and surreptitiously with rationalistic world-

views, it may be added)¹⁹. This correspondingly undermined freedom of thought, especially by covering historical facts with epic narratives and turning them into objective knowledge by including them as mandatory contents of a general academic curriculum. Correspondingly, modern public education is accused of resembling industrial organisation, grouping students by their age (and not by their capacity or interests) and labelling them by their academic performance (see Robinson, 2005). The materialisation of enlightened ideals in democratic schooling is then marked as a social engineering process that, by inculcating fundamental societal values, engenders obedience by a massive and publicly-funded pervasive socialisation. From this contradictory scenario it follows that a liberal-democratic engagement in publicly-funded, mass education – and especially one oriented towards the deliberate generation of cognitive attitudes among its citizens – would equate to deploying an institutional *production of mentalities* that denies its own philosophical and ethical foundations. This would be the reason why Habermas states it is impossible to produce the *learning processes* through the media of liberal law and policy; that is, without denying at the same time their liberal character.

Furthermore, regarding the perceived incompatibility between this conception of education and liberal freedom of thought, Habermasian perspectives on education will respectively stress the meaningfulness of the communicational content in the life-world horizon of participants as a decisive criterion for an educational activity to count as *critical*. In this light, agency on the part of the learner would emerge as a natural consequence of the educational process, as it would be the result not of political action but the student's appropriation of the contents being passed to her. This interpretation is related with the fact that for Habermas, as we saw before, the communication involved in socialisation is a pre-requisite for the ontogenesis of cognition and as such of any form of rational thinking. In this light, thus, rationalistic individualism would not necessarily exhaust autonomy as a goal of education. On the contrary, the forms of rationality inhabiting the communicative practices of the nurturing community could be

¹⁹ This indoctrinatory risk constitutes an old problem of modern education, and as such, has been highlighted by educational thinkers and scholars (Young, 1989, pp. 44-48). In 1915, Dewey for instance stated that “since the maintenance of a particular national sovereignty required subordination of individuals to the superior interests of the state both in military defence and in struggles for international supremacy in commerce, social efficiency was understood to imply a like subordination. The educational process was taken to be one of the disciplinary training rather than of personal development” (1944, p. 44). For Young, “the modern educational crisis is a crisis of precisely the kind which Dewey was discussing. Two tendencies are at war with each other. An education that stresses the emancipation of the individual and through the universalisation of that emancipation, the development of autonomy-promoting social institutions, nationally and internationally, and an education which seeks to meet the more urgent economic and political needs of the nation in its contemporary situation” (1989, pp. 47-48).

understood here as the inescapable realm for the further cultivation of autonomous thinking in pupils, mainly as they constitute the interpretive background on which individual cognitive faculties are exercised. Thus, not only through education is the liberal state rightfully capable of promoting the epistemic and ethical understanding suggested by Habermas as required of its citizens, but also religious education can contribute to it through its different means and modalities.

According to this conception, then, a *mentality* could be *produced* without simultaneously violating freedom of thought, but rather encouraging it by fostering an autonomous engagement of learners with the content being taught. In this line of thinking, any successful pedagogical effort to make that content entirely *meaningful* to learners – that is, effectively *related* to the epistemic coordinates and universe of events of their world-view – would constitute in a sense a *critical* educational act that in turn fosters autonomy. This possibility would include even the case of religious nurturing, as long as it is supported in arguments that effectively *make sense* to students and as such can be heuristically mobilised and appropriated through self-reflection. The problem with *indoctrination* – as we will explore in chapter four – would lie not in the ideological and normative characteristics of the *doctrines* mobilised through it. On the contrary, it would reside in the incompatibility of its epistemic implications regarding liberal democracy’s political foundations (especially regarding freedoms of thought and speech), which would make it not only unsuitable but also antagonistic to the liberal state itself. It would be, then, in the level of its political consequences via its epistemic foundations that anti-liberal fundamentalism would be incompatible with a liberal and democratic RE, especially in the light of Habermas’ formulations of the necessary cognitive transformations for the survival of the liberal state.

7.3. Towards a Habermasian RE

When considering liberal, common schooling, the role of religion necessarily requires the harmonisation with the educational pursuit of autonomous thinking. Accordingly, the educational role of religion can be thought of as grounded in the aforementioned Habermasian linguistic view of cognition, in which the nurturing interactive realm provides the value-matrix for the attribution of meaning. In this respect, private religious nurturing can be conceived as not necessarily opposed to a form of education oriented towards the formation of autonomous liberal citizenship, as far as it does not reject liberal egalitarianism and instils the acceptance

of those reasons perceived as sounder in common deliberation. Religious indoctrination – understood then as the immersion of learners in the conceptual and epistemic world-view of a particular faith – could fulfil a crucial educational role insofar as it accepts a liberal political framework in which it cannot pretend to sustain a discursive hegemony that in content and practice restricts other confession's rights to free speech. The reason underlying this conception would reside precisely in the fact that, in pluralised conditions, a liberal RE for common schooling can be thought of as fulfilling not only an educational but also a representational role, granting to different religions equal access to educational influence and capabilities. If the centrality of the Habermasian religious understanding is accepted as crucial for liberal democracy, it is clear then that the inclusion of a pluralistic RE in the curriculum is key to granting egalitarian representation of religions in common schooling and to promote a critical citizenship, able to cope autonomously with the epistemic challenges posed by a multi-religious situation.

Nevertheless, the corresponding inclusion of religious world-views in the curriculum implies additionally that the implemented pedagogical approach must seek to guarantee the fairness of the representation, fostering a fair understanding of different faiths that allows the insider's voice to be heard on its own terms. In this respect, adopting an open and critical approach to RE can offer a sounder guarantee for preserving the freedom-granting and freedom-promoting character of liberal education. Regarding the citizen realm, this critical-educational approach also presents significant possibilities to a conception of RE as a privileged vehicle for the mobilisation of the secular-religious learning processes. This view conveys the contention that a democratic public RE can be thought of from the Habermasian perspective as the institutional scenario for the recognition and operationalisation of the epistemic potential of the religious traditions. Hence, public liberal schooling could be viewed from here as a structured environment oriented towards the fostering, from early ages, of cognitive capacities in liberal-democratic directions. In this sense, a critical and pluralistic RE can be seen as a resource of the liberal state if relying on a non-indoctrinatory, non-traditional pedagogy, as in Young's formulation. It would also be understood as an approximation to education from the perspective of the production of subjectivity, relying for it on a particular comprehension of education as a form of socialisation. Relatedly, those cognitive transformations oriented in the line of mutual understanding between religious and secular citizens could then be effectively fostered through an RE modality that relies on a *production of mentalities*-approach as its main educational

framework²⁰. This option would simultaneously provide for the pedagogical encouraging of agency-related dispositions on the part of learners, in connection to both the contents and the circumstances of their learning.

This issue grazes a sensitive issue of modern RE, i.e., the role of religious truth-claims in secular democracy and education. Adding to the aforementioned Habermas' request for *translation* of religious public utterances, we can bring up here Robert Jackson's contention that RE in democratic schooling must exclude such claims in the grounds of their unfitnes to contribute to plural schooling (2004, pp. 48-48). In the view of this important contributor to RE, only ethical and moral insights, along with religiously-detached, contemplative and meditative practices, can constitute legitimate material for liberal, common schooling. This option, of course, leaves the critical examination of religious insights to the private realm, potentially shaken by the exposure to local diversity. In both views, explicit religious claims are conceived as inherently incompatible with liberal democracy, particularly to the cognitive effect of modern science on the interpretation of religious narratives and the unavoidable pluralised nature of the discursive universe inhabited by contemporary global citizenship. For this reason, value-depuration, in the sense of ethical and moral translation, is considered in both cases as essential for the preservation of civil liberties and the thorough fostering of thinking capabilities in new generations. Beyond the acceptance of some threshold of discursive depuration as derived from the need to acknowledge the inevitability of the existence of plural rationalities in public discourse, questions may arise however concerning this exclusive assignment to religions of the role of ethical contributor to pluralistic contemporary citizenship, especially regarding education. If indeed it is true that the pursuit of knowledge and other multiple possibilities of self-cultivation²¹ do not necessarily require religious or

²⁰ Although a detailed materialisation of a thus conceived educational provision would exceed the limits of this work, at this point it can be accepted that it would naturally pose questions to existing educational systems, and particularly to the current performance-based emphasis prevalent in industrialised societies (see Robinson, 2003). In this regard, the orientation towards the promotion of agency of this Habermasian approach to education will necessarily criticise the margins of heteronomy implicit in the subordination of educational activities to objectives external and accessories to learning itself, like assessment. As previously highlighted, the *production of mentalities* prone to reaching forms of religious-secular epistemic understanding will privilege students' appropriation of contents as the main educational objective, thus subjecting to its achievement other learning resources. In this, a harmonisation of the educational system around this goal will be expedient, concentrating self-determination-capacities on educational communities instead of on private or public regulatory bodies. Other consequences in this same direction could be further envisaged.

²¹ In terms of RE, this understanding of education as encompassed by a general notion of *self-cultivation* might present interesting connotations for a view of religion as consisting of a process of

spiritual commitment, it is also true that they are not opposite. Correspondingly, they could be viewed as potentially constituting vital experiential associates towards the renewal of intellectual curiosity, on the one hand, and the senses of mystery and individual and collective care, on the other. In this respect, it would be possible to understand that both the aforementioned common representational needs and the agreed centrality of secular science in public controversies do not necessarily confine religious discourse to the private realm of liberal democracies. Such a move would undoubtedly harm at least religion's educational contributions by imposing on it the need to expurgate itself from its core-signifiers.

Finally, questions may arise as well concerning the possible analogies between liberal-democratic deliberation and education in religiously pluralised contexts. Is common schooling in liberal democracy subjected to the same requirements of public debate? While it is true that the *open* character of democratic *deliberation* permeates both institutional arrangements, their functions are pronouncedly different. This comprehension is based on the view of education as not only preserving civil liberties but also encouraging their present and future cultivation through the promotion of responsible autonomy, in the additional teleological context of fair ideological representation in society. It is precisely this integral promotion which, in the pursuit of both measures of social justice and pupils' necessarily multi-faceted development, can enable us to think of state schooling as a distinctive second *public arena*, in a sense similar to the aforementioned notion by Miedema & Bertram-Troost of school as an *intermediary* institution between the public and the private realms. According to this, the Habermasian *translation* and other forms of secular deputation would be inadequate for the fulfilling of school's educational objectives. Consequently, schooling could be conceived of as a central place for the preservation of liberal democracy, and primarily as the locus for the promotion of its still unforeseeable future configurations via the integral cultivation of the liberties and the

de-centering from the self, in line with the thought of John Hick on the matter (XXXX). Under this light, a notion of RE would be necessarily rendered self-contradictory, both of its components advancing opposed objectives. Although it lies outside the scope of this work to satisfactorily address Hick's insightful formulation, it might be tangentially commented that the emphasis on the self provided for instance by the educational vision of a Habermasian source as Kwak (see section 1.4 of this work) might be interpreted also as potentially comprising a notion of *self-denial*, particularly when the promotion of *self-cultivation* is driven along specific moral guidelines. For example, the fostering of a rationally warranted notion of *solidarity* could lead in the learner to an overcoming of primarial hedonistic drives and the cultivation of empathetic attitudes towards alterity, thus promoting an invitation to self-decentering by the cultivation of a compassionate disposition towards emotional communication. In this respect, the specifically religious path of the so-conceived educational endeavour could be seen as complementing the ideal of self-cultivation via the provision of valorative directions for the ethical effort proposed to the subject.

sense of autonomy of every new generation. In this scenario, RE can contribute with valuable insights regarding not only self-identity and rational thinking, but also cross-disciplinary and creative imagination, in the sense suggested by Davis. These derivations could be educationally pursued on the basis of, for instance, the promotion of feelings of wholeness, holiness and awe, beyond but not against particular religious belonging. Here, undoubtedly pupils' individual and collective attribution of meaning to the taught contents constitutes an unavoidable hinge with the educational aim of the enrichment and widening of their life-world, and with this of the promotion of their sense of agency.

Second Chapter: Religious Tolerance and Religious Education

8. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we addressed the Habermasian formulation of the role of religion in liberal democracies, and in particular its derivation of the need for epistemic understanding between religious and secular citizens. From the identification of its educational consequences, the position of this contention on the broader context of Habermas' thought concerning subjectivity and education was considered, along with the main trends of the educationalist (and religious educationalist) appropriation of Habermas' work. After grounding in this manner the basis for a Habermasian modality of RE, this work will proceed to the further specification of the religious facet of the Habermasian influence on education, as was explored in the previous chapter. This dimension is assessed here mainly via recent and contemporary views on religious tolerance, including that of Habermas²². By contributing to the elucidation of the approach of a Habermasian RE to the issue of multi-religious coexistence in post-secular conditions, this exercise will allow us to envisage the possibilities for the promotion of the aforementioned epistemic understanding through RE in liberal-democratic, common schooling.

9. Recent approaches to Religious Tolerance

9.1. Jay Newman

A recent approach to religious tolerance comes from Jay Newman (1978, 1982). For this American philosopher, *tolerance* must be understood fundamentally as a restraint from acting negatively to something to which one genuinely objects, and not as based on indifference towards or a general validation of the contents of what is being objected to. In this sense, this committed rejection of something is essential for a genuine tolerant attitude to emerge. This

²² The authors included in this section were selected on the base of their relevance for the topic. Their consideration is deployed chronologically in order to better illustrate transitions and continuities in their treatment of the subject.

position leads Newman to conceptualise *toleration* not as a relativistic acceptance of any proposition – something he considers as a falsification of genuine religious belief – but as the motivated self-restriction from acting on the believing in such a proposition (Newman, 1978, p. 188). In this respect, Newman states that tolerance must be *half-hearted*: “it is the acceptance in one sense of something one does not accept in another sense” (1982, p. 5). Newman also suggests that this self-restraint from acting against what is deeply rejected must correspondingly be internally and firmly motivated, exploring in each religious tradition its fundamental reasons for tolerance. This contention could be illustrated for Newman in the cases of the *philosophical* (“zealous lover of truth”), *altruistic* (“compassionate”) and *prudential* (“how much should be tolerated?”) intolerants. To each of these types, both spiritual and philosophical reasons can be provided in order to persuade them to *worry more for their own beliefs and actions* – especially with regards to alternative beliefs – *than the other’s*.

For Newman, a genuinely tolerant attitude must be conceived as lying between bigotry and relativism, which he conceives as an intellectual fashion conducive to the moral weakness of permissiveness (1978, p. 194) and even to intolerance towards non-relativistic stances. This view is related to the fact that, for Newman, both relativism and – for him its more moderate and modern branch – structuralism constitute reactions to religious intolerance and bigotry. This connection between structuralist and relativistic stances is stated by Newman on what he perceives as the derivability of the latter from the former via a criticism of the lack of reflectivity of religious leaders on the moral and spiritual consistency of their way of life. This criticism of what Newman conceives as *excesses of tolerance* allows him to underline the cognitive dimensions of intolerance, counteracting common simplifications of the latter. Newman refers in this respect to common miscomprehensions of intolerance which reduce it either to dichotomous categories that for him hardly reflect historical change²³, extra-religious affairs (1982, pp. 172-173) or even to mere defects of the personality²⁴.

²³ In this regard Newman refers to Hume’s conceptualisation of religious belief as comprised in the categories of *superstition* and *enthusiasm*, with which the Scottish philosopher schematically highlights the political derivations of Catholicism and Protestantism, respectively. In Newman’s view, Hume’s conclusion about the more democratic potential of the former confession with respect to the latter is questionable not only on its assumptions, but especially by recent historical developments that show a greater liberal adherence on the part of priests than on the side of lay politicians or journalists.

²⁴ “I have been trying to show that the problem of religious intolerance is multi-faceted, not simply psychological. It has a conceptual dimension: one reason intolerance is so widespread is that many

Newman's Aristotelian view of toleration as a virtue between two excesses is rooted in his universalistic perspective on ethics. This view posits the existence of trans-cultural, *civilisational* values which must occupy in Newman's view the central place of any educational and social endeavour. For Newman, these principles of *love, justice, peace, wisdom* and *beauty* are what is lacking in contemporary secularity, as he perceives it. In his view, the contemporary liberal state neither guarantees the centrality of such values in the collective life nor constitutes the complete fulfilment of its core principle of separation of Church and state. On the contrary, what the current status quo reveals is a *de facto* domination of Church by the state, as the religious jurisdiction is constantly subsumed by the political one that enunciates and thus serves as a host for religious freedom. This situation is evident for Newman in the fact that the last verdict in any Church-state contention is held by a liberal state instance, which results in a practical subordination of religious leaders to political ones. This *modus vivendi*, however, even finds itself frequently replaced in practice by worldlier negotiation and pragmatic accommodation (Newman, 1982, pp. 141-42).

This situation, evident for Newman in the inequity with which minority confessions are effectively treated, has unavoidably degenerated into an illiberal form of governance. In this scenario, societal change becomes dependent not on an institutionalised separation of jurisdictions and entirely on the aspirations of citizens themselves – as the liberal principle itself would require –, but instead on the benevolent, enlightened will of influential leaders. In this respect, it is the ethical incompleteness of liberalism alone which has brought about, for Newman, a corporatist situation of democracy. This scenario concedes political power to merely rhetorical and thus disguising ideologies instead of to genuine ethical virtues, as they

people do not understand what tolerance is or what it demands; many intolerant people actually think they are tolerant, and liberal people usually have trouble explaining to them why they are wrong. It has an epistemological dimension: religious intolerance generally involves prejudice, bad judgement, insufficient evidence, misinterpretation of data, unsound reasoning. It has a theological dimension: intolerant men often see their religious commitments as requiring them to wage a war against all forms of "idolatry" and "unbelief", and to make converts by any and every means available, no matter how unwholesome it may seem; and indeed some of the most important religious teachers and leaders have laid the groundwork for popular intolerance. The problem even has an important utilitarian dimension: many men are convinced that the consequences of tolerating men of other faiths will be disastrous, that it is better to be branded as "intolerant" than to stand by idly as one's society is destroyed by "secularism" or by foolish acquiescence to the unreasonable demands of exotic religious sects" (Newman, 1982, pp. 147-48).

are expressed, for instance, by a solid religious commitment. For this reason Newman states that moral superiority, and not ideological demarcations alone, should hold societal power, a common platitude that could be effectively obstructed by the reification of the Church-state separation as the insignia of the liberal order.

In this respect, Newman stresses the importance of a thoughtful education for tolerance²⁵. This instruction is conceived by him not as a liberal indoctrination but as an ethical encouragement for new generations to live the aforementioned *civilisational* values that allow democracy and humanity to flourish. This implies for Newman, first, the unavoidable recognition of the indoctrinating dimension of education, particularly as stressed by conservative educationalists. Newman summarises this by stating that, *at some level, effective socialisation requires persuading young people not to tolerate certain institutions, values, and principles of other political or religious communities* (Newman, 1982, p. 164). This traditionalist facet, however, does not exhaust for Newman his understanding of education, mainly because, for Newman, *fostering tolerance involves a kind of desocialisation* (164). This relativistic dimension of education, as stressed by radical educators, is also central in Newman's comprehension of education for tolerance. For Newman, this facet necessarily encourages pupils to question the established discursive regime and freely and more deeply commit to the *civilisational* values exposed by their tradition and way of living²⁶.

This difficult educational balance is reachable for Newman by the liberal school precisely through: 1) not so much exposing the student to new values (though it may occasionally do so) as by deepening *his or her understanding of the positive values he already holds* (1982, p. 168); and 2), by continuously stressing the autonomous capability of students to gradually decide on moral matters during the educational process. This last feature gains especial relevance for Newman because for him no teacher can be trustworthy who has reserved for herself the student's right to decide on what is absolutely good or wrong (p. 167). So, by following these

²⁵ "Since the problem of prejudice is not just a problem of inadequate empirical data but a problem of logic and values, too, we have to expect prejudice to flourish in societies that take lightly their responsibility to provide training in logic and ethics" (Newman, 1982, p. 35).

²⁶ Among such values, Newman highlights the ones contained in the, for him, common and extended practice – even within religious traditions – of rational discourse on moral subjects (1982, p. 94), and in the recognition of the fact that, *by talking with men of other faiths, by being prepared to learn from them, we can enrich our own faith* (p. 107).

guidelines, the liberal school would transcend the conservative-radical dilemma and practically induce *civilisational* values in new generations, in Newman's view. This option would also allow it to avoid the narrow-mindedness of conservative socialisation and simultaneously the moral weakness of radical relativism. Moreover, Newman furthers the argument that religion can effectively go hand in hand with such a tolerant educational ideal, precisely as it constitutes in his view a potent civilisational force, the failures of which are essentially extrinsic²⁷.

As can be seen, Newman's conception of religious tolerance is deeply rooted in both his explicit ethical universalism and his underlying conviction of the inter-relatedness between reason and value-judgements. Even though he does not offer a precise definition of religious faith, it is clear for him that religious intolerance cannot be reduced to other forms of bigotry and prejudice without losing its distinctive character as the irreplaceable and ultimate existential moral commitment a person can make (Newman, 1982, p. 173). In this line, thus, Newman is not offering a complete philosophical system on reason and religion. On the contrary, he can be seen as deriving a conceptualisation of religious tolerance based on theoretical polemics and historical corroborations on the role of religion in society. In this respect, his comprehension of toleration as the incontrovertible sign of a universal *civilisation* undoubtedly exhibits relevance as it appeals directly to contemporary configurations of the liberal state. In this respect, Newman would be offering critical insights into the possible reinterpretations of the relations between religion and liberal democracy. Newman's criticism of the separation of church and state – pointing simultaneously to the asymmetrical structural position of the former with respect to the latter and to religious patronage as the direct offspring of this political arrangement – certainly proves heuristically appealing. In particular, this argument can be seen as illuminating a denunciation of what the author perceives as the structural injustice underlying the ultimate discretion of state instances in matters of state-church relations. Newman's contention in this respect can be interpreted as harmonising with a criticism of a formal and restraining-based formulation of toleration, which would necessarily result in coercion as the exclusive feature of state action concerning religious groups and claims. This lack of substantial interlocution between the liberal state and religious voices – as

²⁷ “How, people often ask, can something as noble, as civilizing, as uplifting as religion have brought the human community so much misery? I have given a few answers to this question, but surely none is as important as this one: religious teachers have rarely modelled themselves after the greatest and noblest religious teachers, those *prophets* whom they have falsely professed to be following” (Newman, 1982, p. 171).

one of the central tenets of Newman's critique of the liberal status quo – would then underly the perception of state imposition as experienced by religious and religiously inspired groups, particularly to the extent to which they would be represented here by Newman's argument. Hence, Newman could be seen as illustrating a conservative criticism on the intrinsic fairness of a paternalistic arrangement between the liberal state and religions, and with this the exclusively deterring conception of toleration as one of the pillars of this order. Similarly, Newman's *supremacy of virtue* could be seen as highlighting possible moral intersections between religious and secular political cultures, particularly when examining the ethical coherence of current trends in liberal democracy. In this sense, it can be said that this feature of Newman's theological thought can exemplify Habermas' (2006) insight regarding the role of religion in suggesting possible future paths for liberal democracy.

In addition to this, Newman's treatment of the religious branch of intolerance undoubtedly deserves mention, specifically his proposed differentiation between it and other forms of ethnic and racial prejudice. In this respect, Newman's unapologetic approach towards religion is significant insofar as it allows him to identify the theological currents feeding religious intolerance. Newman's perspective also highlights in this respect intolerance's multiple (psychological, conceptual, epistemic, utilitarian) dimensions, beyond a mere adjudication of irrationality. This straightforwardness opens up for Newman the possibility of laying the foundations for his proposal of education for tolerance on religiously relevant grounds. His posited *civilisational values* would represent in this sense a recognition of the specifically religious trends that can converge with the counteracting of the theological currents feeding the intolerant mind. Education emerges for Newman then as grounds on which the challenges imposed by intolerance can be addressed, particularly via the exploration of the specifically religious motives against the destruction of difference. Consequently, he will summon a versatile educational proposal that, aiming to reconcile what he perceives as conservative and individualistic educational theories, will present itself as able to draw from specific religious perspectives.

Newman's religious tolerance will lie then in a moral universalism endorsing the ethics of non-violence across different religious perspectives. As stated above, this position represents for him the way out from the disjunction between dogmatism and unfettered ethical relativism. In

this respect, Newman's portrayal of structuralism as the latest spearhead of the latter evidences an inclination to attribute to the objectivism of social science an ethical lack. In his view, this absence effectively contrasts with his own effort to offer an ethical parameter for a hierarchy between religious and cultural manifestations. This conservative spirit finds expression in his concept of *civilisation* – with its respective opposite of *barbarism*²⁸ – which elaborates on the subordination of appetites to pre-existing *virtues*. This strong moral commitment necessarily runs the risk of ignoring the existence of ethical developments in the direction of intolerance. Although Newman stresses the intrinsic complexity of the intolerance phenomenon (as consisting of psychological, conceptual, epistemic, theological and utilitarian dimensions), his proposed solution of *civilisational* education falls short of addressing such a multi-faceted nature. Mainly via the association of the intolerant attitude with the *barbaric* pole of this hierarchy of values, the lack of toleration is finally construed as an *absence* of moral content – as provided by different religious doctrines – instead of as an ethical option informed also by particular interpretations of his *civilisational values*. Thus, intolerance becomes Satanised and epistemically reduced to a lack of sufficient ethical reflexivity and cultivation on the part of the intolerant, and entirely to a form of moral ignorance concerning *civilisational* moral possibilities inside different religious traditions.

Although insightful for the promotion of religious and ethical self-criticism and the exploration of theological diversity inside traditions, this solution will then necessarily not acknowledge the multifaceted character of intolerance, as Newman himself diagnoses it. Relatedly, Newman's *civilisational* endeavour would be ignoring the role played by modern rationalism in the emergence of a tolerant stance among some religious traditions. In this, his formulation of the limits of toleration as residing in the common grounds between religious diversity would fail to guarantee the exclusion of illiberal and discriminatory stances outside the moral agreement encompassed by this form of religiously grounded, moral universalism. Therefore, liberal guidelines for political education will not perform any role in the delineation of contours of toleration, consisting – from this perspective – of insights extrinsic to religious reasoning as such. Similarly, the substantiality of Newman's *civilisational* ethical criterion could hardly

²⁸ “A child in primary school in North America is relatively uncivilised, relatively low on the scale of civilisation. He is not what we would normally call a “savage” or a “barbarian”, because even if he is dominated by the demonic elements of his personality, he belongs to a family and a community that are themselves dominated by people who are relatively high on the scale of civilisation” (Newman, 1982, p. 168).

guarantee the fair scholarly treatment of widely diverse religious commitments. Via this *civilisational* universalism, RE in liberal schooling would result in the pursuit of the common moral grounds posited by the perspective itself, far from an acknowledgement of the metaphysical, moral and ethical peculiarities of the different doctrines. Given thus his accentuated teleological orientation, Newman's formulation would obstruct the epistemic exploration of religious specificities beyond the mere convergence upon shared value-perspectives. Naturally, this could be considered as a lost opportunity for an RE modality that provides for the cultivation of rational judgement of new generations along religious lines, and with this for a holistic promotion of pupils' mind-sets through a more comprehensive array of religious possibilities.

Newman's *superiority of virtue*, however, can prove educationally insightful, precisely as it can be thought of as offering a thoughtful balance between conservative and liberal approaches to education, as Newman himself suggests. In this sense, an equilibrium between, on the one hand, the cultivation of a committed sense of belonging to a particular tradition, and, on the other, the need to inculcate respect for alternative confessions, could be meaningfully pursued in each particular case through the promotion of *self-improvement* as a valuable educational goal. This derivation from Newman's thought could itself prove compatible with spiritual growth and communitarian commitment in different religious traditions, and thus with a multi-religiously oriented formulation on toleration. However, and in connection with an RE modality along Habermasian lines, the cultivation of Newman's aforementioned values of *love, justice, peace, wisdom* and *beauty* – in their multi-religious fashion – would need to be oriented towards the recognition of the doctrinal and epistemic specificities of the different religious traditions, instead of exclusively towards their inculcation in learners. In this manner, tolerance as an educational endeavour could lead towards the promotion of pupils' critical-analytical skills in connection to the epistemic understandings between perspectives of the world. This possibility could be further related to the conception of liberal schooling as a second Habermasian *public arena*, especially given the need for liberal schooling to foster the cultivation of autonomy while simultaneously granting recognition to religious pluralism, as explored in the previous chapter. These ramifications, though, will be explored in the following sections of this chapter, in relation to the subsequent authors.

2. Susan Mendus

Susan Mendus (1988, 1989) offers in this respect a relevant and more recent account of toleration. In her view, religious tolerance historically started as a pragmatic solution by European monarchies to reach peace in the context of the sixteenth century's religious conflict, and not as a political philosophy in itself. In this respect, religious toleration and state neutrality towards societal pluralism emerged as political reforms which had to be philosophically justified *a posteriori*, mainly through rationalistic assumptions and theologies during the Enlightenment. This epistemic character would have thus determined, for Mendus, the formulation of tolerance as a social virtue for the liberal state as a necessarily *neutral* one. Consequently, contemporary accounts of liberalism's state neutrality will have to rely strongly, according to Mendus, on rationalistic assumptions of human nature in order to mobilise an individualistic conception of autonomy as the basis for state non-interference. This conditioning would limit in Mendus' view the scope of liberal toleration to cultural and spiritual manifestations that share this rationalistic emphasis on individual decision-making, excluding and repressing those which do not. In this sense, the rationalistic heritage underlying toleration constitutes for Mendus an indelible watermark that sometimes leads it to illiberal, repressive outcomes, which in turn hinder its suitability for a genuinely pluralistic society (Mendus, 1989, p. 92).

In this respect, the thus derived conception of state-neutrality, specifically because of the lack of a more decisive commitment to the cultivation of societal pluralism, would render itself unsuitable for its self-imposed objective of preserving even fundamental citizen freedoms (Mendus, 1989, p. 83) or minority cultural and spiritual manifestations that require proper and substantial public fostering to avoid them disappearing (Mendus, 1989, p. 85). For Mendus, considerations of socio-economic asymmetry and corresponding lack of access to social representation themselves pose the need of substantial state intervention in social interaction, even within a liberal framework that states the need to preserve equality among citizens (1989, p. 159). Thus, *positive discrimination and affirmative action will be the mechanisms by which the state counters individual and social prejudice* (p. 159), making public power a collective tool for materialising toleration against private discriminatory tendencies.

This intertwining between tolerance and distributive justice, however, seems insufficient for promoting a complete tolerance in highly diversified contexts, in Mendus' view. According to her, the right not to have one's worship interfered with – as she summarises Locke's conception of toleration – neither suffices to avoid social exclusion nor completely counteracts the range of harm inflicted by discrimination. In this sense, peaceful coexistence should not be the sole aim towards which liberalism strives, given especially the lack of representation of its rationalistic grounds concerning non-liberal doctrines. On the contrary, a goal such as genuine inter-religious understanding would require, in Mendus' opinion, the promotion of a comprehensive sense of belonging to broader society, without ignoring the particular identity construction processes of groups within it. It is precisely this socio-cultural integration which, for Mendus, can guarantee fair treatment beyond the rationalistic assumptions of liberal tolerance, something that liberalism cannot itself provide (Mendus, 1982, p. 159).

One of the reasons for the incapacity of liberal toleration to provide for such inclusion lies, in Mendus' opinion, in that it remains attached to a *free-chooser*, rationalistic conception of subjectivity. According to this view, convictions are to be determined by the will alone and thus subjected to individual decision-making. Under this light, even the aforementioned compelling epistemic force of religious convictions²⁹ would linger unseen, attributing them to a vacuously generalised representation of autonomy. As Mendus points out, distinctions between the chosen and the unchosen, luxury and necessity, personal and social preferences are frequently blurred and difficult to establish (Mendus, 1989, p. 141). This feature poses significant problems to a fair application of an autonomy-based conception of tolerance, i.e. one that acknowledges and includes both the will's limits to determine personal convictions and the instances of influence that converge in the formation of those convictions. In this constitutive ambiguity of autonomy would reside neutralist liberalism's difficulty to tolerate, for instance, parental religious socialisation, mainly in terms of the former's prevailing conception of *freedom*. In this sense, liberal toleration seems effectively attached to an individualist conception of autonomy, which could be effectively applied only to those manifestations exclusively subjected to the express will of the subject (Mendus, 1989, p. 151).

²⁹ See footnote 33.

In Mendus' view, then, toleration can effectively contribute to the goal of full inclusion of different world-views if it acknowledges the fundamentally ambiguous condition of human convictions, particularly concerning their malleability (Mendus, 1989, p. 160). This means that, for Mendus, human beings do not remain unavoidably attached to their nurturing cultural contexts, even though they play a constitutive role in the shaping of their opinions and beliefs. In this respect, those cultural communities perform as hinges for the civic integrations of their members to the broader society. Consequently, those cultural and spiritual communitarian manifestations must be taken into account when considering social inclusion. This possibility, however, Mendus sees as out of liberalism's scope due to this ideology's intrinsic need for rationalistic grounds for a morally defensible formulation of autonomy. In this regard, she suggests that toleration can find different grounds in socialist thinking, particularly concerning its proposed goal of promoting total inclusion beyond the mere pacification of religious controversies (Mendus, 1989, p. 157).

For Mendus, this entails the recognition of particularities as a condition for promoting a general sense of identification with the socialist society. As she points out, such inclusion performs in socialism not as a mere concession for achieving peace but as an acknowledgement itself of the role of societal subgroups as interpretive mediators of the general socialist ideals. In order to avoid then the ideological instrumentalisation of those subcultures within the framework of socialist ideology, Mendus consequently highlights the recognition-related character of such connection. This implies for her that it is the need to promote the full range of the individual's freedom – with all its socio-cultural complexity – that drives the socialist ideal for unity. In this respect, this impulse must avoid in Mendus' view the totalitarian risk of ideologically colonising the particular sphere of ideas that feed individual convictions by trying to legitimate every aspect of life in ideological terms³⁰. Such an option would parallel the equally rationalist-individualistic temptation of summarising the full spectre of symbolic complexity in civil society in the simplificatory label of *private sphere*, consecrating thus the neutralist-tolerant model of the liberal state. In this respect, Mendus stresses the importance of aiming towards *unity* among *diversity* as the goal of the socialist cultural policy. This alternative would

³⁰ “If liberalism insists on the legitimation of all structures of power within society, then liberalism must insist on the legitimation of domestic relationships, since they are important power structures. The drive to rationality or transparency is the drive to interpret everything on the model of the public” (Mendus, 1989, p. 153).

simultaneously foster both sides of this equation through a dialectics of the general and the particular in which both poles regularly feed each other.

This is the form then in which Susan Mendus depicts toleration as transcending its traditional background of rationalist liberalism. In this respect, she can be seen as offering a post-Enlightened understanding of tolerance as grounded in a culturally-sensitive perspective on inclusion. In the present context, Mendus' arguments are relevant as she effectively re-frames the question of religious tolerance in a pluralistic society. For this, she articulates a view of the limits of liberalism to face the challenges posed by a multitude of non-liberal world-views sheltered by the liberal state. In this regard, her view of liberal tolerance effectively revisits its classical philosophical grounds in order to review its conceptual luggage and realistic possibilities for contemporary society. Thus, Mendus exposes the risks of naturalising the classical liberal view of the citizen as an exclusively self-determined, rootless one that can be recognised as such – and thus be granted freedom – based on the fulfilment of such characteristics. It is precisely this rationalistic view of autonomy that renders classical liberal tolerance unsuitable for the role of civic mediator among different religious world-views. As Mendus highlights in her analysis, this Enlightened liberal formulation would necessarily ignore the socio-cultural mechanisms that underlie the formation of the individual will and delegitimise world-views not adhering to rationalistic perspectives of faith.

Mendus' view of toleration is thus informed by the philosophical underpinnings of liberalism, especially if compared with Newman's formulation of it. This characteristic leads her to frame the problem of the limits of toleration from the viewpoint of the liberal philosophy, and not from the believer's perspective, as Newman does from the beginning of his analysis. In this respect, liberalism is then assumed by Mendus as a total philosophy that encompasses religious and ideological tolerance, mainly because the philosophical problem of tolerance highlights for her the character of society and not only the official position of the ruling body. This implies for Mendus that the religious problem of toleration must be located in the broader context of individual rights and the political philosophies underlying them, and not from an ethically universalist, inter-religious perspective, as in Newman. In this line, the problem of the limits of religious tolerance is sounded out by Mendus through the intricacies of liberal and contemporary philosophy itself and under the light of a liberally structured social system. From

here, she explores the possibilities for positing adequate limits to the range of publicly accepted religious doctrines, thus marking some insurmountable boundaries for institutional tolerance in such a system.

This feature leads us to one of the critical issues in Mendus' contribution, i.e. the comprehension of the state's discourse as a public validation of specific manifestations of civic life. In this perspective, public policy can be understood as also producing specific patterns of social interaction through the mechanism of censorship and public exclusion. Under this light, the neutrality principle can be considered as fostering the rationalistic and liberal model of citizenship, which unavoidably translates into the derogatory treatment of non-liberal world-views. This perspective is highly relevant for considering the problem of religious toleration in religious education, especially as it highlights the directive role of the state beyond its mere regulative functions. In this respect, an official educational policy can be seen also as an authoritative intervention on the religious formation of new generations, precisely by the promotion of the philosophical underpinnings of *religious freedom*. Under this light, the educational policy of a liberal state can hardly claim neutrality, primarily if understood as forging the mentalities of newcomers under specific frameworks of comprehension of what liberty consists of. This view also illustrates political liberalism's immanent restrictions concerning philosophically incompatible doctrines and world-views³¹.

This position leads Mendus to highlight the importance, for political liberalism, of a recognition-related paradigm between the state and the communities inhabiting civil society. As will be pointed out in the following section, a formulation along these lines could in this respect liberal restrictions on non-liberal perspectives upon fairer grounds, allowing for the acknowledging of the epistemic particularities of the doctrines the liberal state harbours. This recognition, in turn, would provide argumentative instances for the exploration of those

³¹ "In a sense the liberal strategy has the capacity to 'demonise' the other just as effectively as those who believe in the exclusive nature of the truth of their particular religious commitment. The line between insiders and outsiders is drawn in a different place, this time between inclusivists and exclusivists rather than, say, between Muslims and Jews, or Hindus and Muslims, but the same binary distinction is employed. Respect for religious difference is compromised when those who are to be accepted and affirmed must first relinquish any claim to uniqueness or religious distinctiveness" (Barnes, 2006, p. 408. See also Cooling, 1994, 2010; Conroy *et al.*, 2013).

doctrines' significance for peaceful coexistence, particularly concerning fundamental freedoms.

The subsequent upholding of socialism from these premises as a viable alternative for thorough cultural inclusion in pluralised contexts presents, however, additional problems, especially in connection with the doctrinal character of socialism itself. Although Mendus herself – as mentioned before – warns against the ideologisation of public life via the reification of state categories, she does not provide for a questioning of the Marxian and historic-materialist underpinnings of socialism and their conception of the “religious” category. In this respect, socialism poses significant risks of conceptual imposition upon cultural manifestations of different kinds, primarily via the *superstructure* and *false-conscience* related categories. Such an exegesis would imply an unavoidable simplification of epistemic diversity into official ideological categories as a condition of its public recognition. In the end, socialist inclusion would not overcome the threshold of a paternalistic admission of what is conceived in negative terms, and could hardly foster then epistemic recognition of non-socialist perspectives. Thus, Mendus' *unity among diversity* ideal would see itself restricted by its explicit socialist framework, promoting at most a materialist reading of the manifestations it purports to represent. Mendus' formulation of tolerance would hence not amount to an avoidance of the doctrinal and epistemic colonisation of social interaction, despite its intention to overcome the individualism of classical liberalism. In this respect, alternative foundations for a post-Enlightened formulation of toleration could be explored in cultural and religious recognition-related paradigms. This option could provide grounds for a deeper epistemic understanding and fairer political and educational treatment, especially of religious diversity.

As can be seen so far, not only can relevant educational considerations be found at the core of political liberalism's stance towards religions but also educational concerns become prominent when exploring the limitations of that liberalism concerning the comprehension of religions. In this respect, the questioning of the liberal-neutralist model of mediation of religious diversity can be helpful for the visualisation of its rationalist underpinnings and the advancement of a cause of genuine epistemic dialogue, understood as a paradigm itself for RE. Under a Habermasian light, then, these concerns would lead to the conceptualisation of the inter- and extra-religious epistemic understanding as a survival need for liberal democracy. This approach

can provide RE with the breadth necessary to shelter also a, for instance, religiously inspired critique of Modernity, along with rationalist attacks on doctrinal dogmatism and other forms of *learning sickness* (Cooling, 1994). In this way, RE could helpfully promote the epistemic understanding pointed out by Habermas as crucial for the survival of liberal democracy under contemporary circumstances. This alternative, however, implies addressing issues of stratification of cultures and religions, particularly regarding the access to adequate means of representation and public discussion. These foundational implications for secular-religious and inter-religious understanding would be explored concerning Galeotti's elaboration on toleration, which provides grounds for its comprehension in connection with inter-cultural and religious recognition.

3. Anna Elisabetta Galeotti

The Italian philosopher Anna Elisabetta Galeotti (2002) provides an insightful, more contemporary perspective regarding toleration. After reviewing Mendus and other authors on religious tolerance, Galeotti agrees that some controversies need to be revised regarding the relation between toleration and the principle of the neutrality of the state, especially if equality among religions is to be thoroughly pursued. Even though tolerance was born as a solution to a historical conflict caused precisely by the unequal treatment of religions, for Galeotti, classical liberalism will hardly address the core of the problem. This limitation can be seen in the religious territorialisation brought about by the Peace of Westphalia, consecrating the *cuius regio, eius religio* and national-sovereignty principles as the basis for the new balance of power. Another trace of this process can also be found in the methodological individualism prevailing in modern liberalism. For Galeotti, however, these political formulations, though historically meaningful and progressive in the liberal direction, prove incomplete for the contemporary challenges faced by liberal democracy. This feature becomes more pronounced, particularly as dealing with claims for collective recognition of different kinds, leading the liberal state to the imposition of individualist criteria for validation. In Galeotti's view, these solutions can today also be considered unfair as they tend to unilaterally structure social interaction from the state's perspective, specifically by projecting an ideological (individualistic but also nationalistic) image over particularly conflictive circumstances in civil society. In this regard, only the implementation of full recognition-related measures among

religions and societal collectivities would provide not only an effective and lasting but a fair solution in terms of the equal footing they deserve in a liberal state. This solution would lead to the addressing of the issue of inequality between majoritarian and minority positions, aiming towards the counteracting of the visibility-differential resulting from such structural asymmetry (Galeotti, 2002, pp. 10-11).

For Galeotti, this means that the classical high regard of neutrality should lose its centrality as a necessary condition for toleration, mainly because its complete realisation would unavoidably result in the suppression of symbolical expressions of minorities. These, as strongly relying on non-liberal foundations in the West, would find themselves degraded to a position of social inferiority, thus reproducing, in fact, a second-class-citizenship situation. Consequently, toleration needs to be conceived, in Galeotti's opinion, as fostering a conception of justice based on a recognition of the social differences and mechanisms of symbolic oppression underlying social interaction. This conception should replace, in her view, a neutrality-based one, which ends up guaranteeing the naturalised privileges of the majoritarian position. For Galeotti, the inappropriateness of toleration for promoting such multicultural recognition is related to its commonly unacknowledged, inner power-relation. In her view, classical toleration as such requires, for its political materialisation, a rationalist social authority establishing mandatory parameters for heterogeneous social coexistence. In this regard, the (effective) pragmatic solution of the ideological neutrality of the state has necessarily engendered for Galeotti a neutral public arena unavoidably associated with the continental *laïcité*. The consequence of this process would be the restriction of religious and spiritual enthusiasm from public access via confining them to the *private* realm. This categorical structure upholding state neutrality is thus imposed over the epistemic variability of multicultural societies, fostering modalities of self-understanding based on this framework of thought. The socialising and educational potential thus of the epistemic apparatus of liberal toleration would further veil the naturalisation of the majoritarian expressions under the *public* label, primarily upon the nation-state foundations of democracy. Thus, once the rationalist underpinnings of toleration have been inculcated upon successive generations, state neutrality will consist of a majoritarian position whose features will automatically define the public sphere, naturally delegitimising non-rationalistically grounded positions on the matter as *irrational*.

Galeotti proceeds then to assess the structural level of fairness of liberal tolerance, particularly concerning the representability of its categorical foundations for the political and epistemic dimensions of religious diversity. In this respect, such a revision leads her to the highlighting of symbolic recognition as a crucial dimension – and the *right* grounds – of a genuinely multicultural modality of tolerance (2002, p. 12). In this respect, classical liberalism is portrayed by Galeotti as bearing a neutralist comprehensive doctrine that could hardly mediate between religious controversies, primarily because of the political commitments imposed by its conceptual baggage. For Galeotti, this conceptualisation also encompasses the Rawlsian initiative (Rawls, 1971) regarding social justice. In her view, the constitutional principle, aiming towards a *free-floating* conception of justice, would naturally highlight the lowest possible common denominator between multiple and opposed conceptions of the good. This distinctive orientation would have as a consequence the keeping invisible of the markers of identity constituting each group as such. In her view, the Rawlsian project necessarily addresses multiculturalism as a distributive problem that requires the blind assignment of social resources and opportunities in order to guarantee justice. In this respect, the force of this argument will naturally lead to a hypostatised view of equality as the fundamental marker of citizenship. This comprehension paradoxically fails to realise justice, particularly if the latter is understood as the fair treatment of different comprehensive doctrines. Thus, an inherently problematic form of *neutrality* will emerge as a direct consequence of the self-assumed predicament of the centrality of the state. In this respect, a reified impartiality would constitute a fundamentally *partial* discursive position that would naturally fail to do justice to the complete metaphysical and political complexities of the multiple conceptions of the good. This situation, especially if considered in a multiple and common educational context, naturally highlights the intrinsic complexities of a thoroughly liberal and tolerant modality of shared schooling for a multicultural society.

Galeotti highlights these problems when addressing the challenges posed by the issue of the potential educational value of racist theories and opinions. In her view, the abandonment by the state of its classical position of societal referee among metaphysical doctrines – in order to adopt a more recognition-promoting one – directly relates to education. This characteristic gains relevance as toleration is conceived in an egalitarian fashion regarding minority-majority relations. In this respect, the socially promoting role of education becomes accentuated even further when considering the cultural non-neutrality of the academic curricula. From this

acknowledgement of the contested nature of the school content – from which established truths in various disciplines must in her view be excluded (p. 165) – naturally follows the acceptance of the need for a fair exposition of various doctrines in civil society. This recognition, portrayed by Galeotti as both a socially just and educationally relevant measure, must however be complemented in her view by two additional considerations: the need to protect vulnerable minorities, which have traditionally been the direct victims of anti-liberal doctrines, on the one hand, and liberal democracy's need to protect itself against anti-liberal initiatives and to preserve its own foundations, on the other³². This equation, posed by the inner intricacies of social justice itself combined with the defensive instinct of liberal democracy, can be solved in Galeotti's opinion by establishing immovable liberal and democratic guidelines for common schooling. These would mark the limit of toleration and public intervention in education, allowing simultaneously for a considerable and creatively necessary margin for freedom of speech in the educational community (p. 166). In this respect, the aforementioned *fairness* of the educational exposition of social doctrines would consist for Galeotti in a liberal contextualisation of classroom contents, especially if they are of a contested nature, as is the case with racist and other anti-liberal views.

Galeotti is in this respect positive when establishing the social position of these liberal educational guidelines, particularly in respect to broader public rights of freedom of speech and opinion (p. 167). As can be seen, Galeotti's view expands a classical view of toleration as consisting solely in the non-interference of the state in religious controversies. In her opinion, a more sociologically informed view of civil society necessarily leads to a comprehension of fairness as transcending passive tolerance and the mere guaranteeing of individual liberties. Correspondingly, social justice in conditions of diversity is portrayed by her as comprising affirmative action and positive discrimination. In this respect, the egalitarian and socially distributive measures of democracy need to be complemented for Galeotti by cultural interventions oriented towards the promotion of recognition. In her opinion, these can guarantee a more solid basis for tolerance and peaceful coexistence, simultaneously with a more thorough promotion of thinking capabilities. It is precisely this educational dimension which leads Galeotti to consider a qualitative difference between general public life and schooling, contemplating different political criteria for each. This view, which potentially

³² Galeotti refers to these respectively as *the principle of self-defence* and *the need for consistency* (p. 166).

supports the viewing of school as a second public arena – in Habermasian terms – is defended by Galeotti with the argument that, where discriminatory discourse may be allowed in public life, its educational enshrinement must be prevented. Therefore, separate guidelines for toleration in educational settings must be contemplated, along with the criterion of the preparation of new generations for intercultural harmony in liberal-democratic conditions. In this respect, the consideration of a symbolical asymmetry inherent to social coexistence leads Galeotti to a culturally redistributive formulation of tolerance, allowing for the democratisation of the access to public recognition. This option is conducive in Galeotti's thought to the highlighting of the educational character of a thus conceived form of tolerance, and with that of the special nature and role of education as a promoter of social justice.

Galeotti's position could be considered then as highly illustrative of the shortcomings of classical liberalism to address complex cultural circumstances and to reflect the social embedding of personal choice. In this sense, the Galeottian formulation of toleration can be seen as oriented towards the pursuit by liberal education of the fairer treatment of multiple comprehensive doctrines, particularly in the light of the aforementioned understanding of autonomy. This issue, pointing towards the educational prerogatives of religion in liberal schooling, poses the question then of the substantive character of the liberal safeguards against illiberal stances and the extreme cases of freedom of speech, as Galeotti frames it. In this respect, Galeotti's formulation of liberal democracy's principles of *self-defence* and *self-consistency* emerge as offering grounds for these liberal-educational assurances in terms of protection of its constitutive ethical foundations. Galeotti's view on this matter, inspired by the close evaluation of historical cases of racist claims for free speech, would consequently stress the importance of the conservation of liberal democracy's foundations against regressive attempts to overthrow it using liberal rights. In educational terms, this would mark a limit for the presentation of religious doctrines and perspectives, particularly by requesting a non-biased portrayal of religious manifestations that could reproduce established forms of asymmetry between societal groups. From Galeotti's premises, especially a majoritarian derogatory depiction of minority cultural manifestations would have to be prevented, particularly as this constitutes in her view the prevalent challenge for a post-classical formulation of toleration. In this sense, Galeotti's perspective can be seen as harmonising with a more sociologically-informed view of religious diversity, driving toleration towards a comprehension of the struggles for recognition among societal groups.

However, Galeotti's formulation of toleration can also be seen as not necessarily addressing the epistemic core of mutual misunderstanding between religious perspectives. In this sense, it would be missing the cognitive processes involved in the derogatory simplification of religious alterity, thus failing to tackle the unfairness of the treatment mobilised by religious intolerance in educational contexts. This characteristic could be seen in her postulation of the need for mutual respect as one of the criteria derived from the principle of liberal self-consistency. Educational safeguards along these lines could then be envisaged as relying exclusively on factually-based accounts of religious diversity and hence avoiding mutual theological interpellation as a consequence. The mandatory non-neutrality concerning truth, as Galeotti states it, would then perform as an additional stimulus for keeping religious accounts at a descriptive level, calling for highly restrictive clauses when addressing religious truth-claims. In this sense, there would be few incentives for transcending a phenomenic level of religious knowledge and for reaching instances of inter-religious understanding and potential enrichment in religious instruction. The delineating of RE under Galeotti's toleration and its need for reciprocal respect would then perform as a strong drive for keeping this subject in an informative dimension. Apart from leaving inter-religious learning and insemination for extra-curricular scenarios, this option would also impinge on the comprehension of the *religious* category by non-religious perspectives, resulting in the final modelling of RE after the influence of the theologically neutral state. This would mean that the conception of an educationally re-distributive liberal policy would have to contemplate the need to address the recognition-related asymmetry between majoritarian and minority expressions exclusively on an instrumental basis. Thus, for toleration to overcome its negative, non-interventionist formulation, the ultimate goal of a greater inter-religious comprehension would need to be pursued. This proviso, pointing to the educational realm, would thus support the view of the RE subject as a relevant communicative instance for the pursuit of such inter-religious understanding on the basis of epistemic and doctrinal comprehension beyond the necessary initial respect among religious stances. This educational goal would also leave the door open for a deeper religious/non-religious understanding, based on the cultivation of a more epistemically contextualised comprehension of religious diversity in common religious instruction. In a Habermasian sense, this would endorse the view of these forms of societal understanding as a structural need of liberal democracy, in connection chiefly with its historically contingent character as a political system. Similarly, this posited overcoming of the

restrictive, mutual respect-stage of toleration can enhance liberal RE's capacity to perform as an instance for the new generation's formative engagement with the inter-religious and the religious/secular forms of understanding.

Galeotti's toleration, inspired then by the close evaluation of historical cases of racist claims for free speech, would consequently stress the importance of the conservation of liberal democracy's foundations against regressive attempts to overthrow it through the use of liberal rights. As was explored above, this solution, thoughtfully extrapolated by Galeotti to the peculiarity of the liberal educational risks, could be seen as providing a platform of moral minimums for the deploying of a recognition-oriented RE subject under liberal circumstances. However, this institutional structure, although grounded in the pursuit of social justice, would call for a pedagogical mediation of religious truth-claims, providing for theological interlocution as a condition of any further inter-religious learning processes. This solution would, in turn, contribute to the posited Habermasian threshold of epistemic understanding between religious and non-religious stances. An educational provision that goes beyond the (necessary) respect for alterity and liberal contextualisation of anti-liberal doctrines would then lead towards the goal of recognition of alterity based on epistemic justice. This paradigm leads then to the conceptualisation of toleration as an educational virtue embedded in the acknowledgement of the epistemic character of religious traditions, in the line of the realisation of liberal justice. This view implies – as in Galeotti's previous formulation – that the thorough promotion of the social opportunities of students through RE – an area, unlike physics, characterised by endemic epistemic uncertainty – would unavoidably require the contextualised promotion of multiple world-views. However, this educational objective would need to be considered not only as a condition for the equality of social and academic representation of minorities but also as a fosterer of pupils' cognitive and judgmental capabilities regarding crucial and urgent controversies of the contemporary world. Such educational provision could be thus conceived as a further development of its grounding on political liberalism, necessarily widening itself to include the politics of recognition as a natural transition of classical liberal tolerance. In this respect, thus, a genuinely liberal education would require a communicational instance that serves as a platform from where an epistemic dialogue can be deployed in educational terms. This possibility would contribute to the awareness of the epistemic and logical character of the traditions under study and on the liberal philosophical character of the imparted education.

4. Lori Beaman

Beaman (2017) also critically addresses religious tolerance. In her view, the approaches and vocabulary associated with toleration have engendered mainly a paternalistic accommodation of diversity as a consequence of the search for peaceful coexistence³³. This scenario has translated, in Beaman's view, into the colonisation of the imaginaries on diversity by an isolationist narrative of non-interference that counteracts possibilities of intertwining and consequential de-essentialising of identities. In this author's view, toleration necessarily establishes an asymmetry – and from there a hierarchy – of positions between majority and minority cultures. This structural inequality is for Beaman based on an assumption of “reasonableness” that generates a disincentive for transforming the accommodating institutions in the sense of greater recognition and inclusion. This process ends up, despite its pacifying effects, engendering an aseptic and simulated form of public sphere in which no dialogue or mutual comprehension necessarily take place. Developments in this direction can be identified, in the author's view, in relevant judicial decisions in Canadian and European courts, leading in most cases to insubstantial forms of equality. For Beaman, many judicial decisions regarding the granting of exemptions to religious minorities – displaying the aforementioned differential of power positions – are based in the West especially on an underlying evangelical Christian understanding of what counts as “legitimate” religion. This feature, visible for her in the classical Lockean formulation of toleration, would necessarily value faith as the indispensable basis for the public acceptance of religious practices and customs. This particularity will explain the prevalence of exemption-claiming as the mechanism for the realisation of intercultural recognition in liberal democracies. In Beaman's view, this judicial resource necessarily renders the burden of proof on the claimant, who must thus exhibit the possession of a substantial world-view as the basis of her pretention to public acceptance. In Beaman's opinion, this fundamentally unequal distribution necessarily reinforces in the claimant the sense of minority and thus of burden to the majoritarian society. Similarly, this Christian

³³ Recently, Potgieter, van der Walt & Wolhuter (2014) also examined the pedagogical connotations of the claim for a redefinition of tolerance under a less paternalistic light. In their view, an understanding of human condition as ontologically *open* would lead to a more comprehensive view of alterity. Thus, the restriction to act on something one disapproves of should in their view give way to more positively interested attitude towards difference. This constitutes for them a key insight for contemporary educational thinking, especially in relation to religion.

inheritance of the tolerance paradigm is visible for Beaman in the Lockean exclusion of Catholics and atheists³⁴, a feature still visible for her in the common derogatory conception of atheism in American religious culture.

From a post-modernist perspective, Beaman calls then for the overcoming of the entrenchment of identities brought about by this classical-liberal framing of religious diversity. Beaman proposes then the contemplation of what she considers as “deep equality”, understood as a complementary alternative to the formal and unavoidably legalistic approach of toleration and accommodation (Beaman, 2017, p. 197). This perspective leads to the recognition of the objective necessity for displacing the emphasis in inter-cultural interaction from difference to sameness, this without obliterating particularities. “Deep equality” would thus contribute to the making visible of the often-unperceived thresholds (or “non-events”) of intersubjective understanding active in daily interaction. These perennial, ordinary negotiations could then teach valuable lessons concerning the margins of disclosure of differences and commonalities with which peaceful coexistence and friendship are regularly brought about by citizens. For Beaman, these quotidian and autonomous dynamics are often unacknowledged by the media and academic emphasis on publicly recognised problems and the provision of solutions for them. The revealing of such “non-events” would allow then for what she calls “agonistic respect”, understood as the adoption of a respectful attitude towards persons as different from the culture they uphold and represent. Beaman views this fundamental form of toleration as paving the way for the revisiting of traditionally held assumptions on alterity and the corresponding highlighting of the common ground among interlocutors via their interpretative opening towards diversity. For Beaman this form of mutual understanding should constitute a fundamental objective of any multicultural policy as it necessarily contributes to the countering of religious bias and intolerance. In this author’s view, one of the reasons underlying the lack of inter-religious understanding in contemporary liberal democracies also lies in the heightened objectivism of social sciences and political philosophy. For Beaman, a deep communicative

³⁴ “A church seems to me to be a free society of men who voluntarily come together to worship God in a way that they think is acceptable to Him and effective in saving their souls [...] No-one is born a member of a church; otherwise the religion of parents and grandparents would be inherited by the children in the same way that they inherit wealth and land—and you can’t imagine anything more absurd than that. So there it is: No-one is by nature bound to any particular church or sect; everyone voluntarily joins the society in which he thinks he has found the creed and mode of worship that is truly acceptable to God. He joined that communion in the hope of salvation, and that hope is the only reason he can have for staying there” (Locke, [1689]2015, p. 7).

engagement between religions would gain strength from the explicit pursuit by researchers of positive experiences on inter-religious social coexistence. Such a move would help counteract the growing stereotyping of religious identities brought about by prevailing trends in media coverage on the subject, a trend which ends up leading religious conscience towards orthodoxy as a consequence of their over-emphasis on religious identity (Beaman, 2017, p. 4).

As can be seen, Beaman offers a revision of the toleration problem in the light of contemporary theoretical approaches. In her view, the overcoming of the philosophical individualism connects with the exploration of bottom-up approaches for the conceptualisation of religious tolerance as a state policy. This option would, in her view, complement the exploration of alternative views for the promotion of more tolerant forms of life. Thus, spontaneous practices of mutual understanding could serve in her view as sources of relevant educational insights for toleration. Under this light, social usages and customs of concrete coexistence would reveal core features of a respect-for-persons approach, offering criteria for the promotion of openness towards alterity based on the quotidian negotiation of the disclosure of identity-referents. Overall, this interactionist exploration of modes of cultural agency undoubtedly serves as a source of relevant intuitions for the comprehension of the complex dynamics of cultural adherence and from then for the promotion of forms of de-essentialisation of religious identities. Similarly, it provides a relevant criticism of the accentuated unilateralism of a classically inspired mode of toleration that blinds itself to identity politics and the struggles for recognition, on the one side, and its own philosophical and theological trademark, on the other.

In this respect, the perspective adopted in Beaman's research makes a strong call for the demopolisation of the provision of responses to societal problems from academic, specialised research. It also claims for an increased visibility of people's perspectives, narratives and actions as relevant sources for political and academic reflection, especially with regards to intercultural coexistence. However, the analytical emphasis on individuals' narratives and experiences of successful inter-religious understanding – as a relevant source of insights for more substantial forms of equality – would not necessarily have to be accompanied by an accusation of *reifying* placed upon social sciences and the study of religious conflicts itself. Particularly as this charge would equate to the stereotyping of analytical categories, it would project the image of social research as unaware and uncritical of the linguistic grounds of its

theoretical resources, ignoring thus significant trends on theoretical and categorical reflexivity in social thought³⁵. Correspondingly, methodological problematisation in social sciences can be thought of as not necessarily associated with the generation of societal conflicts via the – either unintended or deliberate – framing of phenomena as inherently *problematic*, as Beaman has it. On the contrary, the academic questioning of empirical circumstances can be seen as frequently serving the highlighting of societal tensions underlying institutional arrangements, as Beaman’s own questioning of the tolerant-accommodating solution itself illustrates. Thus, historical reality – and especially religious diversity – would not necessarily be constituted as a *problem* by a systematic and epistemically open perspective – as the academic one – which purports not to be determined by any political and ideological concern. On the contrary, the portrayal of reality as intrinsically problematic would have to be attributed to political interventions and modes of instrumentalisation of academic perspectives, either by pre-determining research outcomes along ideological lines or by broadcasting them in a rhetorical and discursive manner.

Relatedly, Beaman’s firm reliance on an interactionist view of religious faith renders her approach vulnerable to the accusation of lack of awareness of the theological traditions informing and framing individual configurations of identity. Calling expressly on occasions – on the basis of interactionist analysis – for the deconstruction of the “religious” category (Beaman, 2017, p. 47), her emphasis on the social construction of forms of religious self-awareness would involve the risk of ignoring the constitutive character of religious traditions and orthodoxy in the formation of the individual’s self-understanding. Although plural and necessarily nuanced – and conceived especially as structures of meaning contextualising particular configurations of identity –, religious traditions need to be approached also as substantial perspectives on life and reality. They can be seen in this regard as sources of insights on public and political affairs, and as providing common denominators among more particular and contextualised constructions of identity by individuals and communities. In this respect, Beaman’s accurate questioning of the reification of religious identity – via particularly the essentialisation of authoritative pronouncements as *natural* representatives of the community of believers – could be complemented here by the acknowledgement of the existence of

³⁵ See for instance Jackson’s (1997; 2004, pp. 22-38) questioning of the essentialisation of religious labels as a colonialist historical inheritance, constructing non-porous spiritual identities based on a rigid ontologisation of religious traditions.

relatively autonomous and consistent symbolic systems incarnated in the different forms of faith inhabiting religious imaginaries. Though vulnerable to essentialisation and fundamentalist assimilation, these matrixes of meaning could be comprehended here as representing spiritual, cultural and moral sources for individuals' forms of self-understanding. It is precisely these traditions – besides individuals' identity-constructions – which can experience transformations as a result of inter-religious encounters. Thus, the *reifying* indictment would find support on a rejection of this posited relative objectivity of faith as a symbolic system, denying the methodological correspondence of the analytical branches devoted to their study. In this regard, the praiseworthy purpose of rescuing perspectives on inter-religious recognition from the study of shared dynamics of coexistence would not necessarily have to support itself on a sceptic stance towards objectivism in the social study of religion, portraying academics as subject to perspectivising-related obsessions. Differently, Beaman's analogous questioning of the social consequences of media coverage of religious diversity would prove more accurate, especially as the previously mentioned accusations of reifying and problem-generating could find more solid grounds on this field's generalised emphasis of attention-catching headlines.

5. Denis Lacorne

Denis Lacorne (2019a, 2019b) addresses toleration by first positively assessing Locke's classical formulation on this subject. In Lacorne's view, this philosopher's contribution symbolises the passing from a "classical" – based on the paternalistic concession of an unquestioned authority – to a "modern" view on tolerance, oriented towards the exploration of its appropriate philosophical basis. For Lacorne, Locke inaugurates thus a universal duty to avoid any coercion on the grounds of religious belief, allowing tolerance to overcome considerations on the societal convenience of religious diversity. This universalism is viewed by Lacorne then as supporting the subsequent Lockean separation between the religious and the political magistracies, thus introducing the division between Church and state in philosophical thought. However, Lacorne also questions Locke's exclusion of Catholics and atheists from the scope of religious expressions to be tolerated³⁶. Lacorne questions then the

³⁶ In this respect, Lacorne illustrates the historical embeddedness of Locke's claim for the intolerance of Catholics and the Lockean originality of the exclusion of atheists.

pretension of universality of the classical formulation of toleration, despite its clear contributions to the establishment of a philosophical basis for peaceful religious coexistence. In this respect, classical-liberal toleration is finally assessed by Lacorne as a meaningful – though necessarily limited – development in the direction of the search for fundamental freedoms as the basis for peaceful coexistence among diversity.

After reviewing different enlightened stances and political variations on toleration (“Imperial-bureaucratic” in the Ottoman Empire, “mercantilist” in Venice and “religious and colonial” in North America), Lacorne stipulates that multicultural societies have developed alternative considerations on this subject. He then portrays these modifications as being formulated not only in terms of individual liberties but also in light of the social consequences of those liberties. This “multi-cultural” tolerance has purported thus to recognise collective instances of identification as subjects of rights, addressing possibilities for restrictions to freedom of speech concerning potential damage to minorities’ sense of dignity and social cohesion in general. Lacorne illustrates this issue in connection with recent debates regarding the Burkini-ban in France and the events in Charlottesville, Virginia. These contemporary circumstances are evaluated by this French scholar as illuminating the recent collision between fundamental freedoms (as the freedom of speech when claimed by white-supremacist groups) and religious tolerance as a societal value. From a revision also on the current configurations of the limits of freedom of speech in European and North American countries, Lacorne argues strongly for a more extensive comprehension of the “legality” of religious and ideological voices as necessarily encompassing a communitarian sense of respect. For Lacorne, the understanding of the diachronic dimension of the trends feeding religious and cultural diversity constitutes a central requisite for a formulation of toleration in the light of contemporary circumstances. This stance would lead to the understanding of religion’s historical sense of identity as constitutive of the multicultural public sphere. From these premises, relevant considerations for an adequately restricted definition of freedom of speech can be extracted. In Lacorne’s view, thus, the definition of the appropriate contours of religious and political toleration must be considered as a necessarily unfinished project, especially given the democratic drive towards the protection of fundamental liberties.

In this respect, Lacorne's contribution can be assessed as meaningful for a contemporary view on toleration. Despite his positive valuation of the philosophical character of the classic liberal formulation of tolerance – and lack of recognition of the limitations inherent in its rationalist foundations –, Lacorne acknowledges the illiberal consequences to which it leads. This awareness leads him to the exploration of more inclusive formulations of toleration, particularly in the light of different historical experiences. Lacorne's final assessment of the relevance of this concept as attached to the recognition of cultural rights as a fundamental source of societal coexistence appears in this respect as relevant. This fact is highlighted by the comprehension of tolerance in connection with the legal recognition of communitarian identity-sources, allowing for the consequential acknowledgement of cultural particularities beyond the protection of individual rights. This common ground between different recent perspectives on toleration can be seen as complemented by Lacorne's realisation of the need to consider limitations to fundamental rights that initially were connected to toleration itself. This perspective presents thus a notion of freedom of speech as necessarily subjected to a thus conceived form of tolerance, limiting individual rights with regards to an awareness of their consequence to the body politic. In this formulation, a respect-for-collectivities approach emerges as a fundamental criterion for societal coexistence, especially concerning those communities' historical self-understanding. Thus, shared narratives and other forms of collective self-representation – which constitute a privileged target of anti-liberal, discriminatory stances – would be understood in this perspective as relevant subjects of special legal protections. As such, these symbolic instances would serve as platforms for the deployment of individual rights to personal identity and to education, which evidences their structural articulation on a liberal-democratic foundation.

As can be seen, Lacorne's orientation in this regard will offer a recognition-based, collectivist approach to toleration as representing a path for reform in public and legal institutions in liberal democracies. Regarding this, this approach would not rely on a respect-for-persons direction that would find insights in communitarian practices of practical coexistence, as in Beaman. On the contrary, Lacorne explicitly calls for reflexivity on judicial adjudication concerning the enforcement of freedom of speech. This option highlights an institutional path for the reformulation of tolerance as a relevant societal virtue for different contemporary configurations of the multicultural public sphere. Certainly, scenarios of complementarity between Lacorne's legal and Beaman's interactional approaches to the reformulation of

toleration could be envisaged, especially in connection to their educational implementation. Overall, however, the emphasis on recognition of the collective instances of cultural and religious identification would emerge as a crucial feature of these approaches. Along with the Habermasian assertion of the intersubjective basis of personal identity, these common grounds would translate into the need to acknowledge the epistemic specificities of religious worldviews. From this perspective, this epistemic modality of recognition would constitute an unavoidable need of any liberal-democratic form of education for tolerance. As was highlighted in earlier formulations of toleration, this convergence on the realisation of the threshold of otherness inhabiting religious diversity offers itself as a constitutive trait of any contemporary revision of this classical concept, especially concerning the questioning of its rationalist/individualist underpinnings. However, the exploration of further articulations between these perspectives and Habermas' approach to toleration will be developed in the next section in the chapter's conclusions.

2. Conclusion: contemporary trends of liberal tolerance in a Habermasian light

Toleration has represented in the West a profound aspiration for religious understanding and peaceful coexistence. The longing for peace amidst religious conflict on the part of the intelligentsia found philosophical grounds in liberalism, particularly in the conception of the inalienable freedom and dignity inherent in human condition. In this manner, political thinking articulated a conception of the state as based on the recognition of such liberty, attaching to it the granting of freedom to religious practice itself as its natural consequence. As in Locke, toleration was proclaimed as predicated on the (supposedly) inner reasonability of belief and thus of avoiding physical coercion in religious conversion. This procedure, leading to an individualist conception of religious belief, naturally portrayed faith as the *natural* conclusion of the rational citizen – reached by the use of its reason alone – and unbelief as an unnatural position which deserved to be politically excluded based on its dubious morality. From these grounds, neutrality was preached as the natural position of the enlightened state towards the religious diversity among its citizens, and toleration became a necessary citizen virtue which would constitute the core requisite for peace among religions.

Recent formulations of tolerance can in this respect illustrate later formulations of this concept's liberal inheritance. In this regard, Jay Newman, Susan Mendus, Anna Elisabetta

Galeotti, Lori Beaman and Denis Lacorne offer insightful perspectives on the matter, addressing what they perceive as liberal toleration's main limitations and possibilities. The American philosopher Jay Newman avoids in this respect a conceptualisation of tolerance as the logical consequence of the accepted impossibility of fostering conversion by any non-persuasive means, as Locke does. On the contrary, he attempts a logical definition of toleration as not requiring the suppression of judgement on the beliefs that are to be tolerated. This option leads Newman to foster tolerance instead as a form of engagement with *positive* motives to avoid acting against the relevant belief³⁷. This *positivity* would lie for Newman in its religious character – for the case of the tolerant religious believer –, being spiritually informed by the like-contents of her own religious tradition. According to Newman, it is precisely the purposeful cultivation of the *civilisational* (i.e. non-violent, philanthropic) values of one's own tradition that is the indispensable condition for a fairer modality of toleration. This disposition would allow religions not only to sustain but essentially enrich social interaction on democratic premises. In this manner, liberal democracy would overcome the political imposition of a determined set of criteria to define the common, shared realm, something which results for Newman in the elimination of religious voices in the public sphere.

Newman's more religiously-informed view of religious tolerance, although possibly approaching from a different direction the right not to have one's religious freedom interfered with, can hardly prove effective when addressing the multi-factored nature of intolerance, as he himself highlights when commenting on the psychological, conceptual, epistemic, theological and ethical facets of this phenomenon. Similarly, the relevance of this formulation is questionable, particularly in terms of educational mediation of different societal perspectives. This author's assertion on the possibility of universal agreement on the formulation of *love, peace, wisdom, justice and beauty* – as encompassing humanity's central values – would unavoidably render this moral universalism the central tenet of any form of education for toleration. Consequently and as meaningful as this proposal may be, Newman's religious tolerance would have to rely on a universal perspective across religions instead of on an epistemic recognition between them. Thus, the cultivation of perspectivising-related skills

³⁷ This thesis will regularly address *belief* as constitutive feature of religion, particularly in line with the epistemic emphasis of the analytical perspective adopted in this work. This usage does not pretend to imply a reduction of religion's phenomenal (i.e. epistemic, psychological, ethical, moral, etc.) diversity to its cognitive features.

and dispositions of empathy in new generations would yield to the thus formulated *civilisational* content, leading in turn to the highlighting of the shared moral grounds over the differences between religious perspectives. In this respect, Newman's posited education for tolerance, despite materialising Habermas' contention on religious contributions to liberal democracy, would prove however hardly possible to be harmonised with a Habermasian inspired modality of RE. As was outlined in the previous chapter, the critical orientation characterising a Habermasian influence on RE would emphasise reflexive cognition on epistemic specificities among religious and non-religious interlocutors as a requisite for the epistemic understanding between religious and secular citizens. In this respect, Newman's proposal of education for toleration would imply a risk of displacement of curricular emphasis towards his *civilisational* values, constituted as the central educational goal for an RE modality. This possibility would necessarily hinder the cultivation – through the appropriate knowledge of religious material – of the cognitive dispositions highlighted by Habermas as fundamental for the preservation of liberal democracy.

Not from a theological perspective but inside the liberal philosophical tradition, Welsh political philosopher Susan Mendus highlights the importance of contextualising classical tolerance as expressing its liberal underpinnings. From here, she purports to extract relevant insights for the application of this formulation of toleration to the contemporary world. For her, these underlying conceptions of freedom and autonomy are the ones setting effective limits to liberal toleration, reducing its applicability to modern, highly diversified contexts. In Mendus' view, the neutral state would not allow society to grant a fair treatment to the multiplicity of world-views found in civil society, especially if considering minority cultures. Thus, state involvement and promotion of such social diversity is necessary if equality is to be pursued, and especially if social cohesion and civil identification with society are to be promoted. This enhancing of citizens' sense of belonging to general society requires for Mendus the exploration of non-liberal political perspectives that can provide renewed insights for this objective. In her view, one of these stances can be meaningfully found in socialist thinking. For Mendus, socialism can enrich the processes of social recognition of symbolic peculiarities through the meaningful mediation of communities' identity-related particularities. As was highlighted above, Mendus' formulation offers a post-Enlightened view on toleration as requiring the abandoning of its rationalist-individualist inheritance in order to be able to mediate between different conceptions of the good. However, her selection of socialism as the

instance providing a platform for a reciprocal engagement among citizens can be questioned. In this respect, the socialist understanding of religion would represent a substantial perspective for the educational framing of religion, threatening with an ideological simplification of religious doctrines and perspectives. Thus, socialism as an integrative force for pluralist societies poses a significant interpretative risk for the epistemic mutual recognition of a highly diversified citizenship.

The Italian philosopher Anna Elisabetta Galeotti offers here a renewed view of the problem of religious tolerance. For her, classical toleration needs to be complemented by identity politics as civil society is, in her view, unavoidably constituted by asymmetrical interaction between groups. It is precisely the acceptance of this fact which leads her to question the neutralist model of the state, conceptualising it as one that blinds itself to the symbolic particularities of its citizens via its emphasis on individual rights. This constitutes for Galeotti an essential problem of political freedom as recognition is, in her view, an indispensable requisite for the full exercise of citizens' rights. For her, the cognisant realisation of alterity unavoidably mediates in social integration beyond the formal granting of civil status. For Galeotti, the contemporary liberal (Rawlsian) emphasis on distributive justice fails to address comprehensively the heterogeneity of conceptions of the good, with all its political implications and ramifications especially regarding visions of society. From this perspective, welfare politics could hardly be separated from identity politics in the sense that the full realisation of the former will hardly be achievable without the consideration of the existential and symbolical grounds that support the sense of belonging to the body politic. In this sense, Galeotti proposes a recognition-based form of toleration as transcending the neutralist-liberal model of statehood without compromising the necessary impartiality of the governmental body in matters of ideological controversy. Here, Galeotti stresses the liberal state's need for consistency and self-defence when addressing the potential educational value of anti-liberal ideologies and the role of freedom of speech in liberal schooling. As can be seen, Galeotti's main argument regarding recognition leads her towards the consideration of the educational dimension of toleration, deducing in the process a need for solid liberal guidelines that frame the exposition of any doctrine in the socialisation of new generations. This pedagogical framework would precisely constitute the bearer of the social trust invested in schooling, providing arguments for state intervention in educational matters.

More recently, Lori Beaman (2017) and Denis Lacorne (2019) offer relevant revisions on religious tolerance in the light of complex multicultural circumstances. In the first case, classical-liberal toleration is considered as emblematic of an unjustified rationalist emphasis that blinds itself to the power differentials exhibited by societal groups. This characteristic would be evident in the Protestant influence lingering in, for instance, the Lockean formulation of toleration itself, projecting from its own perspective criteria for the validation of religious belief. This asymmetry translates for Beaman into the religiously determined character of the public sphere in Western democracies, privileging individualism as the yardstick for the assessment of genuineness of any form of religious faith. This form of structural inequality is assessed by Beaman as illustrating the limitations inherent in the formulation of toleration itself, unavoidably based on an exemption-granting majority who is unwilling to revise its own foundations. From these premises, this Canadian scholar proposes the overcoming of the formal equality underlying rationalist toleration, navigating instead towards more substantive forms of recognition among diversity. One of these she finds in the spontaneous dynamics of quotidian negotiation between religiously and culturally diverse citizens. In her view, daily coexistence in pluralistic communities exhibits features of thresholds of disclosure and negotiations of symbolic referents, allowing for gradual processes of de-essentialisation of identities among participants. The study of these ordinary instances of communication will for her shed some light on those forms of intersubjective recognition taking place away from the media reflectors. Such “non-events” constitute bearers of – for Beaman – relevant insights (as the individual-based “agonistic” respect) for a more thorough comprehension of equality beyond its formal/legal manifestations. Although strongly persuasive of the virtues of the ethnological study of religious diversity as a source of ethical insights for the promotion of more substantive forms of equality, Beaman’s approach struggles however to overcome a respect-for-persons approach to the call for epistemic recognition of alterity. Along with the correlated interactionist reduction of religious traditions to reified labels arising mainly from objectivistic social science and media coverage, this outlook on toleration fails to recognise the margins of substantiality of the religious traditions feeding particular spiritual imaginaries. In this respect, the accurate questioning of the essentialisation of religious identities via their assimilation to institutional orthodoxy leads Beaman to an unawareness of the relative

objectivity of social constructs in terms of cultural patterns of identification³⁸. Thus, Beaman's *deep equality* – despite insightfully illuminating particular strategies of disclosing and negotiation of identity-descriptors in social interaction – would lack a fundamental disposition to integrate religious doctrines and world-views as ethical and moral voices for the public sphere. In this respect, this would render questionable its ultimate suitability for a liberal-democratic modality of RE along Habermasian lines.

Similarly, Lacorne addresses the Lockean formulation as a foundational attempt to ground toleration on a universal, philosophical basis. In this author's view, the aforementioned characteristic justifies a positive evaluation of this classical-liberal version of toleration as a relevant source for the contemporary world. In this, this French scholar assesses Locke as transcending the political arguments for tolerance in the direction of a general duty of respect towards persons, despite Locke's shortcomings concerning Catholicism and atheism. However, Lacorne himself realises the importance of contemplating non-individualist perspectives on toleration, regarding in particular outlooks that recognise the importance of considering groups as subjects of special rights and protections. Lacorne considers this as present in formulations of tolerance in connection with identity politics and potential limitations of freedom of speech in liberal-democratic societies. Correspondingly, toleration would need to be conceived in the light of the actualisation of the liberties it originally confounded during the early liberal era. This interpretation would imply the highlighting of social cohesion as a core criterion for the adjudications of limits for toleration, considering not only social harmony but also recognition and cultural awareness as fundamental objectives of the liberal state. Overall, Lacorne's approximation to toleration offers in this respect an insightful contemporary contextualisation of the challenges faced by peaceful coexistence of various religions. In this light, the juridical ramifications of the Lockean formulation of tolerance are highlighted as engendering fundamental rights that currently call for a revision of this classical public virtue. Lacorne's formulation reinforces thus the need for toleration to assert its historical relevance by addressing cultural instances of identification as relevant sources for a thorough realisation of individual liberties. Correspondingly, the due threshold of legal protection for religious communities would emerge as a constitutive character for toleration, promoting consequential restrictions for freedom of speech along the lines of

³⁸ See classically Durkheim ([1895] 1982) for a foundational formulation of this methodological premise in sociology.

collective rights to cultural assertion and self-respect. This portrayed juridical institutionalisation of cultural recognition would in this respect converge with the Habermasian emphasis on inter-subjectivity as a prominent source of individual rational and symbolical ontogeny. From here, educational considerations could be deployed under the light of Habermas' call for epistemic understanding between religious and secular citizens, promoting significant levels of awareness concerning inter-religious and secular diversity. Thus, the legal consecration of – especially minority – collective rights could lead to the enforcement of a RE modality oriented towards deep margins of inter-religious and religious-secular epistemic recognition and understanding, within the framework of a more comprehensive materialisation of fundamental individual rights.

From diverse ideological shores, then, these authors bring founding liberal assumptions to face contemporary circumstances in which non-liberal political views – many embedded in religious world-views of different kinds – coexist side by side and share the same public arena. This shared feature leads these views towards a widening of the meaning of toleration to the point of questioning not only the individualist accent of its liberal background but also other supporting liberal dogmas. The range of problematised central tenets includes, for instance, the neutrality of the state or its absolute separation from the Church. Either from a virtue-ethics stance that postulates its compatibility with a committed religious perspective or from an argument on the limits of toleration whether to promote a thorough sense of belonging in citizens or to deal reasonably with collective claims of different kinds, these views purport to expand classical liberal views. In particular, the perspectives revised here aim to promote in the liberal state an increased awareness of its historicity and political limits. In this respect, classical toleration is questioned and thus reformulated in order to widen its margin of inclusion and with this its materialisation of modern democracy. This objective is pursued from one these perspectives (Newman's) by suggesting new general ethical criteria that could cut across religious and secular perspectives. In the others (Mendus' and Galeotti's), further developments are offered in terms of the scope of toleration and towards its approximation to the struggles for recognition waged by minorities in democratic societies. More contemporary approaches (Beaman's and Lacorne's) to toleration emphasise the overcoming of the rationalist individualism underlying its first philosophical formulations, as they emblematically identify it in the Lockean case. In these cases, the approximation to processes of intercultural recognition – either as an objective or as a source of legal configurations on the matter – gains

prominence as a constitutive feature of the conceptualisation of toleration for contemporary circumstances of religious pluralism. Thus, societal considerations in terms of peaceful coexistence and the fostering of modes of awareness concerning religious diversity bring toleration's conceptual basis towards the importance of deriving relevant educational concerns for the promotion of similar mentalities in connection with the recognition of alterity. In this respect, the correspondent transition towards the importance of legal protection of collectivities in the conceptualisation of toleration could be articulated with the comprehension of the social embedding of subjectivity in an attempt to ground a thorough comprehension of both individual integrity and education for tolerance. In this regard, the emphasis on the inter-subjective grounding of conscience and identity would support the liberal need for legal recognition of communities' rights and the desirability of fostering in individuals empathetic ethical assumptions in connection with the interpretation of otherness. As was explored in the previous chapter, this modality of shaping of mentalities – as Habermas suggests it – would constitute itself as a safeguard of individual liberties, engendering educational modalities in terms of epistemic recognition of – mainly – religious diversity as a requisite for the limitations of, for instance, freedom of speech and the preservation of the liberal-democratic order itself. Thus, the formulation of a public policy of toleration would find support in a comprehension of the social foundation of identity – with its correspondent emphasis on groups' and cultural rights – and its connection with a subsequent educational policy in terms of critical awareness of diversity as a necessary platform for the cultivation of individual liberties.

These contributions can also be conceived in light of Habermas' view on the need by religion to contribute to the further configurations of democracy, particularly by highlighting the moral forces that feed the democratic spirit in civil society. Habermas (2004) himself highlights contradiction as one of the main problems of toleration, particularly about the possibility of incurring illiberal measures in order to promote religious freedom. In his view, this risk, rooted in the historical genesis of toleration-acts themselves, can be overcome by transcending their "official-permission" connotation towards a "mutual-respect" model that more effectively institutionalises the tolerant attitude in society. This displacement of emphasis implies the understanding of the universalistic normative core of liberal democracy as requiring the universal acceptance of equal treatment before law. As such, the generalisation of this understanding would constitute a necessary requisite for the effective institutionalisation of toleration in culture and society. Under these conditions, social interaction could acquire the

features of the peaceful coexistence of unsolved but *legitimate* cognitive controversies. Correspondingly, the grounding of the disqualification of racist and other illiberal doctrines and opinions would reside in their lack of fit with this founding liberal and rationalist *ethos* underlying communicational engagement in civil society. This conditional requisite gives way in Habermas' view to a more functional solution according to which religious and other comprehensive doctrines can find within themselves sound reasons to adopt such fundamental normative stance as a *natural* development of their own assumptions. In this respect, toleration could be cultivated beyond a mere adaptation to prevailing liberal norms and values. In Habermas' view, then, such a *modernisation of the religious mindset* would represent for religious citizens a cognitive instance in which a mere *modus vivendi* with the liberal-democratic order can be substituted by a reciprocally transformative communication between both.

As can be seen, Habermas will insist on the importance of transcending an adaptation of comprehensive doctrines to the liberal system. In his view, mere external and compulsory obedience to the prohibition of discrimination constitutes an initial but necessary partial stage of religious conscience concerning the fundamental right to religious liberty. In this respect, subsequent elaborations on religious and secular understandings of peaceful coexistence would need to be explored in order to honour liberal democracy's need to foresee potential future configurations. Unlike Mendus, Habermas' proposal to enhance civic identification with political liberalism would reside not in a recourse to socialism but in the engendering of corresponding cognitive transformations between religious and non-religious citizens. As was highlighted before, both the assumption of rationality in religious voices and the *modernisation of religious consciousness* appear in Habermas as discursively ethical products of mutual perspective-taking between the two aforementioned religiously diverse types of citizens. As can be seen, critical normative transformations are envisaged by Habermas as a consequence of comprehensive doctrines' adjustment to liberal-democratic conditions. However, these modifications are not conceived by him as requiring adherence to an all-inclusive political ideology. On the contrary, they are seen as harmonising with a notion of epistemic justice conceived as the basis for effective interlocution among diverse cultural backgrounds. Thus, the political culture of a liberal constitution is viewed by Habermas as intermingling with the diverse ethical doctrines in civil society, prompting substantial modifications on their general moral outlook. Habermas conceives this process as resulting in a greater threshold of

institutionalisation of ethical attitudes favourable to the procedural rationality of public deliberation. This cultural transformation, seen as an educational pursuit in itself, could in this respect find support in a democratised access to curricular representation for religious minorities, in Galeotti's sense. This particular curricular objective would represent here an opportunity to render visible in particular local diversity in a dignified way, also serving as an educational platform for the enhancing of the individual's cognitive capabilities concerning religious diversity. In this sense, Habermas emphasises individual rights as the normative core of liberal democracy, understanding collectivities as unavoidable platforms for the emergence of individual autonomy. This form of theoretical prioritisation will allow for the harmonisation of educational measures of representational justice with the fostering of critical thinking in new generations, providing a clear educational framework along Habermasian lines. In this respect, the acceptance of the inalienability of individual rights – brought up especially by the direct facing of the irreducibility of religious diversity–, can foster significant cognitive transformations in world-views. These modifications, envisaged by Habermas in the sense of a deeper understanding of alterity, would consequently not impinge on those doctrines' epistemic independence from any attempt to ideological assimilation by state doctrines. From these grounds, relevant insights could be extracted for the educational implementation of religious knowledge in the sense of a greater understanding of religious diversity and the “religious” and “secular” categories themselves.

What acquires importance here is the Habermasian requisite of a parallel institutionalisation in society of a mindset according to which *reasonableness* can be granted, as a condition of communication, to religious world-views. In this respect, the critical addressing of rationalist assumptions of different kinds that hinder any fruitful exchange between religious and secular citizens appears as indispensable for the fostering of any form of understanding between them. Correspondingly, the revisions of toleration explored above can find an echo in Habermas' considerations of the epistemic modifications that need to take place among citizens if liberal democracy is to survive. Habermas' *modernisation of religious consciousness* can be seen then as attuned to Newman's cultivation of *civilisational* values inside the believer's tradition. According to this view, both formulations would be providing insights on the epistemic changes occurring in religious mentalities when thoroughly addressing the cultural and ideological heterogeneity that characterises contemporary civil society. Similarly, Habermas' request for the assumption of rationality as a condition for the validation of civic interlocution

would constitute an epistemic deepening of Galeotti's attempt towards the inclusion of identity politics in liberal tolerance. In this light, the acknowledgement of logical consistency and moral relevance in alternative identity-constructions can illuminate possible modalities of the corresponding epistemic changes, particularly on the secular side. Different as their respective philosophical contexts and possible derivations might be, these formulations articulate in their own way a conception of conceptual and ethical changes that need to accompany the implementation of toleration in a secularised and diversified civil society. In this respect, the exploration of the philosophical boundaries and inherent contradictions of classical tolerance leads towards a critical revision of its liberal assumptions. This exploration reaches the point of questioning not only classical toleration's individualistic accent but also the underlying neutralist and non-interventionist model of the state. Thus, a wider cultural framework for public policy emerges as requesting a communicative articulation between world-views for the assertion of the liberal and democratic character of any state intervention in public life. This organic articulation between the liberal-democratic order, on the one hand, and inter-cultural and inter-religious recognition, on the other, emerges thus as a critical societal need, in particular if temporary peaceful coexistence is to give way to a more lasting and meaningful form of public deliberation.

Thus, the cultural and political dimensions of schooling gain relevance as providing a privileged scenario for the liberal promotion of epistemic changes in new generations, as was highlighted in the previous chapter. The afore-mentioned explorations of toleration can be interpreted as indirectly underlining the educational dimension as a consequential formulation of the concept, especially under conditions of high diversity. This development leaves conceptual space for conceiving liberal schooling as the scenario in which both the promotion of thinking capabilities and recognition of minorities are pursued³⁹. This means that the promotion of genuinely tolerant and epistemically comprehensive mentalities in pupils – understood as a condition for the ultimate preservation of their political liberties – can be conceived as effectively harmonising with the curricular widening of the representational scope concerning religious diversity. In this way, education would be harbouring the legitimate

³⁹ For the particular case of RE, this political and educational convergence can also be thought of as providing a hinge between a *subject-centred* approach – oriented towards the democratisation of the curriculum – and *pupil-centred* one, based on the promotion of skills in learners (see in this respect Grimmit, 1973, and Teece, 2010 on these categories).

educational goal of individual promotion and, simultaneously, measurements of political recognition and social justice. This convergence could, in turn, set a sound basis for the previously explored conception of liberal democratic schooling as a *secondary* or *preliminary* public sphere, providing channels of cultural promotion beyond the dispensation of knowledge and skills.

Such promotion of comprehensive mentalities can be interpreted thus in the sense of the educational guidelines framing the educational activity, in the direction suggested by Galeotti. In this respect, changes within the general cognitive attitude concerning alternative world-views can operate as the pedagogical framework for the promotion of religious diversity in school. This educational formulation would require the focusing of the levels of pupils' exposition to the curricular contents in the achievement of this general formative goal. It can also contribute to the adequate pedagogical framing of truth-claims and different kinds of religious controversies, something which becomes increasingly important especially if comprehension and self-awareness are to be promoted through the educational use of polemics. This orientation requires the consideration of effective limits for the exposition of controversial contents in the classroom, particularly about the stated goal of promotion of critical-thinking skills and representational justice in RE. These ethical boundaries could help avoid the hazards of proselytism and radicalisation through RE, on the one side, and *factualisation*, on the other⁴⁰. Consequently, this cognitive modification in the direction of intellectual openness would encompass both religious and secular students, operating as the educational place where different religious doctrines are summoned for the pursuit of this goal. This educational framework for RE can then be considered as significant for, and more in tune with, the

⁴⁰ This last risk gains especial relevance when considering the educational emphasis on hybridisation and experience in RE (Jackson, 1997, 2004). Regarding this, an underlying romantic theological heritage is highlighted by Wright (2003) and Teece (2010), especially as simplifying the doctrinal and metaphysical dimensions of religious claims. In Teece's words: "I suggest, therefore, that the central focus for religious educators should be on religions as expressions of human experiences of transcendence. It should be stressed, taking Wright's concern about not limiting RE to an exploration of social space, that this does not mean that religious education merely focuses on the human experience. It is what human beings claim to know through their experience of the transcendent that is essential" (p. 179). Although Teece himself further criticises Wright's emphasis on truth-claims controversies as portraying religious as mutually incompatible - therefore obviating the possible common metaphysical and moral grounds among them, both authors converge on the criticism of the factualist simplification of religion as a potential de-substantialisation of religious traditions in favour of their particularist comprehension as products of subjects' identity construction-processes. In this respect, the prevalence of this interpretative emphasis can be viewed as representing an educational risk in the sense of imposing anthropologically informed accounts on religious doctrines' voices.

cultivation of a more symbolically informed conception of tolerance. This perspective would contribute simultaneously to increasing self-criticism of one's own assumptions. Ultimately, this evaluative direction for RE could, in turn, pave the way for the institutionalisation of the general epistemic attitude necessary, in Habermas' view, for the survival and evolution of liberal democracy.

Third Chapter: Liberal Education and Indoctrination

1. Introduction

The previous discussion on toleration concluded with its conception as a political tool for maintaining peace and the fostering of epistemic levels of public understanding in pluralist conditions. This increasing consideration of the symbolic dimension of social interaction could be identified as compatible with Habermas' formulation of the centrality of the religious-secular epistemic understanding for liberal democracy and of toleration as the result of the appropriation by the religious believer of its founding rationalist ethos. This theoretical articulation opens up the possibility of conceiving RE as a privileged tool for the promotion of the aforementioned epistemic understanding between religious and secular citizens, while simultaneously contributing to thought-cultivation in new generations. The specific addressing of religious truth-claims, world-views, practices, and experiences proper to this subject area can thus be considered as an educational scenario providing communicative and socialising processes for religious and secular perspectives to attain mutual understanding. In this respect, RE in common schooling would seem to provide a suitable instance for such objectives to take place effectively in pupils' learning⁴¹. This possibility will simultaneously enable liberal schooling to represent religious diversity academically via RE.

Consequently, religious education would then be justified as a fit scenario for the joint pursuit of two central educational objectives: human flourishing as the promotion of capacities for rational thinking through intersubjective socialisation in a specific religious world-view, and cognitive modification (*learning processes*) within religious and secular perspectives. Similarly, some modalities for the convergence between these two goals, on the one hand, and the above-mentioned objective of fair academic representation of religious diversity, on the other, can be further explored, especially under the banner of religious minorities' becoming visible through schooling. This convergence of educational and political objectives can be

⁴¹ Galeotti's remarks on the need for mandatory liberal guidelines for public education could be considered here as providing an additional safeguard against the risks of religious indoctrination through education (see section 3.3. of this work for a further exploration of the notion of *indoctrination*). The particular characteristics of this proviso will be explored in relation to the philosophical definition of indoctrination. In this respect, the second section of this chapter can be interpreted as developing important educational guidelines performing as teaching borders for liberal schooling, in Galeotti's sense.

developed especially as providing justification for the inclusion of RE in the liberal curriculum, justifying thus the liberal-democratic value of inter-religious learning. Additionally, the promotion of rational thinking will reflect both the public importance of parental ideological nurturing – grounding the emergence of further autonomous reasoning – and the communitarian embeddedness of many schools – embedded frequently in the explicit religious beliefs that guided their foundation. The cognitive achievements included in the first and second objectives can then be projected as relying on the educational processes of religious communities (including their schooling) in the field of religious nurturing. This objective can be considered as grounded in the liberal and democratic potential of any form of schooling, capitalising on their socialising and therefore publicly relevant role. Accordingly, the threshold of social representation included in the third objective would find support in the pursuit of the two previous ones. Thus, a combined modality of RE along these lines could be envisaged as contributing to the specific goals of liberal education and hence to the corresponding socialisation of new generations.

In this respect, this chapter will proceed on a further clarification and contextualisation of this convergence of educational objectives. For this, it will address relevant approaches to the concept of *liberal education*⁴², especially in order to set an interpretive background for the comprehension of the convergence mentioned above. Furthermore, the chapter will address a supplementary specification of this confluence with an especial emphasis on the second objective concerning the religious-secular understanding. This concentration is due to this objective's special significance for liberal education and to the fact that objectives number one and three were already developed in previous chapters. Finally, the chapter will address the philosophical debate around the concept of *indoctrination*. As mentioned above, this exploration will be deployed primarily in line with the search for liberal-educational guidelines for common schooling, and particularly around a possible convergence of liberally educational

⁴² This research addresses the concept of *liberal education* as embedded in the historical persistence of liberal-democratic political conditions in the Western world, in particular in connection with Habermas' emphasis on deliberative democracy as a theoretical locus. In this respect, the selection of this form of education as relevant for the pursuit of this research finds grounds in the aforementioned Habermasian appraisal of liberal democracy as an essentially *unfinished* project. It is in this light that relevant formulations of *liberal education* are used as pertinent for the political harmonisation of the Habermasian RE here attempted. For a theological and political discussion on the notion of *postliberal education* see for instance Davis (2015).

goals with a non-perfectionist⁴³ concept of autonomy. In this sense, analytical findings regarding indoctrinatory risks for the development of autonomous rationality would be considered here as answers to the search for an RE modality that can harmonise with liberal educational goals.

2. Liberal Education

2.1. Paul Hirst's Liberal Education

One of the primary sources for the philosophical revision of the concept of liberal education is the British philosopher of education Paul Hirst (1965; 1970; 1973; 1974a; 1974b; 1974c). In his view, the concept of *liberal education* needs to be grounded in the nature of knowledge itself. This foundation would provide an adequate analytical base for the accurate comprehension of the learning process, conceived as the meaningful relation between the human mind and that knowledge (Hirst, 1974). In this manner, Hirst projects the concept of liberal education as avoiding a loose negative definition, i.e., as opposed to technical or specialised education or to other ideological labels such as *conservative* or *totalitarian* education. In this regard, the exploration of substantial and solid ontological grounds would help counteract any form of political misappropriation of the concept. Hirst stresses then that beyond the potential intrinsic value of the acquisition of a particular form of knowledge or skill, liberal education needs to engage with the fostering of some mental aptitudes and attitudes that provide for the development of general rational capabilities (Hirst, 1974a, p. 38). Reason as the founding faculty of learning is therefore described by Hirst as the testing of the validity of propositions made about experience. Hence, rational reflection constitutes for Hirst the faculty through which experience is transmuted into an intelligible object of reflection. This transformation, for Hirst, unavoidably requires the cognitive mediation of particular conceptual schemes that embody the exercise of reason itself. These schemata provide effective means for

⁴³ The *non-perfectionist* character - developed further in this section - will highlight the absence of moral or ideological substantive commitments on the formulation of concepts (i.e. *autonomy*). Regarding politics, the non-perfectionist approach will for instance emphasise the principle of the neutrality of the state towards irreconcilable conceptions of the good (see Wall, 2019).

the articulation of not only judgment and assessment but also other cognitive utterances as imagination, emotion, and communication in which reason is involved at different levels (Hirst 1974b, p.38). In this sense, rational learning will consist for Hirst in a cognitive assimilation with the fields of rational experience or *forms of knowledge* that humanity has built across the centuries. This familiarisation will allow the learner to handle her respective symbolical systems of communication and corroboration against experience and thus develop her own learning capacity through them. This process constitutes for Hirst the cornerstone of any liberal education. Hence, this concept will be based for Hirst on the epistemic conditions of knowledge instead of on metaphysical doctrines stating the existence and knowability of ultimate structures of reality, as in the Ancient Greek case.

For Hirst, the *forms of knowledge* are necessarily built around three fundamental elements: the basic concepts for the apprehension of the relevant parcel of reality; the system of logical relations between those concepts – allowing for the establishment of meaningful connections between them in the form of propositions –, and the publicly agreed truth criteria for testing the truth of those propositions. In their final shapes, these forms can consist either of a body of established truths (*narrow* sense) or also include a series of techniques, skills, attitudes, values and other components associated with the pursuit of knowledge (*wide* or general sense). In any case, for Hirst the possibility of knowledge will be subjected to standardised and regulated patterns of language use, specifically via the background agreement on the truth-criteria for the validation of propositions. This means that knowledge will for Hirst be ontologically associated with language and the mastering of symbols as a tool for communication. In this manner, it would itself embody the possibility of the emergence of reason in nature.

In a Hirstian sense, it is precisely the emergence of such symbolic systems which allows the cognitive creatures that engendered them to have experiences through the matching of assertions to events and thus through the attribution of meaning to them⁴⁴. In this line, Hirst states that the focus of liberal education will be the development of the mind through what he considers the main areas of symbolically structured experience as they have been gathered by

⁴⁴"To acquire knowledge is to become aware of experience as structured, organised and made meaningful in some quite specific way, and the varieties of human knowledge constitute the highly developed forms in which man has found this possible" (Hirst 1974a, 40).

humanity: mathematics, the physical sciences, the human sciences and history, morals, religion, fine arts and literature, and philosophy. These seven completely distinguishable and mutually exclusive fields of knowledge – forming for him the subjects of the liberal basic curriculum – do not constitute for Hirst a hierarchy of cognitive areas of any kind. Instead of adopting this traditional form – for him a clear sign of metaphysical commitments commonly underlying education –, Hirst's forms of knowledge are assigned separate epistemic places given the logical considerations supporting each. In Hirst's view, then, adequate familiarisation with these fields of knowledge will allow the learner to cognitively construct experiences in these areas and therefore to attribute meaning to the contents and skills thus acquired. In this sense, liberal education will be for Hirst solidly grounded in the nature and the pursuit of rational knowledge itself, for him the last reachable instance that an attempt of philosophical justification of education can attain.

In practical terms, Hirst states, liberal education must oscillate between the extremes of encyclopaedic knowledge and specialist formation and training. For him, this stance derives from liberal education's general aim to introduce pupils to the understanding of new forms of experience. In his view, the achievement of this goal requires the provision of contents belonging to specific fields not for the sake of their acquisition but with the general objective of the enrichment of pupils' general cognitive life. For Hirst, this relates to the necessary genetic connection between any form of knowledge and daily experience, from which these forms derive as especial constructions of human reflexive capabilities. It is precisely to this partial subdivision of the inquiries of human mind that the forms of knowledge constitutively refer, branching different disciplines that respectively answer to each quest. Their character as *disciplines*, instead of as *sciences*, highlights for Hirst precisely these forms' fundamental connection to human experience. Correspondingly, their full acquisition necessarily requires, besides the indispensable level of solitary study, a considerable margin of interpersonal interaction, allowing for a direct exchange of perspectives that broadens the learner's inner experience. This does not mean however that a perfect correspondence can be conceived between disciplines and forms of knowledge. Conversely, the unavoidable fluidity of experience imposes for Hirst an important threshold of variability and unpredictability in the conformity between research-results in these areas, on the one hand, and reality, on the other. For this reason, the academic approximation to the different modalities of experience and their correspondent forms of knowledge frequently requires the combination of several disciplines

and sub-disciplines, promoting each time more sophisticated ways of understanding reality. All this imposes important constraints in the liberal curriculum, which for Hirst must, therefore, be focused not on the mandatory presence of specific contents but on their selection according to their suitability for the primary goal of enhancing the pupil's general field of experience.

However, for Hirst, some forms of knowledge and disciplines are more problematic than others with respect to their own conceptualisation. This characteristic particularly points to those disciplines related to the humanities and the arts, where the public truth-criteria are more problematic and not directly subject to straightforward clarification. Concerning the latter, Hirst links the criteria of *meaningfulness*, prevalent in these areas, with that of *truth*, characteristic of the sciences and other fields. Here he advances the cause of conceiving works of art as propositions whose truth can be effectively assessed. *Truth*, Hirst clarifies, does not constitute however an objective or natural feature supposedly residing in objects independently of perception. On the contrary, it would refer to a constitutive feature of the symbolical systems embedded in human communication, which serves as the ontological basis for rational enquiries and the emergence of language-games of different kinds. Thus, *truth* will consist of an inherent feature of those systems, pointing particularly to the internal consistency of propositions with respect to the established connections between the symbols composing the system itself⁴⁵. Then, Hirst suggests, the contextual utilisation of signs and symbols in highly complex systems of meaning will allow for the assessment of the consistency of those operations with respect to the character of the system itself. This would allow for the establishment of their level of *meaningfulness* or *truth*, according to the nature of the system in question⁴⁶. Thus, the specifically artistic modality of experience would justify for Hirst the claim for the justifiability of artistic knowledge. This view paves the way for the conclusion that not only words in literature but marks or other signs can be conceived as constituting specific statements whose *meaningfulness* can be assessed. Hirst claims then that this understanding would in turn match a contemporary broadening of logical terminology to

⁴⁵ This comprehension, closer to mathematical truth than to that of physics, clearly separates it from *referentiality*, particularly in that this would characterise the early stages of the symbolic systems, when conventions emerge for the recall of absent objects or situations. *Truth*, on the other hand, characterises complex systems of communication that enable the settlement of higher-order enquiries about *what is the case*.

⁴⁶ In this respect, Hirst insists that artistic knowledge, which supports itself on both daily and other forms of specialised knowledge, should not be confused with the knowledge proper of artistic criticism, which illustrates especially disciplines related to art rather than about artistic experience itself.

represent an increasingly ample margin of phenomena beyond the traditional, propositionally-based areas of thought.

This concept, however, does not lead Hirst to consider all areas of meaning as firmly established fields of knowledge. This feature can be seen especially in the case of religion. Initially, for Hirst, the lack of rational public criteria for the validation of religious propositions poses significant questions to the pretended objectivity of the religious form of knowledge. In this respect, religious beliefs differ not only in the contents of their faiths but also in the proposed ways to corroborate their truth-claims⁴⁷. Not even coincidences between what Hirst considers *natural* moral knowledge and divine commands provides solid grounds for this justification. This is because for Hirst these are two different sources of morality that, although sometimes concurrent, are not identical to each other. In this respect, the promotion of any form of religious belief would lie outside the religious form of knowledge, and as such outside the scope of liberal education. Consequently, for Hirst the teaching of religious doctrines in schools should not reach an epistemic status similar to that of the publicly accepted disciplines. This consideration is based on the claim that such teaching would fail in the promotion of adequate rational and knowledge-driven dispositions and skills in pupils. Only the objectivistic exposition of religious doctrines, practices, and institutions could be justified in the light of this goal. For this philosopher, this is related to the fact that only the dispensation of religious information under historical and sociological perspectives would be able to promote comprehensive and imaginative attitudes appropriate for the understanding of any specific religious standpoint. This last goal, which Hirst considers valuable for liberal education, could be pursued in his view especially by a *teaching-about-religion* form of RE. This option would enable pupils ultimately to comprehend not only the vital role religious belief and some of its specific modalities have played in the history of humanity, but also their parents' and their own choice in these matters⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ Although Hirst admits that there are initiatives towards the rational justification of religious statements in the field of neo-Thomism and philosophy of language, this for him is not enough for the epistemic equation of religion with other clearly established forms of knowledge such as the sciences or the arts.

⁴⁸ The only alternative he conceives to this perspective on RE is a system of diverse religious schools that provide for different religious communities in the body politic. This, however, he considered highly unviable for England by the time he formulated these conclusions (1970). This conclusion connects with Hirst's defence of the secular school and the non-religious teaching of morals in his work *Moral education in a secular society* (Hirst 1974c).

Hirst's view relies thus on a strongly symbolic view of knowledge, delivered in connection to the attribution of meaning to events and experience and the public rules for the corroboration of the consistency of such attribution. In this respect, Hirst advances the cause that only the types of learning in connection with the shared criteria for the assessment of knowledge can be adequately considered as rational and thus serve as reliable content for the liberal curriculum. As stated before, this cognitive grounding will provide for Hirst a solid foundation for a model of liberal education that avoids ideological commitments. This systematic endeavour then leads Hirst to a position that combines a significant level of openness towards the symbolic dimensions of learning with a strict criterion concerning the public assessment of the products of intellectual work. Given that, for Hirst, both the production and the acquisition of new knowledge point to an active role of the mind in relation to experience and the established framework of concepts mediating it, the basic curriculum for liberal schools must in his view deal with the cognitive requirements for both learning and researching.

It is for this same reason that Hirst distances himself from the possible assimilation between *meaningfulness* and *truth* concerning the public validation of knowledge-experiences. This issue is particularly raised by Hirst's polemics with Phillips (1970), who insists on the existence of public criteria for the validation of religious knowledge among religious communities. Regarding this, Hirst's insistence on the difference between *truth* and *orthodoxy* is relevant, something he does by stressing the realist assertion of the universal character of rationally achieved knowledge (Hirst, 1970). This means that the corroboration of the systemic consistency of religious or metaphysical statements will not amount for Hirst to truth-demonstration, especially as this corroboration cannot stand the test of metaphysical impartiality. The fact that not every independent researcher can reach the same conclusions as a religious believer – unless they share the same metaphysical foundations –, marks for Hirst an impossibility to include religion statements in the category of rationally established forms of knowledge. Hence the exclusion not only of doctrinal and theological teaching but also of spiritual worship from the realm of liberal education. This alternative would leave space only for a descriptively-oriented presentation of the insider's perspective with the aim of improving pupils' comprehension of religious phenomena.

Hirst's proposal for RE in liberal schools presents thus a solid case for the exclusion not of any dealing with religious truth-claims but specifically of some modes of addressing those claims (Hirst, 1965). This particularity can be conceived as a legitimate part of Hirst's concern for RE as a promoter of rational dispositions⁴⁹ in learners. In this respect, it would be the granting of objective and rational status to those claims that would represent for Hirst an incompatibility with respect to liberal education. Thus, both learning about religion and religious learning itself could be conceived as *rational* in Hirst's categorisation, which would be corroborated by Hirst's listing of religion among the forms of knowledge. It would be only religion's current lack of agreed criteria for validation of truth-claims which excluded from liberal schooling. However, the presence of religion as a key component of the liberal curriculum would be, from this perspective, sufficiently guaranteed. What Hirst points to is precisely the necessary restriction for liberal educators to induce or hint at any form of religious consent in pupils, especially as this would counteract the fostering of adequate mental attitudes among them. In this regard, religious learning – clearly in a non-doctrinal, illustrative fashion – could play a positive role in the liberal education of new generations. This possibility would require the adoption of especial restrictions concerning the unavoidably polemical character of some religious truth-claims in multi-religious, common schooling. The observance of these restrictions would allow RE to take place in schools as a significant trigger for pupils' rational mental dispositions, especially regarding the adequate comprehension of multiple viewpoints, including the religious ones. Thus, religion's cognitive properties – despite not achieving classification as one of Hirst's *narrow* forms of knowledge – would enable it to contribute to the goals of liberal schooling. In particular, this collaboration could be developed via the respecting of the epistemological borderlines that separate RE from the other, objectively established fields of knowledge. This central point will be considered in more detail in the following section on the reception of Hirst's work.

2.2. Critical views on Hirst

⁴⁹ This preoccupation with the promotion of rational thinking corresponds especially to Hirst educational thought, although also with this thesis main theoretical framework (Habermas) for assessing RE. It however does not exclude the envisioning of alternative educational goals, something which Hirst himself contemplates as a feature of the liberal curriculum (see particularly section 3.2.2).

Criticisms of Hirst focus on this epistemic ambivalence of religion and the implications for its inclusion in the liberal curriculum. In this line, the aforementioned discussion with Phillips (1970) stands out as highlighting the problems arising from the pretensions to universality of Hirst's formulation of the forms of knowledge. As stated before, Phillips claims that this pretension would ignore the existence of truth-criteria among religious communities for the validation of religious statements. As a form of knowledge, religion would thus be able to provide a relevant scenario for liberal educational pursuits. This assessment would find grounds in the philosophical acceptance of religion's cognitive character, albeit its ambiguity regarding truth standards. In Phillips' view, this acceptance should lead towards the promotion of RE as a valuable educational insight for the liberal curriculum, embracing – instead of rejecting – its epistemic uncertainty. This option would require the formulation of special requisites for teachers, in order to ensure their capability to recognise the educational meaning and possibilities of religions⁵⁰. In convergence with Hirst, Phillips states that philosophical considerations – let alone those he judges *confusing* – should not exclusively determine the curriculum of liberal schooling, something which would strongly impoverish the educational activity as a whole. In this manner, religion would qualify for Phillips as an essential component of the liberal curriculum for democratic schooling.

Although Hirst's main response to these criticisms was outlined above – including his specification of the need to address religious truth-claims in a non-objectivistic manner –, Phillips' position can illustrate – despite his philosophical differences with Hirst – the possible ways of handling the constitutive ambiguity of RE in liberal education. In this respect, the philosophical polemics about the similarities between *truth*, *meaning*, and *orthodoxy* can be conceived as tilting in favour of Hirst's position asserting the rational indeterminacy of religion. This interpretation does not however necessarily undermine the relevance of Phillips' insights on the potentialities of RE for liberal education. On the contrary, the latter's recognition of religious belief's cognitive properties can be seen as driving Hirst's formulation towards the final contention on the need for a non-literal interpretation of religious truth-claims in the classroom. In this regard, this discussion illuminates the argumentative development of

⁵⁰ For Phillips, this will not necessarily discriminate between believer and non-believer teachers, especially as this capacity *to see something in religion* can in his view be found among either.

the Hirstian comprehension of RE as a potential – though perhaps non-constitutive – component of liberal education.

Another relevant criticism comes from Shone (1973). After reviewing Hirst's main argument concerning the religious form of knowledge, this author concludes that the syllogism underlying its exclusion from liberal education hardly reflects the meanings attributed to RE under concrete liberal educational systems. After considering different conceptions about *religious teaching* in England and Wales, Shone highlights an intermediate position between explicit evangelism and fact-based teaching as prevalent in these contexts. This spiritual-imaginative promotion, as he characterises it, is noted by Shone as constitutive of this British materialisation of RE, especially as fostering genuine religious curiosity in pupils. From here, deep religious self-interrogation and even a margin for conversion in students are considered as legitimate for Shone, particularly if these spring from the religious and theological exploration taking place in classroom. This possibility would require the direct addressing of religious truth-claims in RE, something that would be lost if such issues were substituted by a mere fact-based approach to the subject. In support of his view, Shone argues along three additional lines: First, children's presumed need for indoctrination – as the non-argumentative inculcation of beliefs – a necessary requisite for their adequate cognitive development. Secondly, the narrowness inherent in pretending that the strict application of rational criteria for assessing forms of knowledge would solely determine a liberal curriculum, something that would exclude not only para-educational activity (movement, woodwork, activity sessions) but traditional academic areas as geography. Thirdly, liberalism's illegitimate claim to determine the criteria for qualifying a field of knowledge as such, adopting a ruling position that would only lead it to illiberal consequences. From this convergence, Shone finally concludes about the need for widening the comprehension of RE's educational potential, arguing in favour of its suitability for liberal education on less rationalised grounds than those provided by Hirst.

In this controversy, Hirst (1973) relies on the introduction of the *wide/narrow* distinction among his forms of knowledge, particularly concerning the presence (*narrow*) or absence (*wide*) of agreed criteria for the validation of empirical propositions. Hirst also stresses here the notion of *fields of knowledge*, which would point to a higher-order category that combines elements from different forms of knowledge. This formulation will allow Hirst to include in

his argument para-educational activities and non-scientific areas – such as geography – as essential components of these fields, even though they are not directly derivable from the forms of knowledge as such. In this respect, Hirst remarks that his whole position regarding educational reform should be understood as supporting the enrichment of education itself and not as claiming for the imposition of a philosophically determined liberal curriculum (something he had insisted on when addressing the possible legitimate sources for education). Hirst complements this by questioning the suitability of Shone’s formulation of children’s need for indoctrination. Concerning this, Hirst briefly qualifies this specific proposal as introducing an unnecessary terminological confusion that can pave the way for in schooling for *anti-rational forms of thought* (p. 10)⁵¹.

Finally and perhaps more relevant for this context, Hirst addresses Shone’s central claim about RE’s need for an explicit dealing with truth-claims. In this respect, Hirst points out the importance of basing pupils’ understanding of religious position on both their general knowledge of other people’s minds – this knowledge considered by Hirst as a field – and an appropriate comprehension of what it means to adopt a specific religious position as such. This conception implies for Hirst, besides factual knowledge about historical religions, a reflection on the character of different religious truth-claims beyond a mere superficial knowledge of them. This will for him preclude any form of inducement by teachers to a religious belief, leaving students’ religious exploration as something that could only be legitimate in liberal education as an unintended, unforeseen consequence of teaching. Regarding this issue, Hirst asserts that there are no substantial differences with Shone’s concern for the educational value of religious truth-claims, addressing them as exemplary illustrations of religious world-views and not as truth-claiming propositions about *what is the case*.

This educational objective exhibits thus great importance for Hirst, especially as endorsing religion’s constitutive uncertainty and its role in liberal schooling. For Hirst, it is this uncertainty, as the necessary rational attitude to adopt towards religious truth-claims, which marks the epistemic status of religion beyond all necessary recognition of its cognitive and

⁵¹Hirst – merely by mentioning in support “recent work on the concept of indoctrination” (1973, 10) – does however not elaborate further on the formulation of this notion, which would certainly touch on his own core-argument on the cognitive relation between experience and knowledge. This problem, central for this context, will be addressed in the second section number of this chapter.

cultural richness. As stated, this view does not imply a necessary avoidance of a deep reflection on those claims. On the contrary, Hirst suggests, what is needed is the elucidation of their epistemic status, insisting on their character and avoiding instead any granting of objectivity parallel to that of other knowledge-forms. In Hirst's view, this will all be included under the label *teaching about religion*, suggesting that a mere factual exposition of religion needs to be complemented by a certain degree of epistemic deepening in their world-views and cognitive features. Something like this would be central precisely for explicitly stating religion's epistemic condition, prompting comparisons in students concerning the same issues in different areas of knowledge. This alternative would enable pupils to comprehend better not only religious utterances by locating them in their respective epistemic context, but also what it means to adopt a religious position, especially by reflecting on the epistemic character of religious belief. Hirst seems then to support Shone's request for a fair treatment of truth-claims to be included in RE, particularly given the risk of simplification posed by a fact-based approach to the subject. Keeping in mind thus its acceptance of the epistemic uncertainty of religion and of the objectivity and independence of natural morality from religious one, Hirst's approach to knowledge and liberal schooling can be said then to leave educational space for an adequately contextualised examination of religious truth-claims in the classroom.

This examination gains relevance especially in the context of the promotion of skills oriented towards a better understanding of religious standpoints. This endeavour, asserted by Hirst as a valuable rational educational goal, exhibits interesting features, especially concerning Habermas' formulation of the need for cognitive changes in religious and secular world-views. In this respect, the adequate comprehension of a religious standpoint can be conceived as locating them in their proper epistemic context, acknowledging their inherent characteristics and avoiding the vesting upon them of alien denotation properties. This contextualisation would imply, in Hirst's perspective, accepting religion's constitutive uncertainty, particularly regarding the lack of publicly agreed criteria for testing the objectivity of its utterances. However, it must be kept in mind that for Hirst this does not imply the absolute denial of the attribution of rationality to religious statements. On the contrary, it implies the acceptance of the current impossibility of equating them to the ones belonging to other publicly established

forms of knowledge⁵². In this line, the presence of religion in liberal education would exhibit an unavoidable ambiguity, grounding its liberal rationale precisely in its epistemic uncertainty as a necessary requisite for the promotion of an adequate religious understanding.

In a sense, thus, the reciprocal granting of rationality between secular and religious citizens can be conceived as requiring the highlighting of the dubious rational grounding of religious utterances, bringing awareness to their current unsuitability for validation by publicly agreed criteria. This acknowledgment, although necessary for the promotion of mutual comprehension between religious and non-religious speakers, would however necessarily prompt justification-related problems for RE, particularly concerning the indoctrination risks inherent in its inclusion in the liberal curriculum. This permanently unstructured situation for RE, however, seems unavoidable mainly as a consequence of Hirst's prospectus of structuring a liberal curriculum based not only on the nature of rational knowledge but also on valuable objectives for the higher goal of the development of the rational mind. Thus, to face the different possibilities encompassed by this proposal and its possible connections with Habermas' posited requirement for the survival of liberal democracy, would lead to both admitting and perhaps trying to exploit pedagogically religion's peculiarity with respect to the epistemic standards of modern knowledge. This option, of course, poses questions about the existence of ways to embrace completely religion's unavoidable educational ambiguity in liberal schooling and its formative potentialities.

In this respect, an important convergence emerges between Habermas' formulation of the cognitive modifications and Hirst's educational goal of the comprehension of religious perspectives. This possibility is related to the mutual granting of rationality between religious and secular perspectives. In this line, Hirst's view would consequently stress the acceptance of religion's lack of agreed testing criteria and thus of objective rationality as a necessary condition for the existence of RE in liberal schooling. This contention would discourage students, in liberal educational settings, from interpreting religious perspectives as literal propositions about the world. Similarly, Habermas would stress the importance of preserving

⁵² As stated earlier, this comprehension necessarily leaves the door open for potential attributions of meaning based on possible alternative developments on agreed criteria (interpreting religious propositions as metaphysical and spiritual metaphoric language, for instance), a path that Hirst himself briefly reviews (1965).

the epistemic authority of modern science, especially in matters of objective information and criteria. In this respect, the posited need to prevent the colonisation – by metaphysical doctrines of different kinds – of the sphere of objectivity in contemporary, post-secular society would represent a potential common ground between Hirst and Habermas. This shared stance will not extend however to a refusal to recognise the existence of rational cognitive characteristics in religious doctrines. On the contrary, the formulation of epistemic inter-recognition between secular and religious perspectives as a valuable goal of liberal education and a fundamental need of liberal democracy would illustrate a shared attitude of avoidance of the extremes of secularism and religious fundamentalism.

In this manner, this theoretical confluence would lead to the upholding of the aforementioned form of epistemic recognition as a crucial feature of liberal political culture, and particularly as a necessary area of any form of liberal education in multicultural societies. From this basis, a realist assessment of the educational possibilities of religion could be portrayed as requiring the acknowledgment of precisely this area's constitutive epistemic uncertainty. In this regard, RE could be seen as cognitively complementary of the curricular areas that find grounds in more established forms of knowledge. This would lead to the conception of a liberal rationale for RE based on the intrinsic logical features of religious belief and their potential philosophical explorations. This formulation can, in turn, prove insightful for the pedagogical examination of renovated learning approaches and techniques (interdisciplinary, for instance) and to the encompassing goal of promoting autonomy via critical thinking. This view suggests then the need for renovated principles of responsibility for both educators and carers, especially concerning the indoctrination risks associated with the inclusion of such an ambiguous field in liberal schooling. However, this epistemically contextualised inclusion of RE in the liberal curriculum can hint at possible unforeseen paths for the promotion of an enhanced religious understanding and the broadening and renovation of liberal education itself.

2.3. Meira Levinson's *Liberal Education*

Another important source for the conceptualisation of liberal education comes from the American philosopher Meira Levinson. In her view, political liberalism is necessarily entangled with educational concerns, mainly as they derive directly from liberal assumptions

on human freedom and autonomy (Levinson, 2002). In her view, it is not only the case that educational proposals can be inferred from political liberalism, but also educational outcomes impinge on the permanence and renovation of political liberalism. This constitutive correlation can be appreciated in the prominence of identity politics in contemporary liberal states. Thus, a specifically liberal mode of education becomes highly important especially as minorities increasingly invoke liberal principles, in some cases to justify their posited right to alienate children educationally from liberal socialisation.

Levinson proceeds then to determine what for her constitutes the three fundamental commitments of contemporary liberal theory. In the first place, she points out *the fact of pluralism*, consisting of the acceptance of the unavoidable and irreducible character of ideological diversity in modern society. This implies that no viable synthesis can be possibly foreseen between the multiple reasonable conceptions of the good life coexisting in public life. Secondly, *the legitimation conditions*, consisting of the necessity of a transparent process of equal and free participation of all citizens for the establishment of commonly accepted principles of justice. This process is supposed to set the foundations of the liberal state itself and its rule of law over citizens. Thirdly, the need for *liberal substantive institutions* as a natural result of the deliberative process. In this regard, basic guarantees of human dignity and equality – with their correspondent governmental duties – need to be consistently derived from the materialisation of the two previous commitments in order for a political system to be conceived as *liberal*. However, the simultaneous justification of these three commitments has proven, in Levinson's view, to be difficult inside the liberal philosophical tradition. She claims that classical or “comprehensive” liberalism failed either by misconstruing the first commitment in the sense of collective oppression over the individual – as in Mill (1982) – or by disregarding the second commitment over the necessity of connecting the other two, as in Raz (1986). In this sense, she argues that a perfectionist version of political liberalism based on a substantive conception of autonomy would necessarily fall short of justifying the liberal-democratic state.

In Levinson's view, contemporary or “non-perfectionist” liberalism fails as well on this task. Here she reviews especially Rawls' formulation of the *burdens of judgement* as providing basis

for the simultaneous justification of the three commitments mentioned above⁵³. However, for Levinson, this form of political liberalism does end up requiring a substantive formulation on autonomy, especially as the complete enactment of the two Rawlsian fundamental moral capabilities is posited as a precondition for the fulfilment of the three commitments of liberalism. This implies that, for Levinson, the acceptance of the *burdens of judgement* as a condition for the realisation of the first moral capability of rational beings posits too high a standard for, for instance, fundamentalist believers to be recognised as citizens. The self-estrangement derived thus from such acceptance would hardly apply across the diversity of conceptions of the good in civil society, failing therefore to constitute a common moral basis for societal pluralism. For Levinson, then, the demand on the part of political liberalism for the combined realisation of the two fundamental moral capabilities necessarily relies on a concept of autonomy as a positive value naturally associated with the notion of personhood. The underlying comprehensiveness of this notion of autonomy, which Levinson extends to Rawls, implies for her that the state will unavoidably discriminate against those who do not hold a thus formed *sense of judgement* – that is, one based on the acceptance of the unavoidability of the *burdens of judgement*. This conditioning would imply that some citizens' capacities to hold and pursue a conception of the good – particularly those holding a fundamentalist or an entirely religious version of those conceptions – would become effectively undermined precisely through the discrimination against their moral stance on these matters. Thus, the state's lack of liberal recognition of this type of ethical commitment would undermine for Levinson this political liberalism's capacity of public representation.

⁵³ This revision is deployed by Levinson as follows: grounded especially by (a.) the unavoidable controversies over the character, availability and the weighting of evidence; (b.) the influence of previous experience on the interpretation of the present one; and (c.) other external factors affecting the formation of judgement, the reasonability of the disagreement over the best conception of the good life should naturally prompt a certain degree of estrangement with one's own moral and ideological convictions. Accepting these *burdens* would thus naturally activate in citizens their capacity for a sense of justice, conceived by Rawls' as the first and most fundamental moral capacity of rational beings. This position will then provide a bridge between the fact of pluralism – derived from the second Rawlsian fundamental moral power of forming and pursuing a conception of the good life – and the commitment to the procedural and substantive freedoms of liberal society. From here, a wholesale justification of the liberal process could, therefore, be derived as revolving around moral reflexivity as the axis of the ethical recognition of alterity and of the resulting need for establishing a common notion of justice among diverse conceptions of the good. In this manner, Rawlsian non-perfectionism would be able to come up with a liberal foundational arrangement without relying for that on a strong conception of autonomy.

This restriction could be avoided in Levinson's view by abandoning the obligatory nature of the fulfilment of the first moral capacity, in particular the required matching between one's sense of justice and the acceptance of the *burdens of judgement*. This possibility implies that the sense of self-estrangement derived from this acceptance will not constitute a non-negotiable requisite for a conception of the good to have liberal validity. Correspondingly, the second fundamental moral capacity would need to include in its definition not only the ability to form but also to have a conception of the good, even if such conception was not formed directly by the individual. This will allow non-thoroughly self-critical commitments to be considered as potentially autonomous, especially if they agree with additional criteria (see below). It would also leave space for not discriminating against those who accept the reasons for choosing an inherited conception of the good. For Levinson, this conception leads towards the need to conceive the second moral capacity (the ability to hold and materialise a conception of the good life) as not necessarily *enacted* but merely *recognised*. If this is accepted as a condition of liberalism, then it could be considered as *weakly perfectionist*, deriving a conception of the state as fostering autonomy without imposing its effective exercise as a precondition for the concession of political liberties. Under this light, liberalism would adopt a different standard of recognition as applying to all responsible and ideologically reflexive individuals who can create/learn and pursue a conception of the good, this without requiring the authorship of such conception.

The concept of autonomy underlying this weaker perfectionism is then portrayed by Levinson as involving four central features:

1. First, the need for a significant level of cultural embeddedness that provides the individual with a robust platform of intellectual and moral coherence⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ This posited need for *cultural coherence* can be better contemplated in Levinson's assertion of the feasibility of its provision by liberal education itself. In her account, a thorough socialisation in liberal values could present newcomers with a psychological stronghold parallel to the religious one, particularly in the cases where the latter is lacking. This particularity, true in practice for many secularised families that raise their offspring in a non-religious environment, would illustrate precisely the objectivity attributed by Levinson's argument to this item.

2. Second, the presence of a plurality of constitutive personal values, particularly concerning higher-order values that allow the subject to subordinate immediate preferences and act consequently.
3. Third, an openness to others' evaluation of oneself, as a necessary step for the construction of an autonomous viewpoint.
4. Fourth, appropriate levels of personality development concerning moral, spiritual/aesthetic, intellectual, and emotional issues.

Levinson stresses however that the promotion of this concept of autonomy distances liberalism from a position of neutrality towards doctrines of the good. On the contrary, the commitment to the development of a thus conceived concept of autonomy in new generations leads the state towards a more regulatory role especially regarding the educational derivations of those doctrines. This view implies that the classical separation between *public* and *private* spheres becomes unavoidably impinged upon when the liberal state posits as an objective the need for an education oriented towards autonomy. These interventions are constituted mainly in children – as non-consulted members of the social conglomerate – and parents – whose liberty to raise children in a discretionary way might see itself contravened by state intervention. These impingements on the conditions of pluralism constitute for Levinson a necessary development from not only the educational derivations of liberalism but also its weakly perfectionist character itself. This means that the necessity of a common notion of autonomy for the justification of substantial fundamental freedoms would call for the regulation of ideological activity in the field of new generations' early socialisation.

In this light, then, the threshold of unavoidable coercion exerted upon children leads Levinson to conceive liberalism as deploying neutrality towards the persons holding a conception of the good, instead of towards those conceptions themselves. In this respect, then, children would not be allowed neutral treatment in Levinson's eyes, precisely because they would be ontologically unable to fulfil the requirements of the liberal conception of autonomy as incapable of holding a determinate conception of the good life. Children's pre-liberal condition would thus authorise in Levinson's view a margin of educational coercion of their freedom to be brought up as full members of the liberal society. Consequently, Levinson asserts parents' posited liberty for discretionary raising of their children as a "privilege" instead of as a "right",

due particularly to the teleological nature of this function as children-centred instead of as culturally oriented. This view implies that the privileged position of parents in the socialisation of their offspring can and needs to be harmonised with the liberal requirements for autonomy-promotion, thus conceptualising the parental educational role as complementary with liberalism instead of as opposed to it. The nature thus of this justification of the parental socialising privilege (i.e., as fulfilling children's *objective* interest in cultural coherence, social and emotional stability and personality development) leads towards granting primacy to the liberal state's interest in autonomy promotion over parental interest on discretionary upbringing, especially in case of conflict.

Under circumstances of harmony between them, it is the combination of parental-private raising and the detached school which seems to offer for Levinson the ideal scenario for autonomy promotion in new generations. Either by granting identity formation via emotional stabilisation and cultural embeddedness or by supplying a supportive environment for the pursuit of critical enquiry, tolerance and reflectiveness, these two socialising instances are viewed by Levinson as jointly providing favourable influences for the fulfilling of the previously outlined concept of autonomy. This harmonisation seems attainable for Levinson especially as the primacy granted to the state interest in autonomy promotion is portrayed as potentially harmonising parents' discretionary sphere of upbringing. In this sense, state influence on education is conceived by Levinson as avoiding, for instance, a fetishism of choice that would surreptitiously standardise pupils as rootless consumeristic individuals. This scenario, summoned by Levinson as exemplifying an individualist extreme of liberalism, illuminates a complete loss of influence by the communitarian and parental interest in cultural reproduction. Conversely, the promotion of autonomy is portrayed by her as leading to the greater differentiation of cultural choices among citizens, enabling liberties for identifying either inside or outside of established cultural communities.

Although the autonomous, free-choosing citizen-ideal might appear to a parental perspective as a culturally alien imposition, Levinson consequently states that an autonomy-driven educational provision seems necessary to counteract the unavoidable threshold of parental despotism over their children, and specifically to balance its influences with more individualistic ones. Even though such a combination of socialising influences can result in the

disappearance of cultures within society, or even their change of character, this outcome should be considered, in Levinson's view, as indifferent from the liberal educational point of view. In this respect, it must be remembered that children's development of autonomy constitutes for Levinson the preponderant educational interest of liberalism, as well as the reason underlying parents' privileges in this field. A children-centred approach should be seen then as forming the primary socialising objective of a liberal society. Thus, not only should those cultural transformations be disregarded by liberal schooling but also a margin of evaluation of the liberal virtues of some cultures constitutes a fundamental basis for liberal education, especially of those who pose actual threats to liberal values and guarantees (i.e., anti-liberal fanaticism or delinquency). In this respect, Levinson's weak perfectionism posits political liberalism as upholding an education for autonomy that, although possibly harmonising with parental educational provision and its socialising potentialities, necessarily adopts a position of superiority over cultural contentions for educational privileges. This preponderance constitutes for her a necessary means to preserve present and future liberal guarantees in new generations against the risks of anti-liberal alienation or persuasive coercion of their freedom of – also symbolic – choice.

Levinson attributes to liberal education then the crucial role of framing societal pluralism – especially as dispensed through parental provision for children's cultural coherence – within the political requirements of the inculcation of a liberal character and related virtues in citizens. After a review of this balance in the UK, US, and French educational systems⁵⁵, she finally

⁵⁵ Regarding the British system, Levinson assesses it as allowing cultural promotion of pluralism but lacking a common public sphere that counteracts ghettoisation by effectively engaging with a determinate, shared liberal character. In this scenario, the allowance of religious recruitment of students and the allocation of public funds to so constituted schools – along with the preponderance of a results-driven educational culture – configure for Levinson a receding liberal situation in which shared liberal referents fail to be adequately addressed by public education. A somehow contrary situation is present in her view in the French educational model, where the imposition of a neutralised public character overrides private conceptions of the good, especially in their public expression. This specifically French political fear of multiculturalism characterises for Levinson an overwhelming ideal of the liberal citizen that overpowers private – but especially minority – process of identity affirmation – and thus of complete identity construction – in new generations. In this respect, US public education resembles for her more a kaleidoscope of diverse religious inheritances mingled into a common schooling situation, projecting in this sense a mosaic image in which private claims are all accommodated into the same educational provision. Mainly due to the consequences of parental bargaining, Levinson considers liberal education in the US as also failing to reconcile private and public educational provisions by excessively incorporating cultural truth-claims (such as creationism) and adjusting thus civic education to the demands arising in the different sectors of civil society. This trend corresponds for Levinson with

concludes that the indiscriminate incorporation of cultural affirmation to basic education appears also unsuitable for addressing the challenges posed by the constitutive commitments of political liberalism, especially concerning the need for common constitutional guarantees in civil society. Educationally, this means that only a commitment to the promotion of the necessary conditions for the exercise of autonomy will allow the liberal state to combine the adequate margin of necessary parental involvement in their children's education with the social need for the inculcation of a liberal character in new generations. Posited as compatible with the educational pursuit of economic competitiveness, democratic self-reflection and equality of opportunities, this liberal education model is viewed by Levinson also as supporting the construction of an effectively common school, a role that for Levinson is not restricted to state maintained schools and that can be satisfactorily fulfilled by private or communitarian ones⁵⁶. Similarly, Levinson defends a balance between centralisation and decentralisation of school organisation⁵⁷. This option would guarantee for Levinson the commonality of main educational pursuits, along with the necessary margins of specialised local educational provision, allowing for the presence of autonomous practices of organisation by educational communities. Finally, Levinson highlights especially the necessity of constitutional guarantees that shield education for autonomy against democratically unfavourable situations⁵⁸. All these transformations – accompanied by a similar cultural change that embeds education for autonomy in culture and

that one of relapsing of the *cultural melting pot* ideal as the defining characteristic of the US civil society, relinquishing in favour of the mosaic image mentioned above. In this sense, civic virtue would have stopped constituting the convergent influence par excellence in the US, being replaced by particularistic affirmations and identity politics as the privileged means of public participation of communities.

⁵⁶ Among the challenges this educational policy faces, Levinson highlights those deriving from parents' common defence of their own unrestricted school-choice freedom, especially as it is deployed in industrialised liberal societies; the role of school-related specialisation (in curricular, pedagogical and administrative terms) and its risks of counteracting the common main objective of education for autonomy; and the availability of effective means to pursue a form of education for autonomy in liberal democracies. Regarding these, Levinson defends – in addition to the state regulation of school fees – a controlled school choice modality in which schools do not recruit students, but instead parents select schools with the help of specialised state agencies. This choice would be unavoidably restricted in Levinson's view by relevant spatial criteria (to at least partially counteract the prevalence of high socio-geographical mobility among high-income parents) and by effective deadlines (in order to promote diligent engagement and to replace the first come-first served basis predominant in the assignation of public schools posts among low-income families).

⁵⁷ This means in specifics the combination of common, national curriculums and standardised evaluations, on the one side, with local levels of specialisation and concrete classroom organisation, on the other.

⁵⁸ In this regard, reversals of some US legal precedents would be required in order to ensure state preponderance over the major educational objectives, especially regarding cases that granted a greater margin of autonomy for schools (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*) and to parents with respect to crucial decisions of their children's education (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*).

by an increasing pedagogical professionalisation of school teachers – would for Levinson contribute as necessary conditions for the realisation of a weakly perfectionist form of liberal education.

As can be seen, Levinson's case for liberal education rests on the search for an especial harmonisation of the multiple commitments of liberalism. This arrangement is sought especially as evading a biding attachment to a strong definition of autonomy that leads the liberal state to its imposition as a prevailing conception of the good life. Thus, the necessity of combining the inexorable margin of societal pluralism with the need for a representative consensus and shared inviolable rights leads Levinson to uphold a weakly perfectionist conception of autonomy that guarantees the free character of political participation. From here, necessary constitutional safeguards emerge as defining the circumscription of *legitimate* conceptions of the good. Based on the four mentioned logical requisite, this conception of autonomy is portrayed by Levinson as undoubtedly posing the need for a detached school that balances the structures of power and influence pre-existing in society. In this manner, the liberal school will be able to conjugate the parental contribution to autonomy-education in new generations with the liberal one, deriving in this manner a properly reinforcing educational scenario that pursues legitimate goals also through effective parental involvement. The concrete organisation of such a school necessarily leads to the political questioning of the parental position in children's upbringing, posing the need to conceptualise it as a *privilege* instead of as *right*. The primacy here granted to the state's interest – also implying its rights to assess the liberal virtues of some particular communities and even to prosecute some – constitutes for Levinson an unavoidable logical concession if the, for her, lightest conceivable way of necessary autonomy is ever to be educationally pursued.

The ideal modality of liberal education is then conceived by Levinson as naturally springing from the premises of political liberalism, and also as harmonising with other, both liberally (equality of opportunity, democratic self-reflection) and non-liberally (economic competitiveness) related educational objectives. After reviewing the liberal potentialities and weaknesses of educational systems in the UK, US, and France, Levinson extends the character of the detached school and conceptualises it as also encompassing private schools that embrace education for autonomy in their curricula and educational practices. Although holding

significant doubts on the role of religious conceptions of the good as the basis of private schooling, Levinson accepts however that the necessary detached character of the liberal school needs actively to engage parental educational provisions in order to be effectively able to promote autonomy. This option unavoidably requires political reforms that better restrict the substantial margins of autonomy currently exhibited by parental provision for children's education in most industrialised democracies (with the exception of France, considered by Levinson as close to exemplary in this sense). Such reforms also imply the revision of relevant legal precedents on the matter, accompanied by the need for imposing a more restrictive modality of parental school choice that guarantees parents' participation in an educational framework formulated by the state. Finally, the three features of: a) state regulation of school fees – in order to make education more accessible to low-income parents; b) adequate levels of de-centralisation of school organisation, which permits school specialisation in the pedagogical, curricular and administrative levels; and c) the constitutional entrenchment of these reforms, round up Levinson's portrayal of the socio-political adjustments necessary for the materialisation of a liberal modality of education for autonomy.

2.4. Critical views on Levinson

The previous overview of Levinson's proposal for a weakly perfectionist liberal education identifies the main points highlighted by her critics. In this respect, important criticisms come from Sarah McGough (2003). In an overall sense, McGough considers that Levinson's proposal generally enjoys consistency and relevance despite its minor theoretical faults. In this sense, McGough accuses Levinson especially of a lack of broader liberal representation, which for her undermines Levinson's assumption of the desirability of liberalism and with this her main argument. In this line, McGough considers that, although Levinson correctly includes in her defence of autonomy the benefits of a plural civil society, there lacks in her argument a connection between these benefits and those derived from the plurality of individual values as a condition for a meaningful exercise of autonomy. Such a connection is vital for McGough as an essential measure for liberalism to transition from an individualist emphasis to a more communitarian one. McGough also considers that Levinson disregards the emotional and cognitive effects of the disjunction potentially felt by students between what they are taught in the detached school and what is predicated in their parents' culture (especially if that culture

exhibits a fundamentalist character). Although McGough leaves space for considering this disjunction merely as a negligible first generation-effect that would disappear once this generation become parents, it constitutes in her view nonetheless an important element not to be disdained by a liberal educational proposal. Additionally, McGough is worried about the constitutional enshrinement proposed by Levinson of an education-for-autonomy provision. In this respect, McGough considers that Levinson's assertion of the continuing character of political debate – despite the constitutional consecration of its subject – is not enough to avoid a shortening of that controversial instance. This is attributable for McGough especially to the foreseeable discouraging effects of such consecration in the contender's attitudes towards the debate itself. In this sense, keeping this crucial educational policy open to political discussion by avoiding its constitutional enshrinement would better preserve for her the liberal-democratic character of the provision itself. Although portraying Levinson's inclusion of empirical elements as unsatisfactory and unfit to her own general argument, McGough however finally applauds the political implications of Levinson's recommendations, especially concerning the American educational system.

Similarly, De Ruyter (2004) highlights as problematic several of Levinson's premises and conclusions. One of her main criticisms is Levinson's view of autonomy as requiring considerable levels of self-detachment from one's bedrock values. In De Ruyter's view, this assertion makes autonomy unachievable, especially as such detachment would introduce an attitude of permanent self-questioning that would make a morally meaningful life barely possible. Thus, for De Ruyter an autonomous life would be possible with the passing unquestioned of some fundamental values that safeguard the cornerstones of personal identity. Asking of a person that she should remain permanently open to others' questioning of this deep level of commitment would imply for De Ruyter the setting of unrealistically high standards for her classification as *autonomous*. This perspective leads De Ruyter to question the detachment proposed as the characterising feature of the liberal common school. In her view, the level of such neutrality, besides not being completely clarified in Levinson's proposal, is based on the idea that it is possible to conceive a public, civic culture beyond the realm of the multiple cultures of civil society. This assertion constitutes for De Ruyter a liberal projection that does not correspond with reality. In her view, it is precisely the intersection of different cultures and world-views that constitute the public sphere as such, finding common grounds amid their different perspectives on society and the individual. Thus, Levinson's proposed

detachment of common schooling equates to the imposition of an artificially conceived idea of the public that unavoidably carries with it the burden of a rigid demarcation between the *private* and the *public* that does not necessarily correspond to citizens' perspectives on the matter.

From here, De Ruyter also questions Levinson's definition of parental responsibilities in children's education as merely supporting or secondary with respect to schooling. For De Ruyter, the conceptualisation of this parental position merely as a privilege is necessarily not accurate. Instead, an approach to parents' educational role both as a *duty* and a *right* would better reflect its political specificity. This means that the socially defined obligation to educate their offspring according to what constitutes in their view their children's best interest grants parents the double right to be assisted in this educational effort and not to be interfered with in its performance. In this respect, De Ruyter suggests that, contrary to Levinson's assertions, for faith schools to qualify as fit for liberal education they do not need to be characterised as *detached* from parental values. On the contrary, this condition can be asserted on the presence of specific pedagogical and administrative trends. These include in particular a distancing from divisive conceptions of the good (i.e., fundamentalism) instead of divisive stances towards any conceptions of the good (exclusivist schools based on a non-fundamentalist doctrine). Given its illiberal connotations, it would be the first type of school which could not be publicly subsidised by a liberal state, as opposed to the second type, which she assesses as potentially liberal⁵⁹. This stance does not imply, for De Ruyter, that fundamentalist schools must be directly banned from the liberal society, but simply that they must not receive any public financing from the liberal state. Only the detachment from anti-liberal, fundamentalist doctrines – and not parental interests *per se* – would then be necessary to guarantee the compliance of common schooling with the liberal ideal of education for autonomy. Given thus the inimical treatment given to parental educational interests and the lack of schools' discrimination on a theological basis, Levinson's detached school would for De Ruyter impose autonomy instead of enhancing it, failing to accommodate actual cultural claims arising from contemporary civil society.

⁵⁹“One can think of liberal mono-cultural or religious schools, which are open to children whose parents believe it is important that they receive a particular religious induction, or of liberal multi-faith schools, where children from various religious backgrounds work together, but have their R.E. lectures separately as well as together” (De Ruyter, 2004, p. 218).

Levinson correspondingly addressed De Ruyter's criticisms by defending her conception of autonomy as endorsing the self-questioning of some ultimate values (Levinson, 2004). In her view, an autonomous person can examine and redefine her fundamental convictions in light of compelling circumstances. This means that the capacity of such self-examination is precisely for Levinson a measure of that person's capacity for autonomy, even if the re-definition of values does not effectively take place. In this sense, it is not a permanent self-questioning attitude but the potentiality to do so that constitutes for Levinson a distinctive sign of autonomy. Additionally, Levinson conceptualises children's rights to an education as against the state – which is interested in providing autonomy-exercising conditions to its citizens –, not the parents. This assertion implies that it is the former and not the latter who must fulfil that right to children. This assigns in turn to parental position a mere secondary and supporting role with respect to their children's education (*feeding them breakfast daily, providing them a quiet place to work in the afternoons or evenings, ensuring that they get to school daily*), assigning them the role of collaborating with public schools as the principal educational provider. Concerning this, Levinson also challenges De Ruyter's assumption that parental views on children's best interests should have primacy in educational decisions concerning new generations. For Levinson this implies that there are reasonable grounds for claiming the existence of an objective liberal definition of children's best interests as consisting of the development of autonomy, a definition that would necessarily trump parents' or other views on the matter. Although Levinson herself supports significant levels of parental involvement in children's education⁶⁰, this reinforces her previous view on the primacy of the liberal state's interest in this area. In this area and despite her acceptance of the capacity of committed schools and educational environments to provide education for autonomy, she reasserts the detached school as the best instrument for the promotion of a liberal education to all children and not just to those brought up in a liberal environment. Here Levinson stresses the compatibility of the detached school with what she considers open, non-fundamentalist religious private ones that do not discriminate on any ideological or social grounds. In this sense, she emphasises that her formulation in this area does not impose an absolute estrangement from parental convictions. Something different occurs however with those schools that are based on effectively discriminatory conceptions of the good. Concerning these, Levinson clarifies that, although pragmatically she promotes their integration with liberal educational provisions, they should

⁶⁰ As she expresses in chapter 4 of *The Demands of Liberal Education* (2002).

not be allowed to operate based on their inherent hindering of education for autonomy. Accordingly, the liberal educational ideal guiding public policy on these matters should for Levinson strive towards the increasing alignment of private religious schools with a common public curriculum oriented towards promotion of autonomy. Finally, one of the most important of De Ruyter's criticisms, with which Levinson agrees, is the one about the problematics implicit in a pluralistically disembodied conception of public culture. Although not conceiving it as fatal blow to her own argument in favour of a detached common school, Levinson does accept though that "it is impossible to have a school grounded in the civic culture that is fully detached from local commitments" (Levinson, 2004, p. 235).

2.5. Conclusion

The last revision illustrates perhaps the most important elements of a weakly liberal conception of education. One of those is undoubtedly constituted by the assertion of the existence of a sphere of public virtues separated from particular world-views. As Levinson sustains, the articulation between such a public sphere of values and the public values of those world-views stands out in De Ruyter's criticism as a crucial unresolved issue of liberal education, which summarises best the main points raised by those of her critics reviewed here. In this line, it is precisely the possibility of pursuing a disjunctional modality of public education – one which alienates alternative socio-political perspectives – that mainly worries McGough and De Ruyter, in both cases stressing the political problems inherent in the idea of a detached school. From here, concerns on the appropriate educational role of other educational actors arise, i.e., parents and different kinds of private schools, along with questions on the adequate political and legal status of such public education, as shown in the queries around the proposed constitutional enshrinement of education for autonomy. Thus, not only the moral but also the political and epistemic status of liberal values themselves pose a lingering question on the possibility of a liberal education that avoids the illiberal perils of imposition of autonomy. It is in this sense that the articulation appears as central for a defence of liberal education. As De Ruyter points out, an extreme disjunction between liberal public culture and the multiple cultures inhabiting contemporary civil society would threaten the level of cultural coherence that new generations need to be exposed to as a requisite for the cultivation of their autonomy.

From this perspective, then, liberal education would relate to RE as a dispensable basis, i.e., only as a concession to its pro-socialising features. This fact can be better appreciated in the aforementioned promise of a liberal substitute for cultural coherence and personality development. In this case, the specific sphere of liberal values would constitute for Levinson a moral realm separate from the religious and cultural ones – with which it could entail cooperative dialogues –, instead of deriving from the intersection of those world-views, as De Ruyter wants it. In this respect, liberal education would also enjoy a political and moral superiority over other cultural spheres, on which it would find social support for the attainment of its goals. This position, clearly affirmed by Levinson and highlighted by her critics, points directly to the core of the argument for a liberal mode of education in a multicultural society, mainly because the intersection between liberal values and the other sources of cultural identity offers particular problems for contemporary liberal theory. This scenario becomes especially acute if not only the contemporary polemical character of cultural interaction (*identity politics*) but also the public reach itself of different world-views are accounted for. This means that the conceptualisation of those cultures and religious world-views only as private pillars with respect to an overreaching liberal public culture can invoke especial problems concerning their recognition as sources of identity. Such a formulation would unavoidably unbalance the necessary fair treatment between conceptions of the good in civil society. In this respect, the attribution to those doctrines of only psychologically stabilising functions – and the correlative conception of liberal values as a separate and publicly superior value sphere – would do injustice to their doctrinal characteristics as containing also political and publicly oriented insights. In this sense, Newman’s formulation of the foundations of religious tolerance as lying in, for instance, religious perspectives on the public realm, can well illustrate the simplification risks involved in framing those perspectives as socialisation devices belonging exclusively to the private realm.

In this same line, one of the main problems of Levinson’s liberal education lies precisely in its proposed connections with parental and non-intrinsically liberal educational provisions, as the religious ones. In this sense, the centrality assumed by the liberal educational provision exhibits further problems regarding the public meaning of several features of religious doctrines. Concretely, both incompatibilities and neutralisation risks can arise concerning the illiberal elements of those doctrines and their general political-educational significance. In the first case, it would have to be accepted that censorship over the non-autonomy promoting characteristics

of religious views would not be directly derivable from Levinson's proposal, particularly if we have in mind their socialising significance. This ethical indeterminacy towards the explicit promotion of heteronomy becomes evident if we consider the contribution of these illiberal elements to cultural coherence and personality development – and potentially to the plurality of internal values – as providing a justification for their legal and educational protection. Thus, heteronomy-promoting elements can be valued as positive in an educational sense. A general precaution against this merely foreseen incongruence is therefore absent from Levinson's proposal. In this respect, the psychological consequences on pupils of the potential ideological disjunction between school and home can hardly be undervalued, as the previously quoted controversy with De Ruyter highlights. To a certain extent, the positioning itself by Levinson of liberal values as a valid source for cultural coherence indicates an awareness on her part of the need for coherence with respect to parental and school educational provisos. In this line, Levinson can be seen as orienting the case towards the total equalisation between both sources of morality, subordinating private provisos to the autonomy-related ethos of political liberalism. However, this alternative necessarily leaves uncertain the solution to the demand for a fairer arrangement between liberal and parental educational provisos, i.e., one that completely recognises and integrates their own respective epistemic and moral complexities for a more organic educational arrangement between both.

In a similar vein, to the extent that the social and political elements of religious doctrines are for Levinson educationally relevant – that is, as they effectively contribute at least to cultural coherence and personality development –, those of their potential political contributions which are compatible with liberal democracy can become irrelevant for the political education of new generations. This is to say that the attribution to a religiously inspired, parental educational provision of exclusively socialising importance runs the risk of disdaining some of their most pertinent socio-political features. In this respect, the highlighting of the socio-psychological functions performed by religious doctrines (as those of *cultural coherence*) can hardly offer a viable way for a fairer and more insightful liberal-educational utilisation of religious educational provisions. This potential trivialisation of politico-religious claims via a weakly-perfectionist, liberal educational argument derives from the possibility of an educational modality that does not morally engage with religious doctrines and their perspectives on society. In a certain sense, this is corroborated by Levinson's own acceptance of the difficulties inherent in her "disembodied" conception of liberal public culture, and concretely those

intrinsic in the attempt to derive from these premises a more organic connection between the liberal and the multiple parental educational provisions. An effective avoidance of this risk – which would mean the imposing of important interpretive restrictions over several religious traditions – would necessarily require a broad curricular formulation of not only political and citizen education but also of RE. The inclusion in this sense of relevant religious voices in the political education of new generations, accompanied by the strengthening of RE in a multi-religious and cross-curricular direction, could then prompt more organic connections between liberal and religious educational provisos. These considerations highlight previously reached conclusions in this work about the political significance of RE in public schools as a prominent device for the promotion of minorities' recognition and a more socially comprehensive modality of toleration⁶¹.

The risks inscribed thus in the indeterminacy of the educational status of illiberal religious elements, and the possible educational disregard dispensed to their socio-political aspects, illuminate the importance of a more thorough articulation between liberal and at least some parental-religious educational provisos. Levinson's effort to reach a weakly perfectionist liberal platform for such assemblage can be assessed as an attempt to attain this without losing the necessary centrality of highly representative, border-crossing liberal values. This means that, despite its previously mentioned shortcomings, Levinson's conceptual device for the formulation of liberal education can be developed towards a fairer curricular accommodation of non-liberal educational provisos, mainly through the pedagogical exploration of both illiberal doctrines and features from different perspectives. A move in this direction will enable the adequate contextualisation and more thoughtful assessment of these perspectives, especially concerning the formation of modes of political consciousness of new generations. This crucial educational task supports the conception of the school – and with it of RE – as a broad ideological arena where multiple political perspectives converge through a mandatory liberal-educational mediation constituting an insurmountable pedagogical arrangement, as in Galeotti's sense. This concession would guarantee the necessary prevalence of a weakly-perfectionist liberal-value infrastructure for the contextualisation and assessment of the inherent political merits of different doctrines. In this way, the complete political features of, for instance, religious doctrines can find curricular shelter in academic spaces that provide a

⁶¹ See especially chapter two on toleration.

liberal pedagogical hinge between doctrinal and political controversies. A soundly grounded aspiration in this direction can lay the foundation for a modality of liberal education that integrates without colonising the educational dimension of religion as it is expressed in the curricular existence of RE.

In the same direction, it can be worthwhile to remember for this purpose Habermas' formulation of religious tolerance as overcoming an initial restraining character and reaching a self-critical instance on the part of the religious believer⁶². In a certain sense, this formulation can well illustrate a possibly legitimate goal of one version of the previously mentioned modality of liberal education, exemplifying here a meaningful connection between the liberal and the religious educational provisos in pupils' minds. On this point, the autonomously deployed exploration of the diverse possibilities of the pupil's religious perspective can well perform as a pedagogical device through which the recognition of religious and liberal possibilities is attained. From here, insightful exchanges between both sides can be prompted, fostering processes of reciprocal intertwining among them. This cognitive scenario, which does not necessarily lead to the adopting of an intrinsically fallible stance towards one's own religious dogmas and deepest moral convictions, can articulate well with the search for a modality of liberal education that fairly and insightfully accommodates diverse religious and parental educational provisos.

Of course, possible concerns can arise concerning this cognitive scenario as an instance sufficiently representative for performing as the general objective of a weakly perfectionist mode of liberal education. In this respect, the granting of such status to this proposed modality of religious conscience could effectively fail to represent the diversity of possible

⁶² Particularly as was explored in the previous chapter. For exposition purposes, its main features will be briefly described here: For Habermas, a thorough materialisation of toleration would, in the end, rest on the inculcation of its rationalist ethos in religious citizens, instead of on the external coercion against discrimination exerted upon them. From here, Habermas posits that a total sense of authorship of the ruling laws on the part of the citizen would be achievable, based on his appropriation of the ethical stance incarnated in the liberal constitution. Habermas stresses too that the actualisation of this possibility requires not the complete abandonment of a religious perspective but its re-signification towards an epistemic and ethical sublimation of the concrete mandates of religion. This particular appropriation implies that the believer has reached a cognitive stage in which abstract ethical and spiritual mandates are preferred over the materiality characteristic of early moral stages, achieving thus higher thresholds of autonomy in his moral determination.

interpretations and cognitive modifications that a mode of RE in this direction can convene, especially in highly pluralised societies. An argument along these lines could be conceived as echoing Cooling's (2010) criticism of an underlying preference for liberal theology in liberal-democratic RE, undermining, for instance, an option for the general preservation of religiously conservative dispositions in pupils. This position highlights an essential request for the previously proposed modality of RE to perform as part of a weakly perfectionist liberal education, i.e., its necessary independence from a single fixed educational objective that renders it vulnerable to criticisms over ideological narrowness and misrepresentation. Concerning this, the proposal of the aforementioned Habermasian cognitive scenario cannot be comprehended as excluding other possible intellectual elaborations by pupils of the RE contents to which they would be exposed under the educational modality here explored. It is in this sense that the orientation towards the incorporation of a rationalist ethos was posited as constituting a possible outcome of a weakly perfectionist liberal RE, and especially as providing a significant hinge between liberal and religious educational provisos. This vital connection requires, however, further exploration as including other possible modalities, allowing alternative modes of religious conscience to find meaningful links concerning weakly perfectionist liberal values, and vice versa. This articulation would leave space for a more multi-culturally oriented, deeper educational entrenching of the pursuit of a non-perfectionist version of autonomy that can recognise as such received religious beliefs. In this way, weakly perfectionist liberal educational values could be conceived as abandoning a strong ideological substance that would unavoidably set them on a conflictual footing with alternative moral and religious doctrines, forcing political liberalism, by virtue of this competition, to adopt a robust political character seeking to guarantee the social centrality of its values. For the case of conservative religious stances, an interpretively reciprocal rapport with weakly liberal values could then venture into the reasonings upholding the commitment to the preservation of religious dogmas and moral mandates. This option would allow in turn for the exploration of the deliberative threshold on which the believer autonomously assumes reasoned motives for her convictions. In cognitive scenarios like these, the Habermasian projection of a mutual ethical permeation between religion and liberal democracy could find compatible instances, mainly through modalities of religious education that pedagogically mobilise analogous dialectical, recognition-laden situations.

Additional concerns could also arise regarding the rationalism of the ethos underlined here as distilling from the liberal democratic tradition. Notably, the peculiarity of this philosophical character can awake suspicions concerning its suitability for the aforementioned educational dialogue, especially in relation to the inherent epistemic characteristics of religious traditions and their educational provisos. Thus, measures would have to be provided against possible rationalist assimilations of core contents of religious doctrines, especially if they are deployed under the banner of a liberal educational dialogue with the characteristics explored here. In this respect, it would be worth emphasising the fundamental ideological insubstantiality of the ethical framework corresponding to the rationalist ethos of the liberal democratic tradition. This proposal would be different from the Lockean substantive rationalism that needs to offer a unilateral definition of religion as a condition for the upholding of the reasonableness of toleration. As explored in the previous chapter, this strategy would necessarily mean the incorporation and colonisation of religious beliefs by state-doctrinal imposition. Conversely, the proceduralism characterising the weakly liberal conception of justice would find support in the Habermasian view of the reliance of the conditions for legitimacy on the specific constraints imposed by the deliberative situation in which participants find themselves. Thus, it would be the rationality inherent in communicative action which would lead to the involvement with alterity-recognition. This alternative would provide an insightful dialogical instance among participants' world-views, without relying on rationalist interpretations of religious belief-systems. This appeal to the underlying cognitive attitude and the ethical dispositions arising from the communicative nature of the educational situation here explored – instead of to the normative content of rationalist philosophical branches – could be considered as calling for the incorporation of precisely those attitudes and dispositions to the different religious world-views. This ethical amalgamation could be seen then as prompting in the subject the constitution of an instance for permanent cognitive interpellation and adjustment. As was stated before, this process would not necessarily have to lead towards the progressive adoption of an agnostic or fallible stance in religious matters. On the contrary, such an educational outcome can be thought of as compatible with the progressive cognitive adjustment of a conservative or orthodox religious position, strengthening in the believer its rationale and its demands for greater ethical consistency in her life-conduct. This process would differ from a hardening of the cognitive-emotional attachment to religious dogmas conducive to radicalisation, particularly in that the former would emphasise the cognitive openness to intellectual reformulation. In this manner, this form of ethical rationalisation along religious lines would strive for the permanent establishment of renovated learning possibilities and the counteracting

of the solidification of emotional attachments to world-views. This disposition would prevent the materialisation in the believer of the situation described by Cooling as “learning sickness”, conducive to the impossibility of deploying any level of cognitive refinement when faced with epistemically foreign intellectual material. In this respect, then, different types of religious commitments could find here meaningful and relevant heuristic connections with a sense of procedural communicative justice brought about by the religious pluralisation of civil society and the corresponding need for a fair educational provision.

Intellectual and ethical exchanges of this nature could then be considered as corresponding to the educational position of religion in a weakly perfectionist liberal school system, benefiting from the discursive situation conveyed by the academic emplacement. In this respect, the pedagogical contextualisation of religion could find support in the constitutive epistemic ambiguity of RE. In this, this subject would be benefitting from the lack of commonly established criteria for the assessment of objectivity beyond an immediate level of factual information. Consequently, RE’s natural emphasis on religions’ particular rationale would perform the functions of a communicative vehicle promoting an epistemically adequate comprehension of the subject and, with this, reflexivity in pupils’ religious self-understanding. Thus, the epistemic peculiarity of RE – as Hirst outlines it – and especially its non-perfectionist liberal emplacement can be thought of as a reinforcing platform for the promotion of both a communicatively-based sense of rational autonomy in religious pupils and an epistemically-based comprehension of religious perspectives by secular students. The controversial nature of the subject, accompanied by its liberal-educational setting, would support a communicative situation in which ethical and – to a certain point – epistemic self-reflection is consistently promoted in students, leaving enough space for differential learning-outcomes in this area. Hence, a weakly perfectionist liberal education could derive a modality of RE that contributes to the forging of comprehensive mentalities in both sides of the religious/secular divide in citizenship⁶³.

⁶³ An additional advantage would be represented by the fact that the pursuit of this objective would not have to rely on the imposition of rationalistic simplifications or even on the educational exclusion (and the making educationally irrelevant) of religious perspectives. This direction for RE could also contribute to the restriction of proselytising or indoctrinatory interests in the subject. This limitation would enable it to foster substantial margins of factual knowledge about religions – especially where there is a lack of them – as a fundamental basis for the attainment of deeper cognitive objectives, such as the ones outlined above.

Based on these considerations, we will address below one central polemical feature associated with RE in liberal educational systems, namely, indoctrination. In this respect, we will approach relevant sources concerning the logical elucidation of this important concept, especially to consider the possible risks it could implicate for a modality of RE as the one described here.

3. [Indoctrination and religious education](#)

The philosophical debate around the concept of indoctrination can represent in the present context a relevant effort towards the logical clarification of one of the most controversial referents commonly associated with RE. Especially under liberal-democratic conditions, the subject of the risks - with respect to individual autonomy - associated with indoctrination gains especial relevance. This feature becomes prominent also in the light of the previously mentioned process of forging of mentalities. As was mentioned earlier, a comprehension of education from the perspective of socialisation could awaken some doubts, particularly over its suitability for the liberal centrality of freedom of thought and other fundamental liberties. Correspondingly, individually coercive and indoctrinatory-like connotations associated with the *mentalities*' reference could well convey possibilities of restriction of individual liberties, in the same sense as was classically suggested by Mill (1982).

The Habermasian reference to *mentalities* as fundamentally pointing towards the interactive sources of identity must therefore be emphasised. In this sense, it would be the interweaving between the individual and collective symbolical orders – something which will inexorably influence the argumentative directions followed by the individual in different circumstances – that can be conceived as underlying the denotative utilisation of the *mentality*-referent in this context. This also implies that this influence could not easily be conceived in a deterministic way, that is, as ultimately defining the subject's possible courses of reasoning and action. Instead, the emphasis on the analytical use of the concept of *mentality* will highlight precisely the intersubjective support of a comprehensive sense of identity, one that entails important argumentative features especially concerning a presupposed structure of reality and its

existential implications. Consequently, the concept of *mentality* can in this context be conceived as referring to the shared character of its contents and perspectives. As highlighted in the previous chapter, this implies that the educational attention given to mentalities can be thought of as not necessarily interfering with the legal consecration of individual liberties of conscience. On the contrary, their forging in particular normative directions could well resonate with the fostering and diversification of possibilities for individual identification and intellectual development. Such a process would then harmonise fundamental rights especially if the orientations it takes adopt the communicative conditions for meaningful ideological exchange. Correspondingly, the promotion of certain epistemic directions in the educative labour of mentality-forging could well be conceived as compatible with the preservation and development of individual liberties in matters of thought and speech. In this regard, this form of education would be contributing to the emergence of a diversified ideological atmosphere in liberal democratic circumstances. This last political characteristic would additionally highlight the presence of important margins of rational communicative conditions as mediating between ideological utterances and speech acts in democratic deliberation. This communicative rationality would provide in this respect liberal safeguards for the development of the educational process, promoting conditions for the epistemic recognition of alterity and the proscription of compulsion as a valid method of persuasion.

Thus, because RE conveys substantial risks of indoctrination for liberal education, its contribution to the promotion of comprehensive and rationally deliberative mentalities towards religious diversity gains relevance as an indispensable criterion for its suitability to liberal democracy. The rationally communicative character of the pedagogical action becomes then important too as a necessary requisite for the subsequent emergence of a similar mentality in student-citizens as a product of the educative process. In this, education would be avoiding an ideological or doctrinal imposition over the individual's reasoning process. This rationally dialogical feature becomes prominent especially when children and minors constitute the educational population, given the vulnerability intrinsic in the immature character of their reasoning faculties. For this reason, a formative and deliberative mode of communication becomes necessary for RE to avoid the risks of indoctrination and to guarantee the pursuit of a non-perfectionist liberal character. Correspondingly, the analytical discussion around indoctrination can well pose relevant questions not only for the relation between religion and liberal education but especially about the relevance of the Habermasian approach of mentality-

forging for the comprehension of that relation. To this field we turn now, in order to proceed to the elucidation of the main features of the analytical debate on indoctrination, especially among British and American philosophers after 1972.

3.1. First analytical formulations of the concept of indoctrination (Gatchel, Wilson, Snook, Green, Kilpatrick)

Gatchel's (1972) historical account of the evolution of the concept of *indoctrination* would consequently stress its malleability and intellectual relativity. As the author points out, the Latin foundations of the term were associated with the teaching especially of the Christian doctrine, exhibiting a positive meaning connected to that of *education*. This usage prevailed, according to Gatchel, through the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment, acquiring then a more rationalistic emphasis in connection to the cultivation of rational faculties. It was not the Romantic criticism of enlightened rationalism but the twentieth century's two world wars which brought about the pejorative association of indoctrination with a coercive type of education, especially in relation with the Western world's increasing preoccupation with the foundational values of democracy⁶⁴. The concept acquired thus a definitive negative connotation after WWII, particularly as a consequence of the Western acknowledgement of the international outlook of Nazi and Communist totalitarianism. In this context, Gatchel points to the American educationalists' debate around the proper relation of democracy and education, and within that to some traditionalist positions defending the positive contributions of indoctrination to democracy. For Gatchel, in conclusion, indoctrination could not be straightforwardly rejected even in the Cold War context because limited rather than thorough pluralism was and still is what in effect constitutes in his view the prevalent feature of American democracy. This means that the prominence of civil government concerning social diversity would constitute a widely accepted foundation of political understanding in that country, allowing enough space for the provisions that guarantee individual freedoms against state power (p. 9). In this regard, other civic institutions and citizens' organisations could be

⁶⁴ One of the authors exhibiting a traditionalist defence of indoctrination in the first half of the twentieth century is Benjamin Floyd Pittenger (1941; Gatchel, 1972). In his *Indoctrination for American Democracy*, he claims that democracy is more than a market of doctrines and that certain insurmountable democratic principles are worth indoctrinating in pupils' minds. For a criticism of the notion of *democratic indoctrination* from a critical-Habermasian perspective, see Young (1989).

seen as performing critical social functions, a characteristic that counteracts state omnipotence, in Gatchel's view. As he stresses, indoctrination can be necessary for this variety of societal pluralism, especially as institutions which demand this kind of early inculcation of values are essential for the civic process. Gatchel proposes then the usage of the term *enculturation* instead of *socialisation* as the foundational concept of a modality of education that effectively includes the non-pejorative connotations of *indoctrination* and its potential democratic contributions⁶⁵.

Contrasting with this positive formulation of indoctrination, Wilson (1972) classically illustrates the criticism of the concept. For this author, indoctrination needs first to be differentiated from conditioning (connected with the non-rational generation of compulsive feelings and the overriding of reasoning in the determination of action) and open force (connected with the orientation of conduct in specific directions through the threat of physical punishment). In this sense, indoctrination occupies a half-way position between conditioning, in one extreme, and perfect rationality, on the other. Specifically, indoctrination can be said to involve an important relation with reasoning, plus a considerable margin of strongly felt emotions. For indoctrination to count as such, it needs in Wilson's view to exhibit coherence between intention (the unconditional acceptance of the content in pupils' minds), method (memorisation, authoritarian threatening or other non-rational modality) and the epistemic character of the content itself (the rational non-demonstrability of its proposed truths). In this respect, indoctrination prevents the subject from adjusting – consciously or not – her representation to changes in reality's domain through consequent modifications in her language, perception, and logic. For Wilson, although indoctrination might occasionally be necessary with children, in order to avoid it causing permanent harm in learners it should never thoroughly affect the realm of thinking, despite its constitutive connection with it. Specifically, this means refusing to passing bad reasons for good ones in pupils' eyes, thus avoiding atrophying their rationality. This means that, for Wilson, the health of rational thought in an individual would unavoidably require the preservation of the essential independence of her

⁶⁵ Gatchel's terminological proposal is inspired by Melville Herskovits (1938), for whom *aculturation* points towards the human being's process of becoming effective part of her group and species, specifically through the mediation of information and culture. On the contrary, *socialisation* would refer to the general process by which an animal learns to belong to its kind. Thus, *enculturation* would for Gatchel encompass *socialisation*, providing a wider comprehension of education as a process that can be conceived as compatible with early inculcation of values.

inner realm of thought and language (p. 22), avoiding thus the total loss of her rationality. In this manner, Wilson will view indoctrination as the most definitively heteronomous determination of conscience, beyond even the similar effects of force or conditioning: “indoctrination is opposed to thinking for oneself” (p. 23).

Snook himself (1972; 1972b) offers a critical perspective on indoctrination that shows some points in common with Wilson. For Snook, *indoctrination* unavoidably conveys a pejorative connotation to teaching, one in which someone in an advantaged position exerts a cognitive influence on pupils. This influence is viewed particularly as weakening the subject’s analytical capabilities to weigh evidence adequately and to form beliefs correspondingly. In this sense, Snook evaluates the content, method, and intention-related criteria to conclude finally that only the last one will provide a solid basis for the criticism of indoctrination. He does so specifically by arguing that any content or method could be logically and necessarily associated with this concept. Thus, Snook proceeds to highlight *intention* as the only necessary factor to classify an action as *indoctrinatory*, even if *indoctrination* as such is not reached. This view carries both the strong *sense* of intention as the direct aiming at a particular educational goal and the *soft* one of merely foreseeing the achievement of such mode of thought in learners. For Snook, the basis of the exclusivity of the *intention* criterion lies in the fact that it constitutes the only logical requisite for indoctrination to take place, its absence making impossible the attribution of such a qualification to any form of teaching. However, this does not preclude content and method as unimportant factors in indoctrination. Conversely, Snook considers them relevant as especially some contents (in particular the more controversial ones) and educational methods (especially those relying less on analysis and other rational skills) are more prone to accompany indoctrination than others. When exploring religious education, Snook suggests *objective* educational scenarios (philosophy of religion, theology, religious history and history of religions) in which the rational and autonomous weighing of evidence can be deployed by students without an indoctrinatory influence from the teacher. In this sense, Snook offers an *intention*-based definition of indoctrination that sustains a philosophical criticism of this term through a commitment to autonomic rationality as the *natural* objective of any *genuine* form of education.

A similar critical view of indoctrination is conveyed by Thomas F. Green (1972). For him, the achievement of autonomous intelligence, defined as the capability of forming and holding evidentially-based beliefs, constitutes the supreme goal of education. In this view, it is not the conclusion of the reasoning process (the acquisition of established knowledge, for instance) but the process itself of reaching such a conclusion that matters in educational terms. In this respect, this *region of intelligence* – as Green calls it – would have to appeal simultaneously to knowledge and behaviour, and would be necessarily located between the extremes of conditioning and indoctrination, involving both training and instruction. Support for this opinion can be found according to Green in the fact that there are core beliefs that are needed in order to be able to exert rational intelligence, as he conceptualises it. One of them is undoubtedly the belief in the need to believe evidentially, which can for Green be revised but never completely abandoned. Love of truth, another fundamental belief, requires as well a certain level of non-argumentative acceptance as a starting point for the cultivation of intelligence and autonomy. This early uncritical ascription of value-commitments consonant with the permanent pursuit of truth needs for Green, however, to be complemented with another fundamental core-belief, namely, the necessity of permanent self-criticism and revisionism. Green views this reflexivity as necessary for the fostering of awareness concerning the necessary contingency of one's belief. This attitude would for instance contribute to shielding against cognitive fanaticism – with which autonomous intelligence shares the commitment to love of truth – through the promotion of a meaningful level of emotional disengagement regarding the achieved fruits of knowledge. Unlike Wilson, Green considers indoctrination-like teaching as not necessarily opposed to autonomy-cultivation, but always as no more than an indispensable medium – which needs to be constantly challenged by reason – for the achievement of the higher goal of rational intelligence. In this respect, Green correspondingly emphasises the utmost importance of the permanent cognitive character of the educational outcome as the criterion for considering the pedagogical inclusion of indoctrinatory-like techniques and subjects in an autonomy-fostering modality of education.

Kilpatrick (1972) also classically criticises the concept of indoctrination. Similarly to Green, for him the main problem with this form of teaching lies in its aiming towards uncritical modalities for holding cognitive beliefs. In these, the support expressed by the subject for what she perceives as knowledge would then ultimately rest on the affective value attached to its content, therefore employing argumentative resources in a merely defensive way. Such an

intellectual stance would consequently shield the belief against argumentative rebuttal and any possible reflective reformulation by its holder, further prompting in her positions of radicalisation. This educational outcome would equate for Kilpatrick to the treatment of learners not as ends in themselves but as means for the ulterior promotion of the doctrines in question. This is the main reason why he sustains that, in all matters, teachers must foster autonomous thinking, even in those fixed contents like the multiplication tables. Even though the effective teaching of, for instance, this topic would inevitably require a significant element of rote learning and non-argumentative didactics, this pragmatic resource will not amount to the classification of this teaching as *indoctrination*, especially as autonomous rationality remains the ultimate goal of this education. This intention-criterion appears then for Kilpatrick as the soundest grounds for the definition of indoctrination, separating this concept from any content or teaching method with which it could be typically associated. This implies for Kilpatrick that controversial issues should not be excluded from autonomy-promoting teaching, especially since doing so would equate in his view to the promotion of uncritical citizenship. Besides assessing the *controversial* character of any content as necessarily relative and exhibiting social, geographical and historical variables, Kilpatrick considers the avoidance of debated matters would atrophy the rational capabilities of learners, depriving them of an arena to consider critical social polemics free from constraint. On the contrary, the educational utilisation of contentious content – especially of that closest to the living situation of students’ experience – would provide a valuable opportunity and an important educational platform for the formation of independent thinking in pupils. This possibility can be seized for Kilpatrick primarily via the promotion of students’ skills in analysing and synthesising. In this manner, pupils can achieve a considerable margin of distancing from either the teacher’s position on the subject – whether expressed or not – or from the implicit institutional need for the academic resolution of controversies in the classroom and their presentation as objective knowledge (Kilpatrick 1972). In this sense, Kilpatrick shares with Wilson the rejection of any possible educational legitimisation of indoctrination, but on the different grounds of the rational character of the educational action’s final intention. In this, Kilpatrick differs from Wilson, who adopts instead a comprehensive definition of the term that disqualifies it entirely with regards to any autonomy-promoting form of education. With respect to Green, Kilpatrick shares the belief in the important presence of rote learning and other non-argumentative didactics in a non-indoctrinatory form of education. However, he differs from the former in calling these didactics *indoctrinatory* per se, unless they lead towards an intellectual stance in which non-evidentially modes of holding beliefs prevail. This inclination towards the exclusive reliance on the final-

intention criterion for the definition and application of indoctrination leads Kilpatrick towards the conclusion that every teacher, independently of their subject, is subsequently constructing society through the modelling of the academic and political culture of new generations. This constitutes for Kilpatrick the soundest grounds for the philosophical criticism of indoctrination.

3.2. The Wittgenstenian influence (Macmillan, Garrison, Siegel, Harvey, Hand, Ariso)

Macmillan (1983: 1998) strongly posits indoctrination as intrinsic to any form of education or socialisation. Relying on Wittgenstein's notion of *Weltbild* or world-picture as the ground bed of rationality, this author points to the constitutive role of stand-fast, intrinsic propositions about the world in the exercise of abstract reason and the acquisition of knowledge. This formulation leads Macmillan to the positing of an unavoidable and constitutive paradox of indoctrination as based on the acceptance of its need for the later exercise of reason. For Macmillan, the non-rational instilling of statements would also cross the realm of moral values, grounding the subject's identity and sense of collective belonging. Upon this basis, modern education would unavoidably perform an eroding function, problematising such sets of assumptions and evidencing their malleability to the subject. In his eyes, the dispensation of those grounding contents on new generations exhibits however the character of indoctrination. This is due mainly to the fact that explicit justifications hardly accompany this process of inculcation and edification of a world-perspective in the subject. In this manner, indoctrination would constitute an unavoidable requisite for any form of human flourishing⁶⁶.

Garrison (1986: 1999) addresses this debate by extending this *intrinsic* paradox of indoctrination to modern education itself: any form of instruction oriented to fighting indoctrination inevitably requires an absolute – that is, beyond any rational doubt – trust in the value of rationality and its methods for establishing the truth. Thus, the educational battle against indoctrination will not be able to dispense with it altogether. The author addresses this conundrum by relying primarily on Dewey's formulation of the belief in rationality as necessary self-corroborating. Firstly, Garrison portrays rational thinking as touching on the subject's most profound cognitive dimension via the promotion of systematic doubt. From

⁶⁶ Macmillan then explores forms of corroboration of this view in several pronouncements made by American justices on occasion of rulings on freedom of speech in schools. In his revision, these legal concepts evidence the strength of an argument for the restriction of access to particular contents, considering especially the formative stage of the students' criterion.

these premises, the author extracts the pedagogical conclusion of the necessary gradual nature of any rational educational process, if chronic epistemic uncertainty – and existential anxiety – is to be avoided in learners. Correspondingly, the indoctrination-paradox would invite in Garrison's view a dialectical and progressive resolution. Here the author turns to Dewey's view on the *self-correcting* character of any incompletely warranted belief in rationality. In this light, the margins of unjustifiability of the trust put in rational elucidation by pupils would be fundamentally temporary, constituting solely an educational instrument. Thus, these thresholds of necessary indoctrination regarding rational thinking would be *self-inoculating*, especially given the educational end to which they contribute.

Siegel (1991) also accepts the importance of reasoning-supporting beliefs as indispensable platforms for the achievement of critical thinking. Given the – to the learner's eyes – self-evidential character of these beliefs' later justification, Siegel however considers their inculcation as necessarily non-indoctrinatory, in the sense of Macmillan self-inoculating nature of reason-instilling. On these grounds he asserts the existence of *non-indoctrinatory belief-inculcation* (NIBI) to refer to the process of inducing in learners the emergence of reason's cognitive scaffolding through non-argumentative means⁶⁷.

In this same line, Harvey (1997) starts by accepting that exposure to a diversity of world-views would constitute a case of indoctrination, particularly because it unavoidably produces a form of *Weltbild* characterised by important thresholds of epistemic relativism and toleration. Especially when instilled from early ages and thus unable to rely on evidentially based argumentation, this liberal socialisation would then meet the *consequence*-criterion Harvey himself highlights from the previous debate on indoctrination. In this respect, he concedes to the conservative, communitarian position the legitimacy of their worries on the cognitive threat

⁶⁷ Siegel had already (1985) classically posited critical thinking as an educational ideal, defending it against the charges of ideologically laden and of unavoidable subjection to epistemological relativism. For him, the universalism of this ideal would lie in the objectivity of epistemic criteria for assessing reasons, despite the pluralism of knowledge fields on which those criteria would apply. In this manner, critical thinking would reside in the familiarisation with those criteria, especially as expressed in formal and informal logic. It is for this reason that Siegel claims epistemology should occupy a central place in any form of scientific and modern training, and that epistemologists should deal with philosophy of education. Similarly, he claims that the pedagogy of critical thinking would need to combine this formation with educational considerations in relation to the effective inculcation of the relevant skills and dispositions of mind (Siegel, 2017). For a Siegelian account of indoctrination, see Hanks (2008).

posed by this socialisation to their *Wetbild* and values. For Harvey, these concerns legitimately become accentuated when the cultural pervasiveness of liberal socialisation is accepted, particularly concerning the inevitability of the exposure to global media and their morally relativising effects⁶⁸. However, this author does not ethically equate liberal and, for instance, conservative indoctrination. Here Harvey characterises liberal indoctrination as reaching a higher level of abstraction, specifically in relation to other, more substantive forms of traditional socialisation. Under this light, the familiarisation with the irreducible plurality of world-views – thought of either as an unintended consequence of globalised culture or as an educational tool for moral and ethical nurturing – would have become the content itself of liberal socialisation. As such, this exposition to diversity would be replacing a substantial inducement to liberal central tenets, which would equate in his view to other content-based forms of traditional socialisation. Thus, in Harvey’s own words, in liberal indoctrination *the form would have become the message*, leaving this modality of socialisation in a different, more general position, especially concerning its traditionalist competitors. Similarly, the ethical asymmetry between liberal and other forms of indoctrination would be demonstrated by the self-validating character of the educational goals pursued by the former. For Harvey, the cultivation of rationality and the impartial weighing of arguments and evidence would be implicit in the reflexive consideration of the best form of socialisation for new generations. In this manner, the debate itself would prove the importance of rationality as the appropriate basis for individual life-choices, and thus the primacy of a form of socialisation that fosters the relevant dispositions. This reasoning leads to the consideration of those forms of life relying for their survival on ignorance and cognitive isolation as ethically inferior concerning political liberalism and other rationality-fostering forms of socialisation. Given especially the centrality of liberalism and their cognitive effect on new generations’ rationality, the disappearance of these world-views would then be desirable, despite the flavour of nostalgia Harvey finally leaves when contemplating such an extinction.

Based on Siegel’s aforementioned definition of *critical thinking* as grounded in the impartial consideration of evidence and reasons, Hand (2002) defends the existence of a non-

⁶⁸ This is related to the fact that the *intention*-criterion would not apply to the liberal modality of indoctrination. In Harvey’s view, the cultural omnipresence of the liberal socialisation would not generally point to a purposeful inducement of liberal values in new generations. On the contrary and following Peter Berger, Harvey views this instilling as the liberal *Zeitgeist*, being deployed spontaneously through contemporary media and culture even before liberal schooling in pupils’ lives.

indoctrinatory mode of parental transmission of religious beliefs. Here he relies on the notion of *intellectual authority*, and in particular in its rationally warranted variant. In the cases in which epistemic trust exhibits an objective, evidential foundation, cognitive reliance on it will, in Hand's view, appropriately perform in turn a decisive evidential role for upholding the belief in question. In children's cases, the epistemic trust conferred to their parents would have then the logical foundation of previous experiences which corroborate to the child the notion of their parent as valid sources of knowledge⁶⁹. Thus, the taken-to-be-true of parental religious beliefs and world-views by the child would exhibit rational justifiability, for which it can be seen as promoting in him evidential modes of belief-formation. This comprehension – on which Hand bases his characterisation of religious upbringing as non-indoctrinatory – will in his view stand the criticism based on the view of religious beliefs as personality-shaping in a definitive manner, thus not allowing for its future questioning. For Hand, the reliance given by his argument to the notion of (rational) *intellectual authority* and the epistemic mediation it performs in the child enables us to place the emphasis on the logical and psychological foundation of the religious belief instead of on its content. Similarly, it would also highlight the cognitive and developmental advantages for the child of her participation in a doctrinally homogeneous social realm⁷⁰.

Finally, Ariso (2019) can also be quoted as addressing indoctrination from a Wittgensteinian perspective. For him, however, the rationally ungrounded character of our fundamental certainties allow for the dispensation with the notion itself of *indoctrination*. In this light, the construction of world-pictures (*Weltbild*) in learners would correspond to a natural feature of any form of socialisation, a process unavoidably deployed over the unjustified exclusion of alternatives. Thus, persuasion would constitute the only means through which perspective-change can be brought about. As can be seen, Ariso discards any conception of fostering of

⁶⁹ It would be precisely the rational character of this foundation that would allow for this trust's further questioning to the light of relevant evidence.

⁷⁰ Hand (2014) will develop a conception of non-indoctrinatory, nurturing moral education along similar Siegelian lines, arguing in favor of the objectivity of morality on social-cooperativist grounds and for the need to thus overcome educational paradigms centred on the instilling of virtues (such as *altruism*). See in this respect the critical replies by White (2016; 2017), Tillson (2017) – on the alternative of grounding moral nurturing in pupils' worldviews through *reflective equilibrium* - and Hand himself (2018).

autonomous thinking in learners, committing instead to the provision of “quality upbringing” of children⁷¹.

3.3. The *intellectual virtues* approach (Callan and Arena, Taylor)

Relying in William Hare’s (1979) work, Callan and Arena (2009) can be seen as introducing a virtue ethics-approach to the debate on indoctrination. Similarly to Kilpatrick, for these authors the philosophical criticism of this concept – which constitutes for them its only sound possible critique – must concentrate on the closed-mindedness it fosters, beyond considerations of any possible doctrinal or pedagogical implications involved in the teaching situation. The authors proceed thus to define this *closed-mindedness* as encompassing a significant closure to the revision of central cognitive beliefs. Such an attitude can for them be based primarily on two frequently related but usually different vices: intellectual arrogance or cowardice. The former would consist of the lack of humility concerning one’s cherished convictions, and the latter would point to the lack of courage to face potentially reformulating evidence. Additionally, closed-mindedness needs for them to be conceptualised also according to three characteristics: the cognitive role performed by the belief itself (core/superficial and justificatory/explanatory – i.e., “one should not doubt one’s fundamental beliefs”); its relative *depth* (level of cognitive rooting for the subject); and its *breadth* (its inner capability to reach and compromise other beliefs in the subject’s mental system). In this respect, the critique of closed-mindedness needs in these authors’ view to consider the different possible effects this condition can exert on the subject’s general cognitive performance, especially according to the layered mental architecture the authors present concerning belief systems. Hypothetically, closed-mindedness could then be defended as better than, say, a fatally mistaken open-mindedness, especially if the consequences of the latter prove somehow fatal. In this respect, the authors adopt a more pessimistic position, as found in Plato, according to whom the combination of intellectual

⁷¹ Ariso’s call for abandoning the referent of *indoctrination* on the grounds of its unsubstantiality and equivalence to education could be answered by Siegel’s words: “there is a world of difference between causing Johnny to believe things in such a way that they are now held *sans* rational justification, and in such a way that he comes never to see the importance or relevance of inquiring into the rational status of his beliefs; and causing Janie to believe things in such a way that they are now held *sans* rational justification, but with the view that this lack is temporary, and with an eye to imparting to Janie at the earliest possible time a belief in the importance of grounding beliefs with reasons and in developing in her the dispositions to challenge, question and demand reasons and justification for potential beliefs” (Siegel, 1990, p. 82, quoted in Wareham, 2019, p. 53).

common sense and courage that an open-minded attitude requires is not well distributed among humanity. Consequently, closed-mindedness should not be evaluated as intrinsically harmful, but instead as the cause of further intellectual and moral consequences on the learner. The authors base then the criticism of indoctrination on the moral wrongdoing it causes to the intellectual freedom of people and on the development of their capacity for active enquiry, understood as a condition for the exercise of their fundamental liberties. Thus, neither the intention (for instance, that of the perpetuation of doctrines beyond and above the rationality of pupils) nor the doctrinal content or the pedagogical techniques involved in indoctrination would constitute the basis for its criticism. On the contrary, an *effect* criterion would gain relevance here as highlighting the most certain risk that indoctrination could present towards an autonomy-promoting form of education.

Following Callan and Arena, Taylor (2016; 2017) addresses indoctrination also reinforcing an outcome-based account in which the consequences of this form of teaching on learners provide the soundest basis for its analytical characterisation. However, she stresses the need to consider these consequences as impinging – via the aforementioned authors’ formulation of *close-mindedness* – upon the subject’s habits of knowledge-holding and self-understanding. Thus, Taylor can be seen as highlighting the permanent character of indoctrinatory effects on learners. Additionally, like Young, she reinforces a societal perspective on indoctrination, given that, in her view, the dyadic perspective on this issue – as centred in the teacher-pupil relation – ignores some of its constitutive features. By exploring hypothetical case of the 1950’s Georgian teacher Mr Wilson, she remarks on the role of educational and broader institutional circumstances surrounding *teaching systems*, like those connected to the visions and practices of authority in a given society. In this manner, Taylor will focus her formulation of indoctrination in the promotion – via teaching modalities and systemic tendencies – of intellectual vices (such as intellectual arrogance, cowardice and servility) leading to the renunciation of open-mindedness and other – for her – essential epistemic virtues (such as intellectual courage, humility and diligence) conducive to the increase in both knowledge and understanding (Taylor, 2016)⁷².

⁷² White (2017) answers to Taylor by agreeing with her on the need to widen the view on indoctrination as encompassing societal circumstances. However, he states educational systems as the central and only responsible instance of this process. White based this conception on the comprehension of *intention* indoctrination’s main criterion. In his view, the presence of a *closed mind* in a person – besides difficult

3.4. The Habermasian articulation of *critical thinking* (Young, Huttunen)

Under a Habermasian light, the previously mentioned Australian scholar Robert Young (1989) deserves special attention here as providing an account of the problem of indoctrination in education. In the context of his historical account of the crisis of Western education⁷³, Young proceeds then to characterise his critical education as a process of de-reification of ideologies. It is for this reason that he proposes a definition of an *Ideal Pedagogical Speech Situation* (IPSS) as based on the absence of distortions regarding the intelligibility, accuracy, honesty and cultural appropriateness-levels of communication. This view implies especially that the unrestricted elucidation of validity claims by pupils must constitute the main goal of any educational practice, especially if autonomous problem-solving is to be educationally pursued. However, this educational quest usually finds in modern schooling educational and communicative practices that thwart instead of promoting it. Young characterises these reified modes of communication as epistemically imprecise (*impressionistic*) and full of embedded corrections, relying mainly on an expertise-basis that presents knowledge in an objectivistic and unilateral manner that discourages pupils from engaging with the taught content. For Young, students' passive acquiescence with a reasoning process that the teacher deploys unilaterally has pervasive and detrimental consequences for them. Such a subordinated form of learning, in his view, usually develops in the subject into permanent habits of reasoning-delegation that will later build up into collective trends of different sorts. For Young, this educational outcome constitutes a product of not only explicit monologue-like pedagogies but also of apparently dialogical ones that rely on ambiguous communicative practices for presenting an image of collaborative knowledge-construction⁷⁴. The dubiousness of these

to assess empirically – asserts an ambiguous standard for the delineation of the concept. Instead, he posits the prevention of reflection as the main feature of indoctrination, thus considering educational policy-makers as its determiners – as in the case of British educational secretary Robert Morant – and teachers as powerless pieces of the institutional mechanism.

⁷³ As explored in the first chapter.

⁷⁴ Young's emphasis on conscience as a product of linguistic interaction connects with his emphasis on the social embeddedness of linguistic and cultural systems with respect to communicative practices. In this respect, Young portrays the relative autonomy of systems of meaning as originating in specific linguistic practices and modes of communication, neither of which are in his view completely autonomous. This means that, first, the adequate comprehension of communicative action must in his view consider the constraints provided by previous ideologies, and second, an effective elucidation of validity claims would necessarily require the concurrence of both linguistics and pragmatics. This

practices is characterised by Young as relying on imperative perlocutions that ignore the student's recognition of the *normative context of legitimate authority* (Young, 1989, p. 106), configuring a monopoly of the sources of academic authority that allows for arbitrary or deceptive manipulation by the teacher of the final communicative goals and the system of rewards and sanctions. The theoretical critique of such an educational scenario presents for Young tougher challenges, especially as the dialogical appearance of these communicative practices can complicate the identification of the real character of their inner linguistic exchanges. Thus, the potential political consequences of this teaching modality become more inescapable and ubiquitous, representing a higher threat for the achievement of a more autonomous and engaged citizenry.

Young's Habermasian approach to critical education will thus highlight a critical perspective on indoctrination based on the intended or unintended effects of educational practices on pupils, instead of on particular educational contents. In his view, such forms of communication would constitute the kernel of the ethical suspiciousness of indoctrination, leading to the treatment of students as pedagogical objects instead of as *partners in enquiry*. Because of this, these practices would have for him analytical primacy over the role performed in indoctrination by the potentially controversial character of the subject or even the intention to constrain pupils' reasoning processes in specific ways. Both content and intention would for Young be external and therefore secondary to the inherent effects of these communicative practices on pupils' self-understanding⁷⁵. An approach to indoctrination like this would prove for Young

ontological and epistemic complementarity is formulated by Young as non-dialectical, stressing the analytical precedence of communicative practices in the comprehension of ideologies and cultural systems. For Young, these practices penetrate even science and philosophy, and do so in a scenario characterised by the limits brought about by pre-existing systems of meaning. Therefore, if socio-linguistic practices perform a determining role with respect to ideologies and beliefs, theoretical analysis and critique do not need to occupy an Archimedal point with respect to social reality, analytically referring instead to those practices as the explanatory point of departure.

⁷⁵ In this respect, a change on emphasis can be noticed between Young's proposal in 1989 and 1992, respectively. In the first case, the predominance of the unilateral use of imperative perlocutions leads to the interpretation of Young's concept of *traditional education* (and therefore of *indoctrination*) as based especially on the *intention*-criterion. In the second scenario, the emphasis moves to the linguistic uses instituted in *traditional teaching* and their subjective derivations, leading therefore to the conceptualisation of indoctrination based especially on the *effect* or *consequence*-criterion. This feature would gain importance in Huttunen's revision of Young. Regarding this, Huttunen will argue that Young's accent on the *intention*-criterion needs to be replaced by an emphasis on the *consequence*-criterion in the sense of *empowerment* of students-citizens. This, of course, does not recognise the specific character of Young's latter conceptualisation of indoctrination.

relevant for the promotion of critical education among either adults or young learners, with whom autonomy-promoting communicative practices can be implemented in a compatible fashion with the preservation of their indispensable margins of ontological certainty.

Following this Habermasian line, Huttunen (2009) will provide a recent critical perspective on indoctrination and education. In his view, the previous model by Young is susceptible to critique, mainly due to three reasons: first, it over-emphasises teacher's speech acts over those of students, bypassing a – for him – crucial dimension of the indoctrination problem. Secondly, Young's focus on classroom linguistic interaction fails to give an accurate account of what Huttunen considers *structural* indoctrination, that is, the one deriving from the hidden curriculum and other social circumstances surrounding education. Thirdly, Huttunen considers that Habermas' *Ideal Speech Situation*⁷⁶ – as the theoretical framework for Young's IPSS – fails to recognise the inexorable historicity and content-dependency of any analytical frameworks for linguistic interactions⁷⁷. Therefore, beyond the modalities of communication employed in the classroom, this author stresses the importance of visualising the concrete socio-ideological contexts surrounding education. For this author, this dimension needs to gain theoretical relevance as in his view it exerts an outstanding influence on educational practice and its cultural effects.

In this sense, Huttunen works within the Durkheimian framework of *mechanic vs. organic solidarity*, assigning types of personalities to each model. Correspondingly, he states that modern society would require an open type of personality, capable of critical review of tradition and self-reflection. This type will constitute the opposite of the *closed* type characteristic of traditional societies, characterised by Huttunen as *intolerant, doctrinaire and prejudiced*⁷⁸. Thus, an education for organic solidarity that promotes the critical skills of pupils

⁷⁶ Introduced by Habermas in 1983, the notion of the *ideal speech situation* referred to the specification of the conditions of deliberative legitimacy as contained in the principles of universal participation, generalised interlocution and non-coerceability (Habermas, 1990).

⁷⁷ In this respect, Huttunen rightfully points out that it was for this reason that the notion of the ideal speech situation was substituted in Habermas for an accent on the conceptualisation of the optimal conditions for democratic will formation (Huttunen, 2009, pp. 76-79).

⁷⁸ In Huttunen's view, "in a traditional society, highly individual personalities are perceived as a threat, not as a resource or potential" (Huttunen 2009, 1). The schematism of this formulation – as will be shown next – is conceived as providing grounds for a formulation of modern education as organically

would require a conception of socialisation as a simultaneous co-production of meaning instead of its mechanic reproduction through schooling, in tune with a constructivist view of knowledge. The principle of respect for persons underlying this proposal – which Huttunen agrees with Kilpatrick (1972) as the soundest basis for the critique of indoctrination – leads to a support of a communicative over a strategic form of action as the paradigm for modern teaching. This does not mean however that the latter type of action (which the author considers a requisite for indoctrination) must be conceived as incompatible with critical teaching at all. For Huttunen, teaching is also necessarily perlocutionary, which implies in Habermas' perspective strategic action. Teaching would be thus unavoidably asymmetrical, due to the unevenness between teacher's and student's levels of communicative competence. This conception leads Huttunen to back *simulation* as the fundamental character of the communicative action underlying critical teaching. This formulation leaves space for integrating argumentation with strategic considerations, all in a *critical* modality of teaching oriented towards the development of pupils' critical thinking skills through linguistic interaction. Thus, *simulated communicative action* emerges for Huttunen as an essential referent for considering an adequate *critical* education that not only avoids but also counteracts the indoctrinatory effects also derived from societal circumstances.

3.5. The Siegelian synthesis of *open-mindedness* and *critical thinking* approaches (Siegel, Wareham)

Harvey Siegel (2017) recently addressed Huttunen's formulation of *closed-mindedness* as the central feature of indoctrination. Despite recognising the educational virtues of open-mindedness, Siegel assesses it however as insufficient to prevent the emergence in students of a disposition to hold beliefs regardless of evidence or reasons, for him the defining feature of indoctrination. In this regard, only the promotion of quality epistemically-related capacities – allowing the subject to consider relevant information organically - will in Siegel's view prove insightful to foster *critical* thinking via the consolidation of similar habits of mind and

different from its traditional forms. These sociological considerations should thus not be considered as describing empirical contexts – where their heuristic possibilities will be limited. Instead, they would be informing an educational perspective in relation with the subject of indoctrination. It is in this sense that they are quoted here.

epistemic virtues (such as intellectual courage, humility and independence). Consequently, it would be the fostering of analytical and synthetical skills that will in Siegel's view contribute to the effective counteracting of indoctrination, for which it can find support in the promotion of open-mindedness and related intellectual dispositions⁷⁹.

On similar grounds, Wareham (2019) suggests a comparison between indoctrinated beliefs and delusional ones, with a particular focus on their consequences on their holders. After a revision of psychiatric literature, she highlights the epistemic consequences of delusion, stressing the psychologically stabilising functions of some hallucinations and their contribution to further recovery. She then remarks on the notion of *epistemic innocence* of those beliefs, particularly as they help counteract mental breakdown and thus promote states of awareness where they can be safely overcome. This exercise leads Wareham to address indoctrination via an outcome-based approach, in consonance also with what she identifies as the central tendency in this subject's literature. Here she rehearses Siegel's formulation on indoctrination as the promotion of non-evidential modes of holding beliefs, expressing support for it as better reflecting the formal characteristics of reasoning⁸⁰. However, she also considers the aforementioned paradox of indoctrination as reflecting the importance of early and necessarily unwarranted inculcation of reasoning-facilitating beliefs. In this respect, Wareham assesses Siegel's previously mentioned formulation of NIBI as based on the self-inoculating character of those beliefs. Given thus her acceptance of Siegel's universalism – that is, as context-transcending – regarding reasoning as indispensable for the promotion of autonomic thinking, she finally reinforces the epistemic innocence of reasoning-supporting beliefs, thereby reinforcing the non-indoctrinatory character of NIBI. This comprehension will support, in Wareham opinion, the conception of education as a cognitive scaffolding instead of as the dispensation of specific contents.

⁷⁹ Siegel admits that his formulation of indoctrination offers mainly theoretical advantages – particularly in connection with the unification of analytical perspectives, leaving the door open for possible criticisms and elaborations on this area.

⁸⁰ Here she refers to the comprehension of *belief* as logically connected to that of *truth* (*we form beliefs because we think them true*, upon whose verification we speak of *knowledge*). Thus, non-evidentially held beliefs would be less likely to be true. Consequently, in Wareham's view, the promotion of skills concerning fair weighing of evidence and assessing of reasons will bolster the epistemic merits of the beliefs formed by the subject and her overall reasoning disposition.

3.6. Conclusion

This revision of the analytical discussion around the concept of indoctrination illuminates initially its inherent historicity. In this respect, Gatchel's account brings about the important correlation between the meanings attributed to this concept and the prevailing educational paradigms of the time. For the case of the mid-twentieth century America, the coercive connotation remaining in the proposal of a foundational form of democratic indoctrination⁸¹ evidences for instance the effort to construct it positively amid an inter-war period that brought its negative connotations to the minds of educational thinkers. Thus, the construction of a negative connotation of *indoctrination* would answer especially to the exacerbation of the democratic spirit in America under the influence of the rivalry with Soviet socialism. It is in this context that progressivist educational theory regarded the inculcation of convictions by non-argumentative or rational methods – especially since childhood – as not only a countering force towards *natural* human development but also a violation of human dignity itself⁸².

Later, the ethical ambiguity of the notion of *indoctrination* raised some suspicions among British philosophers especially after 1970. In this period, analytical explorations of its logical connotations revolved around four main criteria: content (especially non-scientifically-demonstrable doctrines), methods (drilling, rote-memory and other non-rational didactics) intention (particularly that of bypassing learners' argumentative capabilities) and *consequence* or *effect* (particularly the promotion of habits of non-evidentially modes of belief-formation in learners). From a comprehensive definition requiring consistency between content, methods, and objectives (Wilson) and the focusing on intention (Snook), this debate will ground the philosophical criticism of indoctrination mainly on the *consequential* criterion as containing the highest potential harm to the development of autonomous thinking (Green). Thus, the analytical characterisation of the concept will by then concentrate its moral reprehensibility in the particular cognitive consequences of a communicational act leading to the emergence of

⁸¹ As in Pittenger's (1941) defence of American democracy against totalitarianism.

⁸² This semantic influence can be corroborated either by Gatchel's attempt to challenge this determination and openly defend an *indoctrination* concept that matches what he considers the necessary *enculturation* functions of society, or even by Pittenger's effort to construct the concept positively on a tacit acceptance of its unavoidably negative connotations.

particular types of personality prone to the uncritical acceptance of authoritative utterances⁸³. However, salient considerations were made in this debate about the unavoidable need of non-rational methods for the cultivation of a rational-thinking disposition in learners (Green and Kilpatrick).

In connection with this trend, a Wittgensteinian approach to indoctrination, arising during the 1980s, will further emphasise the necessity of scaffolding beliefs for the emergence of reasoning capabilities in the individual. Thus, the acceptance of the requirements of a *Weltbild* or world-image preceding the emergence of reasoning (Macmillan) will lead to the formulation of the *paradox of indoctrination* insofar as the promotion of intellectual freedom will require the non-rational inculcation of supporting cognitive elements (Garrison). In this same vein, an influential solution to this contradiction was offered by asserting – in the light of the *consequence-criterion*'s prevalence in these matters – the non-indoctrinatory character of that early inculcation of reasoning-supporting beliefs, especially as they will ultimately prove themselves to the fully rational individual (Garrison and Siegel). Along analogous foundationalist lines, the extension to liberal, multi-cultural socialisation of a thus construed concept of *indoctrination* will finally remark on the *self-inoculating* character of this form of acculturation (Harvey). Similarly, a comprehension of parental transmission of religious beliefs to children will emerge as non-indoctrinatory, particularly given the evidential – and therefore revisable – character of the latter's belief in the former's *intellectual authority* (Hand). The rejection of the notion itself of *indoctrination* – as derogatorily redundant to socialisation's essential feature of unwarranted discarding of alternative *Weltbildern* – could also be quoted as illustrative of a contemporary radical application of Wittgensteinian premises to the debate (Ariso).

Another important trend in the formulation of this concept resides in the *intellectual-virtues* approach. According to this view, defining cognitive attitudes (such as intellectual arrogance, cowardice and servility) will be at the base of the indoctrinated mind, further affecting its reasoning capabilities. These *vices* will further configure a close-minded disposition in the subject, progressively compromising her psychological structure (Callan and Arena). In a

⁸³White (2017) stands out here as defending an *intention*-based account of indoctrination.

similar variant, *closed-mindedness* would be characterising not only the subject's habits of knowledge-acquisition but also her *understanding*-capabilities, concretely in connection with specific topics (including existential ones). In this light, societal influences for indoctrination are also highlighted (Taylor).

An important Habermasian variant can also be identified in the characterisation of *indoctrination*. This paradigm will correspondingly influence this analytical debate mainly by providing an intellectual direction to the educational background against which this term is critically construed. Correspondingly, *indoctrination* will be conceptualised in terms of the outcome of established practices of classroom communication that are traditional in modern schooling and result in a personality-type characterised by non-evidential modes of belief formation (Young). In a more contemporary version, this communicational accent will highlight the convergent character of pedagogical practices and broad societal influences concerning the building up of personality-types in pupils (Huttunen). In this manner, the *consequence*-criterion will again widen its scope for the inclusion of non-schooling sources of indoctrination

Finally, the formulation of an analytical synthesis between the *intellectual-virtues* and the *critical-thinking* approaches is offered by Siegel. Proceeding via a characterisation of rationality as based on the epistemic quality of the psychological mechanisms of knowledge-acquisition, this philosopher will thus give primacy to *critical thinking* as ontologically different from any form of intellectual virtue, assigned henceforth a complementary and instrumental role (Siegel, 2017). Correspondingly, indoctrination will be characterised as the impingement upon the subject's analytical capabilities, affecting thus her reasoning capabilities and with this her general intellectual dispositions. On this basis, the assertion of the *epistemically innocent* character of the non-evidential inculcation in children of reasoning-facilitating cognitive content will be asserted, in particular via the comparison between delusional and indoctrinated beliefs (Wareham). In this manner, a notion of *non-indoctrinatory belief-inculcation* will be developed along Siegelian lines.

This last description reveals then one of the main shifts taken by this debate, especially as it was reviewed here. This refers specifically to the prevalence of the *consequential*-criterion in

the analytical depiction of indoctrination. From its assertion in the analytical debate of the 1970s, the emphasis on the cognitive consequences of a socialising communicational act – given especially its constitutive epistemic asymmetry – will lead to the highlighting of the logical conditions of critical thinking under a Wittgensteinian perspective. This mainly formal exploration of the logical scaffolding of reasoning will then articulate with an epistemically universalist perspective (in the figure of Siegel’s *critical thinking*) and with a normative one in the form of Habermasian conceptualisations of education. Besides alternative formulations on indoctrination on the basis of virtue epistemology, these sources contemporarily converge on a *critical-thinking* paradigm exhibiting a foundationalist grounding of rationality on general intellectual skills. Under a Habermasian light, this theoretical convergence could be seen thus as providing a specific political accent towards the construction of rational autonomy based on the satisfactory deployment of intellectual signs of autonomous rationality by learners. Correspondingly, this theoretical-critical inclination will lead to the deployment of the criticism of *indoctrination* with regards to the Habermasian account of communicative rationality and the requisites for genuine citizen engagement in public debate.

This account could then be widened via a Habermasian ontological communicative account of the emergence of rationality and identity in individuals. This perspective will correspondingly emphasise – as in Huttunen’s proposal – the broad societal character of both *education* and *indoctrination*, in line with the *socialisation*-outlook that grounds here the *forging of mentalities*-concept of education in a Habermasian point of view. Leaving aside perhaps the strong dualism of mechanic vs organic solidarity in Huttunen’s argument, it is clear that the emergence of modes of conscience – which necessarily includes the deployment of rational faculties according to specific standards – would require the contextualisation of schooling in the comprehensive scenario of societal communication that inevitably decants into pupils’ subjectivity. Thus, a sociological and philosophical critique of indoctrination could in this respect rely on ideological criticism – as in Young’s definition – as a methodological tool for the cultivation of a procedurally rational, non-perfectionist ideal of autonomy in students. This articulation will call in turn for the deployment of both communicative and strategic actions for the pursuit of autonomous rationality as an educational goal⁸⁴. A further characterisation of

⁸⁴ In this respect, possible convergences could be explored between the teacher’s handling of the reward system according to a context of authority that is legitimate for students – as was positively posited by

this analytical convergence on indoctrination and education will be deployed – on occasion of the specification of a Habermasian modality of RE – in the following section, particularly in the light of previous considerations on liberal education.

4. Conclusions

This philosophical debate around indoctrination can be considered then as very close to the problem of religious education. As commented before, the necessarily ambiguous rationale of religion in liberal educational systems will permanently highlight *indoctrination* as a risk naturally associated with it. In this respect, the endeavour towards the logical clarification of this term will necessarily shed some light over the liberal educational potential of religion. Consequently, it would be important to remind the reader of Hirst's position on RE as a form of knowledge and as a legitimate educational subject for liberal education. As was concluded above, the necessary rational indeterminacy of RE could well serve as a sound basis for promoting autonomous rationality in pupils, given a critical epistemic distance concerning other, more objectively established fields of knowledge. In this sense, the absence of any belief-inducement on the part of the teacher – which includes the rejection of any granting of objectivity to religious doctrines – will provide a rigorous enough safeguard for the avoidance of indoctrination through RE in liberal schooling. This definition, based firmly on Hirst's thought on the consideration of the cognitive consequences on learners of such epistemic attribution, would point here to the *consequences*-criterion as described by the *Critical* accounts of indoctrination (particularly by Young and Huttunen). In this manner, it would be the objective assessment of the actual probability of any damaging effect on the cognitive capabilities of learners which would constitute the minimum logical requisite for the characterisation of an educational act as *indoctrinatory*. Correspondingly, it would be this potentiality which would constitute an insurmountable limit for liberal education, mainly by virtue of its necessarily adverse consequences on pupils' habits of thought⁸⁵. If inside the limits

Young –, on the one hand, and Huttunen's essential *simulated* character of the *genuine* educational act, on the other.

⁸⁵This predominance of the effect-criterion in the logical definition of indoctrination would imply then that any educational act could be viewed as potentially indoctrinatory, regardless of the epistemic status of its content. In this respect, any educational modality that relies on authoritative and non-evidentially based modes of teaching could be seen as potentially impinging on the subjects' general cognitive dispositions. Here, however, it would be important to consider Garrison's view of the self-inoculating character of the inculcation of rationality, and Hank's defence of the self-justificatory nature of liberal socialisation. In this respect, in a scenario characterised by the anti-rational inducement of objectively

provided by these educational considerations, RE could thus deploy insightful and relevant educational functions in liberal education, precisely because of its objective uncertainty. In this respect, the lack of publicly agreed criteria for the assessment of the objectivity of religious truth-claims could here enhance in pupils the disposition towards the critical evaluation of educational contents. This cognitive feature of RE could, in turn, be deployed along significant thresholds of imaginative skills associated to it, particularly in connection with the comprehension of alterity and the envisaging of developmental possibilities for pre-established world-images and world-views in learners.

Finally, it could be valuable to remark one additional important element of the indoctrination debate, namely, the exemplary role performed by the evidential mode of holding beliefs regarding the comprehension of autonomous rationality. In this respect, the thoughtful corroboration of propositions against relevant information concerning their truth-claims stands out here as concentrating the definition of *rational thinking*, providing an essential basis for thus defining autonomy. Correspondingly, indoctrination is portrayed as opposing that mode of forming cognitive beliefs, inculcating them on bases different from rational scrutiny. In this manner, this permanently verifying attitude is posited as a cognitive safeguard that would allow the subject to form *rational* beliefs about *what is the case*, and from there to achieve *autonomy* consequently through the constant exercise of this form of thought. This element, which could be thought of as highlighting a constitutive – and sometimes underlying – agreement in the philosophical debate about indoctrination, can evidence here one of the significant boundaries of liberal education. In this sense, the assertion of evidence as a requisite for the correctness of any cognitive belief can be conceived as resembling an empirically-based scientific epistemology, in which theoretical constructions acquire truth-status through systematic

established contents, the educational tension between the fostering and the infringement on learners' rationality would have to be solved in favour of the former for such an instance not to be characterised as *indoctrinatory*. This will of course call for an assessment of the cognitive risks intrinsic in the respective educational act. This characterisation does not exclude however the ascertainment of the logical and empirical strong correlation between especial types of educational contents and methods, on the one side, and the potentiality of permanent cognitive affectation of learners in an anti-rational direction, on the other. Thus, the – intended or not – cultivation of non-evidential dispositions and modes of thought will typically exhibit the presence of some especial types of educational contents – i.e., controversial ones – and of specific pedagogical methods – i.e., authoritarianism – that better enable such inducement to take place, although not requiring them on a logically *necessary* basis. Thus, a complete construction of a definition of *indoctrination* on analytically and critically philosophical bases would include, as complementary, other criteria that accompany the *effect* criterion as its central feature.

experiential corroboration. This essential token of cultural modernism – historically associated with the early modern rise of experimentation in natural philosophy – could be considered in the *indoctrination* debate as carrying important value-thresholds about individual freedom and empirically-based rationality. Thus, cognitive beliefs lacking *systematic* – and therefore epistemically *open* – demonstrability would appear here as *groundless*, and consequently as inadequate for liberal education, especially because they fail to foster self-criticism in learners. However, the *systematic* nature of the empirical corroboration could hardly be considered as relying exclusively upon experimentation for the establishment of the truth-status of propositions, in a clear empiricist vein. Conversely, the clarification of the empirical demonstrability of, for instance, racist beliefs would require the questioning of genetic determinism in the explanation of human behaviour, something which leads to the revision of conceptual schemes and empirical evidence with regards to this debate. Thus, *evidence* as a requirement for the attribution of rationality to cognitive beliefs must be considered as including not only the relevant empirical information supporting those beliefs – a feature that elaborated racist doctrines exhibit – but also the logical consistency underlying the beliefs themselves and the evidence wielded in their favour. This duality will allow then to foster a non-empiricist version of the value of autonomy through the promotion self-critical rationality in the pursuit of truth, especially where the correspondent background of established knowledge is available.

In this same sense, the uncritical granting of objectivity to religious beliefs – precisely because of their currently lack of a supporting corpus of knowledge – would lay grounds for the bringing about of the charge of *indoctrination* through religious education, promoting non-evidentially formed beliefs via educational authority. Similarly, however, the opposite stance of positing an intrinsically *false* character in religious beliefs – and of excluding them from liberal schooling on that basis – would equate to a similar epistemic error, assuming that the lack of logical demonstrability of religious dogmas and doctrines would definitively determine the negativity of their truth-status. This attitude, which could be thought of as amounting to indoctrination in logical positivism, would ignore the differences in the cognitive value attributed by religious doctrines to the *empirical* or *phenomenal* realm of experience, especially when this realm is considered as a source of belief-warrant and therefore of knowledge. This imposing of specific conceptual schemes to alien epistemic perspectives – as the religious ones – would equate to their unfair treatment, promoting the uncritical acceptance of its underlying

philosophical doctrine. In this respect, this specific form of indoctrination would also amount to a lost opportunity concerning the weakly liberal educational potentialities of religious perspectives, particularly their capability to promote in learners autonomous rationality through critical reflexivity, introspection, cognitive empathy, cultural coherence – especially in early years – and important thresholds of speculative imagination. Regarding this risk, an adequate pedagogical framework protecting against religious or other forms of indoctrination – like the one sketched above – could provide liberal schooling with an educational rationale for religion, allowing for the preservation of its educational possibilities. In this sense, the fair educational treatment of the constitutive objective uncertainty of religious beliefs could be considered as complementing the teaching of more objectively established fields of knowledge in providing for the fostering in new generations of necessary dispositions and mentality-related features for the pursuit of knowledge. A permanent watchfulness over the cognitive consequences of institutional socialising actions – particularly concerning the forming in pupils of inadequately evidential beliefs –, will in this respect strengthen the weakly liberal educational setting necessarily framing the presentation of contents in the common schooling of a liberal society. This attitude of permanent reflexivity regarding the epistemic effects of teaching upon learners’ mental development will provide for the vital role of schooling in the development of critical, autonomous citizenship.

As can be seen, then, the delineation attempted here of the logical contours of both liberal education and the *indoctrination* concept will provide a meaningful background for the integration of RE to the basic curriculum of liberal, common schooling. Accordingly, the respect for the epistemic particularities of different fields of knowledge and the consolidation of the capacity for rational, autonomous judgement in learners – as the self-evidential, constitutive teleology of liberal education – will provide here a viable platform for the harmonisation of *public* and *private* educational provisos inside a weakly-perfectionist liberal framework. In this manner, not only liberal educational objectives but also fair thresholds of academic representation of religious diversity – as an important contemporary feature of religious tolerance – could be realistically pursued. In this scenario, RE could perform as the socio-pedagogical vehicle for the mobilisation of salient insights for the cultivation of liberal-educational goals and the promotion of religious toleration along the lines of the recognition and legal protection of intersubjective instances of identity-formation. The synthesis here developed for RE could then meaningfully articulate with the promotion of inter, and extra-religious understanding, particularly in the Habermasian line explored in the previous chapters.

In this manner, the promotion of understanding mentalities across the secular-religious divide – and the correlated structural counteracting of either secularistic or religiously fundamentalist views of alterity – could find support in an epistemically contextualised RE subject in common schooling that adequately fosters critical thinking-related formative objectives. Although not fundamentally educational and therefore extrinsic to RE's specific field of concerns, this Habermasian orientation for this academic subject would align with relevant insights concerning the presence of religious voices in the public sphere and the historicity of liberal democracy. Regarding this possibility, it would be worth accepting that problematic elements would not be far from this proposal, especially in relation to the theoretical convergences underlying it and the historical relevance of its primary theoretical sources. However, it would be necessary to underline that the consideration of the confluence here rehearsed as insightful for the conception of RE under contemporary liberal-democratic conditions constitutes the guiding thought of this academic exercise. It is expected then that the margins of identification of instances significant for this problem will outweigh this proposal's shortcomings especially in terms of internal consistency and historical relevance. In connection with this, elements for the further crystallisation of these RE guidelines will be attempted in the conclusion section, particularly after their historical and empirical screening through their application to the Colombian case. It is then to the historical and analytical depiction of this country's RE subject that we turn now.

Fourth Chapter: Religious Education in Colombia

In this chapter, we will attempt a concise historical account of religious education in Colombia. It will include a revision of the teaching activities deployed by the Catholic Church and the Spanish Crown in the colonial period, and by this and other churches and the Colombian government during the republican period. This will be followed by the characterisation of the current legal framework for RE in the country, and from there to a summary of available empirical information on this subject. Finally, some attention will be given to elaborations on the state of secularity in Colombia, leading in this manner to the conclusions.

5. Colonial Period

Religious Education in Colombia has undoubtedly been marked by the dominant presence of the Catholic Church. Active in this country since the beginning of the Spanish colonial period in the early sixteenth century, Catholicism has strongly marked the country's history and cultures in different ways. This constitutive stamp has meant the existence of a still majority Catholic population in the country⁸⁶. Similarly, this religious continuity expresses itself in the important levels of religious practice still prevalent in Colombia⁸⁷ and the important network

⁸⁶ This characteristic is corroborated by several independent sources, especially given the non-existence of official data on the religious composition of the country. One of the most recent sources is the 2014 survey by the Pew Research Centre (2014), which shows religious affiliations to be 79% Catholic, 13% Protestants, 6% Unaffiliated and 2% Other. With respect to this Catholic majority and according to this survey, Colombia falls behind only Paraguay (89%) and Mexico (81%) in the Latin-American context, which includes in this research the U.S. Hispanic population and Puerto Rico. Another important source is Beltrán-Cely's (2012) 2010 survey on the main cities of the country, some intermediate cities and the rural area of Urabá. This survey shows the following results, based on the self-perception of the respondents: 70.9% Catholic; 16.7% Protestant (including Evangelical Christian, Pentecostal, charismatic Evangelical and Protestant); 4.7% atheist and agnostic; 3.5% *I believe in God but not in religion*; 1.8% Jehovah's Witness and Adventist; 0.2% others (including Muslim, Buddhist, Hare Krishna, Rastafari, Orthodox and *spiritual studies*) and 2.2% NR/DK. Another source is constituted by the survey on the matter applied by the Observatory of Religious and Cultural Diversity of the San Buenaventura University (Corpas de Posada, 2009). Its most significant results are: 76.5% Catholic, 14.4% non-Catholic Christian, 3.9% agnostic, 3.2% atheist, 1.5% *I believe in God but not in religion* and 0.6% Jehovah's Witness.

⁸⁷ For example, 94.1% of the respondents of Beltrán-Cely's (2012) survey labelled themselves as *believers* (a category that registers 92.9% in the aforementioned Observatory survey – (Corpas de Posada, 2012), 58.2% as believer-practisant, and 85% of the surveyed population considers religion as *important* or *highly important* in their lives. These percentages notably increase when distinguished by gender, specifically for female respondents (96.6% believers, 65.8% believer-practicing). Although the highest (98.2%) self-categorisation as *believers* is registered in this survey among the elderly (60 and older), the young (18-25) identification in this direction is also meaningfully high (90.6%). These

of Catholic institutions performing salient social functions in conjunction with the State. Ranging from the provision of health and hospice services to the establishment of workers' unions, cooperatives and banking services, the Church in Colombia has acted as a central institution in its evolution as a nation, providing a salient source of traditional morality and social regulation.

In this process of cultural formation, religious education has carried out a fundamental role. Constituting a direct expression of the deep and widespread presence of the Catholic Church in Colombia, Catholic doctrine has performed – and still does – as a prominent educational platform for the socialisation of new generations of Colombians. As an intentional process of evangelism and corresponding moral guiding, Catholic RE in Colombia since the conquering (*Conquista*) and colonisation (*Colonia*) periods has constituted a direct expression of the politico-religious amalgam between the Spanish Crown and the Vatican for the evangelisation and the administrative annexation of the South American continent (Torres-Hurtado, 1985; García-Sánchez, 2005). This agreement between the altar and the throne found form in the *Patronato Regio* (Royal Patronage), the direct concession – by Popes Alexander VI and Julius II – to the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand II and Isabella I of Spain, of ecclesiastical-appointment and administrative powers in the newly discovered territories of the Americas. Through this sacred bestowal, deployed with the explicit intention of the propagation of the Christian faith and the establishment of the Church in the New World, the task of conversion of the American natives was allocated to the Catholic priests and religious communities, performing here as royal officers and thus as a constitutive part of the political enterprise of the expansion of the Hispanic territories overseas. This delegation is visible, for instance, in the religious features of the *Encomienda* (Assignment) institution in Spanish America. This legal formulation, by which the Madrid Crown granted rights to *Conquistadores* over the lands and population of a determined territory, required the condition of the establishment of *adequate* (i.e. Christian) spiritual provision for the subjects under its jurisdiction (Lara-Corredor, 2005). The public confession of allegiance to Christ – represented by the Pope – and to the King, known as *Requerimiento* (Requirement), marked for the Indians then the granting of *vassal* status. This milestone marked the beginning of a process of religious enculturation that would guarantee the conservation of the natives' life under conditions of servitude (Torres-Hurtado, 1985; Caballero, 2016). In this sense, the effective annexation of the New World was

important indicators of a strong religious practice in the Colombian population contrast, however, with the low (27%) affiliation to a church or religious group among respondents..

perceived by the Spanish Crown as a process of widening of the political boundaries of the realm. As this included by that time the perpetuation of the Spanish kingdom's self-perceived cultural landmarks, colonisation naturally encompassed the religious enculturation of the native population. In this respect, it can be said of Catholic RE to have performed a foundational role in the history of Colombia as a modern nation, mainly through the evangelism of the Indians⁸⁸. This early socio-political instrumentalisation of basic Christian instruction illuminates especially the institutional centrality of Catholicism in the consolidation of Spanish dominion over its American territories. As will be explored ahead, this ideological feature of the colonisation will further translate into the conception of RE as a socialising device for the perpetuation of the religious identity of new generations, further constituting a distinctive feature of the educational tradition in Colombia.

This important socialising role of the Catholic Church in the early modern Spanish colonies in America also brought about the establishment of prestigious Catholic schools in what was then called the New Kingdom of Granada. Institutions such as the *Colegio de Santo Tomás* of the Dominican Order in 1573, or the *Colegio Mayor de San Bartolomé*, founded by the Society of Jesus in 1604, inaugurated institutional educative functions, initially for its clergy and later for the offspring of the aristocracy of *encomenderos* and royal officers (Restrepo Zea, 1991). These religious schools, plus the *pious* (*escuelas pías*) and conventual schools for poor mestizos, the doctrinal chapels (*capillas doctrineras*) for the conversion of the Indians, and domestic private instruction – legally and economically restricted to the elites –, can be understood as constituting together the original basic-educational / religious socialising facet of the colonial society. This educational system, which included professional colleges for the instruction of priests and lawyers for the administration of the state, relied strongly on the Catholic religious orders (specifically Dominican and Jesuits). For this same reason, they mobilised a robust religious-civilisational ideal centred on the teaching of the Spanish language and of the Church's doctrine against what was perceived as the pagan barbarism of the indigenous religions (García-Sánchez, 2005)⁸⁹. However, different historians highlight in this respect the official oblivion and institutional abandonment that mainly characterised the state of education

⁸⁸ The African slaves, considered in a sub-human condition, received on this matter a different treatment, avoiding for that reason the administration of the sacraments. In this respect, the figure of Peter Claver stands out (Caballero, Capítulo 3: El Imperio de la Ley, 2016). This Jesuit saint adopted between 1580 and 1654 the solitary and at the time misunderstood mission of the evangelisation of the slave population.

⁸⁹ Pita Pico (2011, p. 39) highlights in this respect these institutions' proclivity to provide a very precarious instruction on literacy and to focus instead on catechism.

during the early colonial period in the New Granada, particularly due to the lack of a modern concept of *public education* on the part of the Crown (Restrepo-Zea, 1991; Torres-Hurtado, 1985). This understanding of religious and moral instruction mainly as political socialisation – especially of the indigenous population –, combined with the private interest – mostly of the aristocratic families of *encomenderos* and officers – in the education of the new generations, can be said to have characterised the institutional educational endeavour in the first two centuries of existence of the New Granada.

It was then the changes fostered by the Bourbon Reforms in the eighteenth century which questioned this established vision of education in the colony. These transformations, which strengthened the political and administrative authority of the Crown over the Church, resulted for example in the first suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1767. Based on the Bourbon interest in promoting industrial capabilities and rational administration in its colonial territories, this expulsion symbolised the Royal interest in the cultivation of modern and scientific knowledge against the traditional scholasticism associated for instance with the Jesuits (García-Sánchez, 2005). In this manner, a variation of Enlightened absolutism promoted in the Viceroyalty ideals of universal and free education oriented towards the formation of virtuous citizens⁹⁰. Although in a modernist vein and fostering state instead of religious and parental control of education (Pita-Pico, 2011; Gutiérrez, 2014), these reforms did not challenge the social centrality of Catholicism. On the contrary, they presented an enlightened conception of the pious citizen, and deliberately sought support of the religious orders for the administration of the newly founded *Schools of First Letters* (*Escuelas de Primeras Letras*) for the instruction of the general population (Restrepo-Zea, 1991). In this respect, the social prominence of Catholic doctrine and morality endured throughout the colonial period, performing as the central ideological source for the socialisation of new generations and advancing an educational ideal (*general instruction*) as intrinsically intertwined with Catholic faith and morality.

6. Republican Period

⁹⁰ Important source of the reformist ideals can be found in the *General Plan of Studies* (1774) by the Royal Audience's prosecutor Antonio Moreno y Escandón; the *Plan of University and General Studies* (1787) by the archbishop-viceroy Antonio Caballero y Góngora; and *Plan for Patriotic Schools* (1808) by the enlightened scientist and independentist revolutionary Francisco José de Caldas.

This constitutive cultural and religious inheritance let itself be felt after the end of the colonial period and through the republican life of the country. The attitude towards religion of Colombia's main emancipating leader, Simón Bolívar, will be representative in this respect. After achieving the independence of the former colony from Spain and when facing the challenges of the founding of a republic, *El Libertador* showed a staunchly conservative stance, considering Catholicism as an indispensable source of social cohesion for the new nation (Olivera-Ravasi, 2014). And for Bolívar, this meant granting state protection to the Catholic Church as the country's official religion, despite the allegiance to Spain shown by the high clergy during the independence campaign. In this sense, Catholicism appeared to Bolívar as a political instrument for the stability of the young republic and as one of its constitutive cultural components⁹¹. This Bolivarian attitude towards religion found reflection in his particular educational policy, undoubtedly inspired by Enlightenment ideals on the popularisation of education, but also strongly sustained by the Church's dogma and institutions for its moral inspiration and implementation. Correspondingly, the establishment of local schools catering for the lower strata of society was conceived by Bolívar and his republican successors as harmonising with the Catholic presence in the nation, providing simultaneously technical (agricultural, industrial, commercial) and spiritual-ethical formation in accordance with the perceived nature of the religious beliefs of the population. This orientation led Bolívar to create the *Direction of Public Education (Dirección de Enseñanza Pública)*, which established public, secular and mandatory education under his ally Santander's *National Studies Plan* (Andrade-Álvarez, 2011, 166). This plan envisioned the promotion of Enlightenment instruction for all strata of society, relying strongly on the established Catholic infrastructure. However, both the lack of financial resources and the aggressiveness of some of its measures – which included the suspension of monasteries and their transformation into state schools – brought this initiative to an end, mainly due to the impossibility of hiring teachers to realise its objectives. In this respect, the first republican governments of the country relied extensively on the colonial religious orders (Jesuits, Dominicans and Franciscans) for the delivery of public education, especially in the remote provinces of the nation.

⁹¹ This public attitude of Bolívar was accompanied in his convictions by his political centralism in the administration of the republic, favouring strong personalism and concentration of power in the figure of the leader (Gutiérrez, 2014). It would also find support in his personal religious confession, which exhibited elements of freemasonry – especially in his early, formative years – and an important threshold of fervent Catholicism, especially in his latter days (Machado-Sanz, 2016).

This situation led to the *War of the Supremes* (1839-1842), the first conflict of independent Colombia. This struggle, strongly inspired by a conservative religious spirit against the liberal reforms, led to a clearer division of the federalist liberals and the centralist conservatives after the government's triumph. In this respect, the Bolivarian, Enlightened, centralist and morally conservative stance towards education was subsequently challenged by radical liberal governments, which alternated with some conservative governments during the mid-eighteenth century. This mixed succession of administrations, each usually accompanied by its own civil war, finally led to the Radical Liberal period (Caballero, 2016b) inaugurated by Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera's administration between 1861 and 1863. The governments of this phase implemented expropriating measures against the Church – which included state confiscation of deceased persons' property and the various expulsions of the Jesuits – and restricted the church's scope of influence in government and society. Intending to promote a more scientific and technical spirit in education and counteract the scholastic attitude then attributed to the religious orders, these governments also established educational institutions for the training of a modern and industrially oriented elite, such as the National University, created in 1867 during the administration of Manuel Santos Acosta. They also established a network of teacher-training colleges, for the foundation of which they requested the first German educational mission to the country⁹². Among other educational measures of the period can also be counted the attempts to create a public, completely de-centralised, mandatory, free (at the point of delivery) and secular system of education, like the one designed by the Aquileo Parra administration in 1876. This initiative, framed by the 1863 Rionegro Constitution that proclaimed a federal regime (*the United States of Colombia*), aroused an armed Conservative resistance especially in the mining regions, led by the Conservative successors of former pro-independence warlords and inspired by Pope Leo XIII's *Syllabus* (and other encyclicals) condemning Liberalism as an error of Modernity. This tense situation finally escalated to the conflict known as the *War of the Schools* (*Guerra de las Escuelas*) of 1876-78, in which Conservative regions offered resistance to the central government's plans to completely secularise education. The confrontation was finally solved by the triumph of the central

⁹² This mission, which was characterised by the promotion of the Pestalozzian educational method, was constituted by nine teachers, seven Protestants and two Catholics, who were distributed through the several provinces of the nation (Toro, Muñoz and Scharnholz, 2014, p. 68). It resulted for instance in the foundation of the Female Normal School of Cundinamarca in 1872, which was a pioneer in this type of education in the country.

government, whose short stay in power was interrupted by the rise to power of the Conservative and centralist regime of Rafael Núñez.

As can be seen, this oscillation between the favouring and the dispossessing of the Church, which characterised the alternation of Conservative-centralist and Liberal-federalist governments during the early and mid-nineteenth century, did not diminish the social significance of Catholicism in popular culture, strongly shaped by centuries of Catholic nurturing. This symbolic and institutional importance of religion in Colombian society was finally established in the 1886 constitution, proclaimed during the Núñez government (Caballero, 2016c). This administration – which re-centralised, fiscally and administratively, public education, and entrenched the religious and moral teachings of Catholic doctrine – implemented a *regenerative* (*Regeneración*) programme based on the moral centrality of Catholic teachings against the liberal tenets of freedom of thought and federalism. Correspondingly, the 1886 Constitution declared Catholicism as the *national* religion, opening its preamble with the formula: “In the name of God, Supreme source of all authority”, and expressly considering this faith as “an essential element of the social order” (Corpas de Posada, 2012)⁹³. This promotion of Catholic values, as an organic component of a strongly centralist democratic republic, manifested itself also in the concordat between the Colombian State and the Holy See in 1887⁹⁴, securing the special status and protection conceded to the Catholic Church and institutions in the country (Silva-Olarte, 1989)⁹⁵. Educationally, Núñez’s *Regeneración* established an explicitly re-Christianising process in the country, mainly through

⁹³ This constitutional formulation of Catholicism as the national religion did not equate however to its proclamation as official. In this respect, article 38 acknowledged that, despite the respective protection that this religion was due from the public powers, Catholicism was not and would never be considered as official, in particular with the express aim of preserving its independence from the State (Corpas de Posada 2012, p. 177).

⁹⁴ Ratified and slightly restricted in 1973.

⁹⁵ In the words of Andrade-Álvarez (2011): “[the Concordat] allows the Catholic Church to abolish the law of property of dead hand and recognises tax privileges, ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and above all, it gives it control and monopoly of primary and secondary education. The establishment of the Concordat in 1887, serves to strengthen relations between the Colombian state and the Catholic Church, by establishing Catholic Christianity as the national religion and grant her the faculty to act freely and independently throughout all the territory under the protection of the State but far from its control. Equally, the Concordat grants the church control and monopoly of education in Colombia. The Church then acquires the legal power to choose the books of religion and Christian morality for all levels of education, as well as power to suspend and report to the authorities all the instructors or teachers who do not respect the Catholic doctrine during the realisation of their teaching courses. The Church acquires a certain power through the Concordat on the instructors and the contents, which strengthens the commitment of the Regenerationist governments to prohibit all types of teaching, literary or scientific, that divulges ideas contrary to the Catholic dogma on the matter, along with due veneration to church” (pp. 161-162, own translation).

French teaching orders (Eudists, Lasallians) (Andrade-Álvarez, 2011). These communities, which found in Colombia a convenient amalgam of Church and State, implemented forms of industrial education along with Catholic instruction across the territory. In this respect, this religiously and morally conservative period of the country's history laid the grounds for the Colombian educational system, relying for this purpose on a centralist view of progress via the accentuation of Catholicism as the primary source of traditional solidarity.

This religious policy was not questioned by subsequent Liberal governments, which abandoned the radical anticlericalism of their predecessors and oriented themselves towards the promotion of welfare measures without advancing for that federal forms of government (Jaramillo-Uribe, 1989). In this sense, the continuation of the oscillation between liberal and conservative governments did not alter this rigid Catholic social order, which persisted during the twentieth century. Neither the emergence of political violence in 1948 – with the subsequent establishment of a military dictatorship between 1953 and 1957 –, nor the manifestation of the first tendencies towards an increasing religious diversity in the country challenged then the social and political centrality of Catholicism (Helg, 1989). Among the reasons for the endurance of this socio-religious order, what undoubtedly stands out is the implicit consensus on the political importance of Catholicism between the ruling Conservative and Liberal parties, who were convinced of the need to avoid the alienation of the Church for the governing of the nation. In this respect, Catholicism could be conceived as being present in Colombia since its gestation and emergence as a nation, performing founding roles with respect not only to religious convictions but also to morality and social cohesion (Cifuentes-Traslaviña y Figueroa-Salamanca, 2008).

7. The emerging religious diversity in the twentieth century

As explored earlier, this central character of Catholicism's place in the Colombian society and culture endured and renewed itself during the twentieth century, which in this respect saw important changes in the country's religious landscape. In particular, Christian diversity increased in the first decades of this century. Although liberal Protestants were established in the country since the wars of independence – in the figure of British soldiers sent to support Bolívar and of the few Bible societies of the capital (Rodríguez, 2004), it was the arrival of the first Pentecostal missions from the US and Canada in the 1920s which formally started a process of religious transformation in Colombia (Butler-Flora, 1970; Bartel, 2004; López-

Amaya, 2014). In particular, these strongly proselytising Evangelical churches, from an original focus on conversion in rural areas – viewed as the peripheries of the Catholic national hegemony –, gradually moved to the cities through generational changeover and the subsequent modification of the eschatological emphasis⁹⁶. Accompanied by an important threshold of conversion in indigenous communities, Evangelical Pentecostals then grew to become the first religious minority in the country, occupying an important contemporary presence in education, politics and society.

In a similar vein, non-Christian pluralism also increased in Colombia during the twentieth century. Although Muslim slaves had been present in Colombia since the XVI century (Islam Al-Fayer, 2017), it was the Arab migration of the mid-twentieth century which brought an important Sunni Muslim presence to the country, particularly centred around the Caribbean north coast (Ministerio de Cultura, 2014). Something similar happened with the Jewish communities, who were present in Colombia since the colonial period⁹⁷. However, it was the first half of the twentieth century which saw the increase of the Jewish population in Colombia, coming mainly from Greece, Turkey, Syria and the north of Africa. After 1933, important waves of Jewish migrants arrived in the country from Eastern European countries, particularly due to the rise of Nazism in Europe (Gutiérrez-Vargas *et al.*, 2018, p. 101). Similarly, small pockets of confessional Buddhists had settled in Colombia approximately since 1945, coming from the United States, Lebanon, Turkey, Syria, Japan, Korea, China and India (Gutiérrez-Vargas *et al.*, 2018, p. 101). However, missionaries arrived in the country in the early 1980s, especially in connection with Vajrayāna Buddhism (KTC Karma Thegsum Cholin, 2018; Budismo Camino del Diamante, 2014), and in the late eighties, belonging to Zen Buddhism (Comunidad Soto Zen de Colombia – Daishínji, 2012; Fundación para vivir el Zen, 2018). It is considered then that the impact of these traditions germinated especially among middle and upper classes, which were closer to the informational and cultural currents of globalisation (Fajardo-Pulido, 2009; Ramírez-Suárez, 2014).

⁹⁶ In this respect, it has been highlighted that the twentieth century marked a change in the Colombian Evangelical churches from an initial, *extra-worldly* (see Weber, [1920] 1968) expectancy of the millennium, to a more active theological stance characterised by the *intra-worldly* turning towards the evangelisation of society as an indispensable condition for Christ's second coming (*neo-Pentecostalism*. See Beltrán-Cely, 2006). This transition is conceived as following the urban concentration of the population and the resulting de-population of the countryside occurring in the country after 1950.

⁹⁷ Due to Jewish support for the independence cause, the Neo-Grenadine government granted this group political rights in 1819 (Bibliowicz, 2006).

8. Legal framework

The aforementioned threshold of limited pluralism in Colombia – characterised by the dominant presence of Catholicism in state and society – was finally recognised by the 1991 Constitution. This new Magna Carta, which replaced the century-long validity of that of 1886, consecrated the recognition of the secular, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic character of the state. Despite preserving the abstract invocation of the protection of God in its Preamble⁹⁸, the new Constitution correspondingly formulated the state’s separation from religion, consecrating both freedom of conscience⁹⁹ and of religion as fundamental rights¹⁰⁰. These constitutional formulations reaffirmed previous international commitments of the Colombian state concerning these rights, such as the ones consigned on the matter in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)¹⁰¹, the American Convention on Human Rights (1969)¹⁰² or the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)¹⁰³, as the necessary conclusion of the state’s self-definition as religiously pluralist and as cognisant of the equality of all religions (Corte Constitucional de Colombia, 1994). In this respect, the subsequent avoidance of the establishment of any official or preeminent religion leads, in the Court’s view, to the implicit recognition of the secular nature of the state, given the lack of an explicit formulation of this direction on the Constitution. In the Court’s view, this consecration constitutes the only feasible way for the state to guarantee the individual rights of freedom of conscience and religion, and simultaneously the proper recognition, equality and the protection of all religious confessions by the state. Consequently, the separation between Church and state, the adoption of a neutral point of view towards the different religions in the country, and the prescription of any form of mutual interference constitute for the Court indispensable requisites for the effective

⁹⁸ “The people of Colombia, In the exercise of their sovereign power, represented by their delegates to the National Constituent Assembly, invoking the protection of God, and in order to strengthen the unity of the nation and ensure to its members life, peaceful coexistence, work, justice, equality, understanding, freedom, and peace within a legal, democratic, and participatory framework that may guarantee a just political, economic, and social order and committed to promote the integration of the Latin American community, decree, authorize, and promulgate the following”.

⁹⁹ Article 18: Freedom of conscience is guaranteed. No one will be importuned on account of his/her convictions or beliefs or compelled to reveal them or obliged to act against his/her conscience.

¹⁰⁰ Article 19: Freedom of religion is guaranteed. Every individual has the right to freely profess his/her religion and to disseminate it individually or collectively. All religious faiths and churches are equally free before the law.

¹⁰¹ See Articles 2, 4, 18, 20, 24 and 27.

¹⁰² See Articles 1, 12, 13, 16, 22 and 27.

¹⁰³ See the Preamble, Articles 2, 14, 20 and 30.

achievement of religious pluralism, and for the realisation of religious and ideological freedom in society (Corte Constitucional de Colombia, 2017).

Regarding the provision of education, this was established by the constitution also as a right of individuals, along with the rights of parents to choose the education of their minor-age children and the general right not to receive mandatory religious instruction in any public institution¹⁰⁴. These potentially contradictory constitutional enshrinements were followed, in religious matters, by the General Law of Education (115 of 1994) and the Religious Diversity Law (133 of 1994), which jointly presented a common framework for RE in Colombia. In this respect, the Education Law identified RE as one of the fundamental and obligatory areas of schooling¹⁰⁵, which would together minimally constitute 80% of the curriculum. This meant that the qualifications obtained by the pupil on this subject would affect their final grade. This law clearly stated also that RE would be considered as a right and that all educative establishments would offer it according to the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion. The General Education Law also reaffirmed the constitutional right of parents to choose the desired type of education for their children of minor age, and the constitutionally inspired precept according to which no person is to be forced to receive RE in state schools. In a similar vein, the Religious Diversity Law correspondingly stated the rights of the parents of the minor-age or disabled student to choose a particular moral and religious education for their offspring, and of the adult student to determine it by herself. It also established that RE would be offered

¹⁰⁴ Article 68: Individuals may create educational institutions. The law will establish the conditions for their creation and management. The educational community will participate in managing educational institutions. Education will be in the care of individuals of recognised ethical and pedagogical fitness. The law guarantees the professionalisation and dignity of the teaching profession. Parents have the right to select the type of education for their minor children. In state institutions, no individual may be obliged to receive religious instruction. Regarding specifically this parental right, the Constitution echoed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 (Art. 18, Num. 4, ratified by Colombia in 1968), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966 (Art. 13, Num. 3, ratified by Colombia in 1968), the American Convention of Human Rights of 1969 (Article 12, Num. 4, endorsed by Colombia in that same year), the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief of 1981 (Article 5, literal b) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 (Article 14, Num. 2, ratified by Colombia in 1991).

¹⁰⁵ The other fundamental subjects enlisted by this Law are (all names in italics) *ethical and human values education; the humanities; social sciences; philosophy; economic and political sciences; artistic and cultural education; natural sciences and environmental education; physical education, recreation and sports; Spanish and foreign language (English or French); Maths; and technology and computer science*. Colombia's education system is composed of 5 years of primary education and 6 of secondary, divided between 4 foundational ones and 2 of specialised formation. The average ages of entry and graduation are 5 and 17, respectively. According to the Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2015), 52.1% of the student population are enrolled in the public sector, and 47.9% in the private one.

by the school according to the religion to which the pupils belong. With respect then to the opposition between non-compulsory RE and the parental privilege to determine their offspring's received RE, this Law also stated the right of the parents or of the adult (18 or older) pupil to withdraw from RE in any school, something which they will have to declare from the moment of the enrolment¹⁰⁶. Thus, the possibility of dropping out, conditioned by the guardianship of parents, was foreseen as the hinge between religious liberty and the parental rights with regards to their children's RE. This Law, which developed the principle of state pluralism towards the recognition and establishment of the equal treatment of religions¹⁰⁷, also stated for the first time a constitutive requisite for the profile of the RE teacher: the necessary possession of a certificate of religious competency issued by the Church or confession which the instructor attends or teaches.

Another milestone in the process of legal recognition of religious pluralism in Colombia can be highlighted in the Internal Public Law Agreement number 1 of 1997 (issued as the Presidential Decree 354 of 1998) between the Colombian state and some *Christian non-Catholic religious entities*. This Agreement, commonly known as the *Evangelical Concordat*, granted several Evangelical churches special privileges with respect to legal effects of religious matrimonies, public register of ministers, non-Catholic RE in state schools, pastoral assistance in the military and in penitentiary and aid centres, worshipping in public areas and facilities, and contracting with the state¹⁰⁸. Regarding RE, this agreement consecrated the right of

¹⁰⁶ In the provision and specificities (parental assignation and legal age-condition for pupils) of this right of dropping out from RE, the Colombian legislation echoes similar dispositions in English and Welsh (Religious Educational Council of England and Wales, 2019), Northern Irish (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, 2019) and Scottish (Education Scotland, 2019) legal frameworks concerning this subject.

¹⁰⁷ The definition of *religion* in this Law, however, evidenced an important theological lineage, explicitly excluding what was considered as “activities related to the study and experimentation with psychic or parapsychological phenomena; Satanism, magic, superstitious, spiritualist or other analogous practices that are alien to religion” Art. 5. In this respect, the religious influence is identifiable here of the senator who drafted the Law, congresswoman Vivian Morales, a lawyer, university professor and prominent evangelical politician who has also performed as Attorney General, proponent of a referendum against gay marriage and, most recently, presidential candidate.

¹⁰⁸ The group of churches included in the Agreement was constituted by the following denominational and independent Evangelical and Pentecostal churches: Assemblies of God of Colombia, International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, Church of God in Colombia, *Casa sobre la Roca* (House on the Rock) Christian Church, United Pentecostal Church of Colombia, *Pan-American Mission of Colombia* Denomination, Pentecostal Church of God - International Movement of Colombia, Seventh-day Adventist Church of Colombia – to whose members special labour-holiday provisions were granted in the Agreement –, Wesleyan Church, Christian Church of *Puente Largo*, and the Evangelical Council of Colombia – Federation (*CEDECOL*), which as “today represents 70% of Christian Evangelicals of the Colombian population” (https://www.globalministries.org/lac_partners_cedecol_concilio_evangelico, accessed 19 May, 2018).

students to receive non-Catholic Christian RE in state schools, from pre-school to ninth grade, according to the doctrines of the church they belonged to and in a non-discriminatory manner to other religions. On an executive level, this agreement conceded to the signatory churches the capacity to participate in the formulation of the RE subject in state schools, alongside the Education Secretary of the Municipality or the Department. It ordered these public authorities and the school board to facilitate this participation and the churches' collaboration in the delivery of this academic subject. In relation to the profile of the RE teacher – in its *Christian non-Catholic* version –, this agreement complemented what was prescribed in the law on Religious Diversity with the requisite of a bachelor's or master's degree in Education with an emphasis on theology or *Christian* religious sciences (emphasis added), granting some exemptions for candidates lacking pedagogic studies or for regions where suitable staff were not available. In all cases, however, the accreditation of confessional Christian studies would constitute a mandatory feature. Regarding RE, this agreement partially resembled the concordat between Colombia and the Holy See (1973), which – in its aforementioned reformulated version of 1973 – granted also the Catholic Church special rights in relation to public education. However, the Catholic privileges in this respect exceeded those conceded to the Evangelical churches, as the former was granted the possibility to teach RE in state schools *according to the Teaching (Magisterio) of the Church*. This prerogative allowed the Church to provide the RE curriculum, assess the relevant textbooks and oversee the effective implementation of the subject in public education, besides committing the state to providing state funds for Catholic *private* (non-state) schools and to the acceptance of the certificates of suitability for RE teachers issued by the Church.

Subsequently, the Ministerial Directive 002 (February 5th, 2004) delivered special directions for the RE subject, on occasion of *diverse enquiries and consultations* that arose on the matter. This document, after reaffirming the obligatory nature of RE in all schools and its necessary correspondence with the aforementioned legal and constitutional framework, stipulates that this subject in state schools will be subject to those provisions on the matter that were included in the public law agreements subscribed between the state and any particular religious confession. After referring to the two mentioned Concordats, this directive also contemplated the possibility of opting out of RE as the only possible guarantee of the religious freedom of the students whose confession did not have an agreement with the state and was therefore not being taught in state school. Besides stating the duty of these institutions to contribute to the realisation and participation of students in praying, worshipping and other pastoral activities,

this directive also granted private schools the autonomy to offer RE and pastoral assistance according to their *Educational Institutional Project* (Spanish: PEI). Although this institutional arrangement requested churches and schools to harmonise RE curriculums with several moral and ethical principles¹⁰⁹ – alongside the prohibition on proselytising through this academic area –, it clearly forbade the possibility of teaching RE in a manner different to that consecrated in the Concordats signed with the state and chosen by the parents through the enrolment of their children. In all cases, the rights of the adult student or the parents to opt-out of RE were also restated. Concerning the RE teacher’s profile, this directive reaffirmed the previous Decree’s resolution of requesting specialisation or *related* studies in the area, plus the possession of a certificate of suitability issued by the respective ecclesiastical authority.

In this manner, the autonomy granted to every school could be considered as the privileged means through which the RE subject was rendered almost exclusively according to the parental and local communities’ interests. As was mentioned earlier, such autonomy took shape in the form of the aforementioned PEI as the ruling educational charter of the schools. This comprehensive document, which must contain information regarding not only educational principles but also pedagogical and assessment strategies, curricula, school democracy, fees and payments, facilities, social responsibility and other elements of school life, was conceived as legally requiring for its design the open participation of the parents and other sectors of the educational community (Decree 1860 of 1994). However, despite the establishment of RE as mandatory in the General Education Law of 1996, the government felt the need in 2006 to issue a decree re-stating its obligatory nature, leaving the determination of its curricular time to the PEI. In this direction the Uribe administration issued Decree 4500 of 2006. This directive reinforced the mandatory character of RE in all schools and restricted their curricular autonomy by requesting them to abide by the provisions of the General Education Law and thus to offer this course providing for the aforementioned right of dropping out. Although in this last respect this document followed the main guidelines established by its precedents, actually it reduced the threshold of liberal harmonisation for RE, requesting only the avoidance of any use of the RE class for the ends of religious proselytism or *the benefit of a specific creed*. Additionally, this Decree did not provide any mandate with respect to the RE content, which left standing the 2004 Directive’s guidelines stating the current concordats as guidelines for RE in state

¹⁰⁹ “Peaceful coexistence and solving of conflicts; the recognition of and respect for cultural and religious plurality and human rights; moral development, self-identity awareness, environmental protection and participation in a democratic society” (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2004, p. 2).

schools. Finally, regarding the RE teacher's profile, this directive loosened the academic requisites placed upon it – in particular by adding the possibility of holding *corresponding* (italics added) studies in the area, while insisting on the respective church's certificate of suitability. In this respect, Decree 4500 is commonly interpreted as answering the request by both Catholic and Evangelical groups on the need to avoid the establishment of substitutive *ethics* courses instead of RE in different schools, a curricular move which ignored the prescriptions on this subject in the General Education Law of 1994¹¹⁰.

In this respect, the liberal harmonisation of RE was conceived in Colombia after 1991 as the framing of this academic subject inside a particular adaptation of the classical liberal context of the secularisation of the state and its separation from religion. According to this adaptation - a good representative of the Colombian tradition of state-building -, Catholic conservative doctrine represents a constitutive source of social morality for the nation. Precisely for this reason and as was highlighted before, Catholicism provides a relevant and central voice for the modernisation of culture and the state. This is the main reason also why the necessity of reconciling the educational prerogatives, first of the Catholic and later of the evangelical churches, on the one hand, with the liberal provisions for religious freedom and the secularisation of the state, on the other, appears as a recurrent theme of the legislation in relation to RE in this country. This form of religious modernism, which re-surfaces after 1991 in the process of liberalisation of the political institutions, can be conceived as leading to the consecration of RE as a mandatory subject – to be offered in every school and with effects in pupils' annual grades – when first addressing the formulation of secular education in the country. This socio-religious inheritance can also be thought of as the reason underlying the recurrence of the corresponding necessity of accommodating the right to receive RE and of parents to determine the education of their offspring within the constitutional framework derived from the consecration of freedom of religion and conscience. This compromising path, as we saw above, was subsequently deepened by the Religious Diversity Law, which

¹¹⁰ Another important milestone with respect to RE is constituted by the *Chair of Human Rights, Duties and Guarantees, and Pedagogy of Reconciliation*, as was created by Agreement 125 of 2004 of the Council of Bogotá. In this document, RE was envisaged as constitutive part of the Ethics courses of both public and private schools in the capital, and foundationally contemplates the following topics in its curriculum: “autonomy, personal freedom, individual and collective responsibility, respect for human dignity; cultural, ideological, political and religious pluralism, tolerance, solidarity and the democratic practices of participation” (Concejo de Bogotá D.C., 2004). This proposal was also conceived as part of a broader educative strategy on Human Rights on different public institutions of the city of Bogotá, which included training on the subject for penitentiary population, city officers and the population in general.

complemented the parental right on educational matters with a religious and moral character, and consequently requested all schools to offer RE according to the religiosity of the pupils.

Consequently, the prevalence of this tradition of agreement between the state and the country's most prominent confessions can be seen as the reason underlying the character of the negotiation between these two sides as the locus where the academic subject of RE acquires its legal profile. It is perhaps not surprising then that the specific character of RE strongly reflects the common ground of ideology and institutional interest between the state and those confessions, instead of the liberal underpinnings of the 1991 Constitution. This situation is corroborated by the Evangelical Concordat, which followed the Catholic one in strengthening the role of the respective Church in the formulation and effective implementation of RE in state schools. This same tradition of agreement can be seen as gaining official status in the discretionary formulation of RE by the educational Decree of 2004, where RE is re-affirmed as mandatory, and its character in state school is expressly conditioned to the existing Concordats between any church and the state. This ruling, which was issued by the strongly – both economically and politically – Conservative government of Uribe Vélez¹¹¹, actually deepened the role of the Concordat-churches with respect to religion in state schools, specifically by demanding that these contribute to the best of their capacity to the worshipping, prayer and pastoral activities in their facilities. Although this Directive expressly requested of schools to harmonise RE with an important set of liberal values – something mentioned previously in the Evangelical Concordat as the importance of rendering RE in a non-discriminatory fashion –, this necessity to avoid any form of proselytism through RE does not exclude here the teaching (and the apologetics) of Christian doctrine in state schools. One of

¹¹¹ Álvaro Uribe Vélez' two consecutive administrations (2002-2010) saw a renewal of the relations between different religious confessions and the state. Since his first presidential candidacy and throughout his presidencies, Uribe exhibited important signs of religious identification, which included the display of participation in Catholic sacraments, massive Evangelical gatherings and even the practice of yoga nidra (Jet-Set, 2011). This symbolism was accompanied with administrative measures as the nomination of Claudia Rodríguez de Castellanos – pastor of the International Charismatic Mission Church and former senator – as ambassador to Brazil from 2004 to 2005, a position which she left amid criticisms for proselytism (La Silla Vacía, 2018). In this respect, Uribe's political rise can be viewed as sustained also on the successful political engagement of religious interests and perspectives, especially under the *communitarian state* flank of his ideological platform (Uribe Vélez, 2014). Most recently and after leaving government, Uribe – again successfully – appealed to the – mainly religiously inspired – Conservative opposition to LGBTI rights in his 2016 oppositional campaign on the referendum on the peace agreements between the Colombian state and the Farc guerrillas. Based strongly on his own leadership and on that of the staunchly conservative, Society of Saint Pius X member, and former Public Prosecutor Alejandro Ordonez Maldonado (Revista Semana, 2013), the “No” campaign was triumphant in the plebiscite, especially after accusing the peace agreements of containing what the campaign's leaders derogatorily depicted as “gender ideology”.

the reasons behind this comprehension resides in the assumption of the existence – in the enrolment act – of a form of consent to the consideration of that Christian teaching as *nurturing* instead of as an attempt at conversion or forced religious socialisation of new generations. From the liberal state's viewpoint, this legal foundation, which echoes the private-law principle of the agreement between private citizens as source of rights, clearly serves to shape RE exclusively according to parental educational interests. This feature, which in this case overlooks any possible liberal public interest in the religious education of democratic citizens, is conveniently articulated in Colombia with the subjection of RE's content to the doctrines of the confessions and Churches holding a valid public law agreement with the state. This legal and institutional landscape illuminates the determination of an essential facet of state schooling, such as RE, by private educational ideals of prominent and widely influential religious organisations, and particularly its sheltering by the application of private-law principles to educational policies. As such, this formulation can be conceived especially as responding to constitutive tensions of the political history of Colombia, and concretely as sustaining the moulding of RE according to both majoritarian and ruling interests in the inertial reproduction of the socio-religious and political status quo.

These considerations are also reflected in the legal evolution of the RE teacher's role itself. As explored in the previous account of the legal precedents of this subject in Colombia, the religious educator profile, from its more confessional-like origins, subsequently acquired a more professional character. This feature is particularly prominent in the corresponding provision included in the Religious Diversity Law (133 of 1994), whose sole inaugural request for the teacher's role was the possession of a certificate issued by the Church or confession being taught. After this, the Evangelical Concordat introduced the requirement for the RE teacher of non-Catholic Christianity of a bachelor's or master's degree in education, with emphasis on Theology or Christian religious sciences, as described above. Subsequently, the Ministerial Directive 002 requested that the subject could only be assigned to teachers of the same speciality or with corresponding studies in this area, and in possession of the aptitude certificate issued by the respective Church. This dual characterisation as religiously accredited and academically specialised was later ratified by the decree 4500 of 2006 and then expanded by the Ministry of Education concerning the range of accepted areas of specialisation for the

RE teacher (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2015)¹¹². In this sense, the professionalisation of the role relies strongly upon religious and confessional studies, including only ethics, education and philosophy as the only non-religious, complementary areas. Thus, the evolution of the RE teacher's profile role can be seen as strongly reflecting the centrality of the publicly validated confessions instead of the state's own educational priorities. From these premises, the RE teachers' role acquired more professional features, including the requirement of the certified possession of specialised forms of knowledge, always under the centrality and tutelage of doctrinal expertise. In this sense, the path followed by this profile in the relevant legislation can be assessed as following in Colombia the universalisation of educative ideals of a religious – and, in a secular state, necessarily *private* – lineage, and especially its adoption as educational policy of a liberal state.

In the following, we will address some relevant studies on RE in Colombia. This section is intended as providing grounds for reviewing the practicalities of the legal provision for this academic area in the Colombian educational system. As will be explored below, an important threshold of consistency will be highlighted concerning the confessional determination of the RE curriculum, either in an explicit or a spontaneous, non-expressly institutional, socio-culturally *inertial* manner. The specification of these remarks will be developed in the following section.

9. Empirical researches

1. Beltrán-Cely (2008)

As we will see below, the aforementioned threshold of accommodation between Catholic socialisation and the secularisation of the state structure in Colombia will express itself in the main tendencies of the general delivery of the RE subject in this country's educational system. In this regard, empirically-based studies will illuminate the prevailing curricular modalities of RE in Colombian schools.

¹¹² The possibilities included in the RE profile were consigned as follows in an official call for teachers' designation: Bachelor of Basic Education with an emphasis on Religious Education; Bachelor of Science or Religious Education (alone, with another option or with emphasis); Degree in Philosophy (alone, with another option or with emphasis), Degree in Biblical Studies, Bachelor of Ethics (alone, with another option or with emphasis), Degree in Education with an emphasis on Theology, Philosophy or Religion; Bachelor of Education with emphasis on Religious Education.

Unfortunately, there is no officially compiled information in Colombia regarding any of the national curriculum's academic subjects. Particularly concerning RE, Beltrán-Cely (2006) offers a quantitative-based approach to the perceptions around this subject in several public and private schools of Bogotá. Although this study's results do not allow for the concluding assertion of a sustained instrumental use of RE by religious confessions in the sample, important trends can be distinguished mainly in connection with the presence of doctrinal determinations of the RE curriculum in the capital's schools. For instance, the significant affirmative answer of 39.2% of the surveyed students to the question *does your school instil in you any particular religion?* increases to 52.6% in private schools¹¹³. When asked about the type of religion inculcated in their schools, 93.1% of the overall positively responding students stated Catholicism, the second place being Evangelical Christianity with 4.4%. In this same direction, when asked if RE was mandatory in their schools¹¹⁴, 30.6% of state school students and 32.7% of private school ones answered positively, with 29.7% of the first type of students and 39.5% of the second type stating *only one religion* as the content of the RE course they received.

Regarding teachers, similar signs of this important indoctrinatory presence can be discerned, especially in state schools. For instance, this group evidences a relatively strong perception of the confessional character of this type of school (39.4%) and the meaningful use of the guidelines established by the Episcopal Conference of Colombia (13.6%)¹¹⁵. This situation significantly corresponds to the teachers' majoritarian strong self-definition as Christian believers (86.1%, 81.2% of which corresponds to Catholics and 6.6% to Evangelicals) and to

¹¹³ This same answer diminishes to 26.7% in state schools. The data distribution of this study does not permit, however, the inference that the proportional percentage corresponds to the opposite answer(s) in any question. This fact is due to the considerable loss of data in this research, constituting the reason why barely any percentage in any of its questions adds up to 100%.

¹¹⁴ As pointed out by Beltrán-Cely, this question is conceived as reflecting students' perception of the existence of any academic alternative to RE – as consigned in the Constitution and the relevant laws and decrees –, and thus of its *mandatory* or *optative* character. It reflects then students' perception of the curricular character of the RE subject, and not the actual verification by them of the mandatory presence of RE in the curriculum.

¹¹⁵ These standards are explicitly oriented by the Church's interest in “answering to the challenges posed by children and youth's new cultures and mentalities on the educative mission of the Church and the exigencies of a new evangelisation” (Conferencia Episcopal de Colombia, 2012, p. 1). They are thus conceived as projected through four main approaches (*anthropological* – including the existential connotations of pluri-religious and secular scenarios, *biblical*, *biblical-Christological* and *ecclesiological*) and addressing the following list of topics from years zero (Kindergarten) to eleven, in sequential order: *God's love through Jesus, life, friendship, celebration, vocation, testimony, the human being, the family, community, morality, life's project* and *the construction of a new society*.

their low frequency of postgraduate studies (bachelor's 66.2%, Specialisation¹¹⁶ 24.3%, master's 8.6% and PhD 0.9%), a trend that becomes more accentuated in private schools (78,8% bachelor's, 14.4% Specialisation, 5.9% master's, 0.8% PhD). When asked about the existence of academic activities replacing attendance at RE for dissident students, 89.8% of teachers of state schools answered in the negative, and 80% of those working in private schools answered in the same way – something which corroborates and even exceeds what was previously outlined with respect to the students' perception of the *mandatory* character of RE in their schools. Similarly, 12.2% of public school teachers state that students must participate in a religious ritual. When asked if they preferred their students to have a determinate religious belief, 40.8% of public-school teachers answered in the affirmative, while 37% of the private school group answered in the same way. Moreover, when asked about what religion this group of teachers preferred their students to have, Catholicism occupied the first place with 76.7% of the answers, with Evangelical-Protestant occupying the second place with 11.6%.

Teachers also evidence a high preference for matters related to ethics and morals as the RE content (52.5%), with the second place being occupied by the history of religions (32.4%) and the last preference (5.6%) by *the teaching of a determined religious doctrine*. The fact that this *ethics and morals* content indicates the presence of a religiously conservative moral teaching can be appreciated by the preference of the *Family* option (82%) in these teachers' answer to the question: *according to your criterion, who must be responsible for the religious education of the youth?* In a similar vein, the distribution of the answers across the remaining options to this question (8% indicating *pastor, priest or spiritual guide*; 6% *themselves* and 5% *school*) can be interpreted as evidencing a conception of the RE subject among these teachers as replacing domestic or specifically religious moral nurturing, instead of as catering for more academic objectives. In this same direction, the majority of the students (52%) endorsed an ideal definition of RE as *a space to learn values, morals and ethics*, with 24% considering it should be *a place to learn about diverse religions*, 18% *a space to know one's own religion*, and 6% *a space for praying and meditation*. In this regard, significant thresholds of secularisation seem to make an appearance in these results, particularly concerning the preference for multi-religious content of RE over mono-religious nurturing and practice. However, the first place of the moral and ethical preference in this respect illustrates as well

¹¹⁶ A *Specialisation* is a type of postgraduate course in the Colombian educational system. Regularly shorter than a 2-year master's degree in the country, it usually provides deepening on particular sub-areas of the profession.

the relevance of religiously inspired, behavioural concerns in most of the students' perspective on the RE subject, demanding of religious doctrines the derivation of moral guidelines relevant for their experiences. The prominence of this ethical type of content being demanded of RE can then be correlated with a morally conservative approach to these concerns, given particularly the influence exerted by conservative Christianity in this country's educational tradition and socialisation processes.

These mixed levels of students' enthusiasm regarding this subject are consistent with the trends commented above: 56.3% of them considered their received RE as *slightly interesting or not interesting at all*. This negative consideration diminishes however to 47.3% when students are asked about the quality of the subject, and to 45.2% when it comes to its usefulness. Corroborating previous results on disaggregation of religious practice and belief among confessional and populational divides¹¹⁷, Beltrán-Cely reports that Catholic, female and lower socioeconomic strata are the categories of students that typically exhibit a more positive appreciation of their received RE class, in terms of either overall interest, quality and utility. Correspondingly, atheist students exhibit the opposite trend in this respect. These aggregates can illustrate the practical relevance that RE has for students, something that could be related to the predominantly moral content that this area evidences in these results. This particularity would explain the higher assessment of the subject by those segments of the population that are more subjected to the traditional religious socialisation in Colombia (Beltrán-Cely, 2008, p. 154). It would also explain the lesser interest it represents for both atheist students and the overall group of students. In this same direction, students' relational appreciation of RE registers higher negative results, specifically in comparison to other, more academic subjects of the curriculum¹¹⁸. In this sense, students in the sample show little interest in RE as a subject (2.24 on a scale from 1 to 10), occupying the last position among the eight mandatory subjects of the curriculum. Similarly, RE occupies the penultimate position when students are asked about the subjects that contribute the most to personal formation (2.4), above only *Arts and Music*, with 2.26. Thus, this overall negative contextual evaluation of the subject could be related to its perceived academic merit, a feature that stands out negatively in relation to other subjects. Concerning this characteristic, RE's predominantly moralist content could be of significance, especially as it is perceived by students as a traditional socialising instance.

¹¹⁷ See footnote 1 of this chapter.

¹¹⁸ Among these are Spanish, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and Maths, which registered in the survey higher levels of students' valuation in comparison to RE.

Perhaps correspondingly, this general lack of academic interest in the subject could be viewed as translating into significant – though not majority – thresholds of religious intolerance among students. In this regard, 31% of them consider people of a different religion as *little or not normal at all*, and 45% consider them *little or not good at all*. Similarly, 71.4% of students considers people of a different religion as *very or a little fanatical*, and 40.8% considering them *very or a little dangerous*. In this same direction, minority students exhibited a relatively high perception of being discriminated against in school environments, with 66.6% of Messianic Jews and 35% of Jehovah’s Witness answering positively in this respect¹¹⁹. When asked if they had noticed mockery of their schoolmates due to their religious practices, 22% of students answered in the affirmative, a proportion that diminishes to 10% when asked if their RE teachers exhibited preferences for those who practise any religion. When disaggregated, these results show a higher perception of discrimination by atheist and non-Catholic students, who, according to Beltrán-Cely, encompass most of the positive answers to these two questions.

Beltrán-Cely’s own conclusions support in this respect what was previously highlighted. For him, the study illuminates a significant confessional perspective on RE in both public and private schools in the capital. He points also to the common confusion existing in practice between the *Ethics* and RE subjects in both types of schools. Regarding this, he remarks on the inconsistency of this confusion with the General Law of Education, which defines both areas separately. Beltrán-Cely also illustrates a generally positive overall perception of RE among the surveyed students, specifically in what refers to its quality, interest, and utility. However, he also signals the Catholic affiliation of most of the students who value this course positively, something he explains by the Catholic character of the RE class in most of the schools in the country (Beltrán-Cely, 2008, p. 176). Beltrán-Cely also affirms that these same groups of minority students exhibit a greater feeling of being coerced to participate in Catholic religious rituals in schools, a situation that he concludes as representative in Colombian basic education and as conflicting with this country’s 1991 constitution. Similarly, Beltrán-Cely singles out the situation of many minority students of feeling religiously discriminated against in both public and private schools, a feature that he sees reflected in the aforementioned RE teachers’

¹¹⁹ Concerning these results, the closeness to both Christianity and Judaism that characterises the two minority religions just mentioned can be revealing of a particular dynamics of higher stigmatisation of close alterity than of distant one. In this respect, both Messianic Jews and Jehovah’s Witnesses would be the target of higher discrimination by the Christian majority culture than the other, non-Christian minority religions. This feature would be related in particular to the proximity of these minorities’ difference – and thus the stronger threat implied by their ambiguity and uncertainty – with respect to the country’s Christian majority.

preference for Catholicism as the practised religion of their students. Finally, Beltrán-Cely highlights the RE teachers' lack of relevant professional degrees, along with their prevalent non-fulfilment of the religious certificate requisite mentioned above. In this respect, Beltrán-Cely concludes that this panorama, along with the absence of public and secular academic standards for the RE subject, converges on the general consideration by school communities of this area as a secondary and less important one¹²⁰.

As can be seen, a substantial margin of confessional heritage can be conceived, if not as explicitly prevalent, at least as significantly present in the RE subject of the schools included in the survey. Although explicit teaching of Christian doctrine still registers a visible presence in state schools – as illustrated by the results –, it certainly does not, however, occupy a dominant position in their RE subject's content. This ambiguity can be seen in the relatively low frequency of one-religion inculcation in state schools (26.7%)¹²¹, despite its high frequency in private schools (52.6%) and the incontestable dominance of Catholicism (93.1%) as the instilled religion. Similarly, the significant lack of alternatives to RE in both state (30.6% in students' perception, 89.8% in teachers') and private schools (32.7% students, 80% teachers) and the important threshold of mono-religious content in this subject (29.7% in state and 39.5% in private schools) illustrate the considerable influence of Catholicism and of conservative Evangelicalism in the implementation of the RE class. This conclusion can be corroborated by the contextually strong preference of RE teachers in state schools for the religious belonging of their students (40.8%), and for Catholicism and Evangelical Christianity as the preferred confessions (88.3% between both).

In this respect, the results of the survey reinforce the important influence of the country's traditional Christian culture in the effective delivery of the RE subject among the schools included in the sample. Simultaneously, this heritage can be thought of as coinciding also with significant margins of institutional secularisation of education, expressed in the important scope of the non-expressly-indoctrinatory use of RE in the answers registered in the survey. This mixed situation – in which a significant threshold of lingering and explicit Christian

¹²⁰ Alternative valuations of Beltrán-Cely's analysis reinforce his conclusions on the Christian belonging of the majority of the students included in the survey (Corpas de Posada, 2012, p. 95) and the representative precariousness of the teaching provision for the subject (Castro-Ordúz, 2012, p. 56).

¹²¹ Although the assumptions on this question could include participation in religious rituals and other *instilling* instances that exceed the RE subject, we could certainly consider this course as the privileged means of religious inculcation in the students' responses, especially given its legal and curricular character in Colombian education.

confessionalism matches a considerable level of secularisation of culture and education – can be thought of as characterising the Colombian state and private provisos for RE. This conflicting ideological character, which can be identified in the combined results of Beltrán-Cely's research, evidences the important historical influence of the Catholic Church in the life of the country. In this regard, this ambivalent compromise between religious and secular influences in education would be prominent and distinctive in Colombian RE, especially if we consider the growing influence of both Catholicism and religion in the urban and rural peripheries of the country (Beltrán-Cely, 2012). Thus, either Catholic or Evangelical Christian indoctrination would be taking place through the RE subject of multiple state and private educational institutions across Colombia, despite the institutionally and culturally secularising influences registered in the country, especially since the proclamation of the 1991 Constitution. This feature would be in this sense corroborated by Beltrán-Cely's findings on the perception of students and teachers, and on other authors' (Cifuentes-Traslaviña y Figueroa-Salamanca, 2008) appraisals on the RE subject's situation in the country.

In this same vein, the growing relevance of moral contents as the subject matter of RE can be highlighted as another important outcome of Beltrán-Cely's research. This orientation is reflected in the aforementioned teachers' preference for this type of content (52.5%) over either history of religions (32.4%) or indoctrinatory forms of teaching (5.6%), and in particularly in their preference for *private* (family 82%, religious leader 8%, themselves 6%) over *public* (school 5%) actors in the delivery of RE to students. In this sense, a clear tendency towards moral and ethical discussions occupying an increasingly central place in the RE content can be underlined from the data provided by this research, particularly in relation with the teachers' appreciation of the subject. This would imply that an important threshold of assimilation between RE and private moral nurturing could be pointed out as central to this school subject in Colombia, especially concerning the private moral preferences of families and religious communities. This orientation, especially if considered in relation with the social and cultural centrality of conservative Christianity in the country, illustrates the different modalities of the traditional religious presence in the delivery of RE in Colombia. Through this moralising path, this academic area would be renewing its social validity and cultural vigour, enhancing in this manner its prominent presence in education. This characterisation by the surveyed RE teachers of their subject as catering for familiar and religious moralisation would correspond then to a majoritarian denial on their side of its academic character, particularly concerning the rest of the school curricula. Thus, as was highlighted especially by the teachers' evaluation of the

subject, a prevalently conservative moral teaching could be seen as prominent in Colombian RE, in a strong connection to the majoritarian Christian religious culture. In this respect, the academic potential of RE as a field of knowledge – in Hirst’s sense of the term – would in Colombia be yielding to an educational emphasis on conservative moral formation as the central concern of this school subject. This process would be being deployed along the lines of the majoritarian Catholic confession and Christian cultural socialisation of the country.

This process would contribute then to understanding the significant levels of religious intolerance among students, despite the relatively low levels of mono-religious indoctrination. In this respect, the lack of promotion of knowledge about alternative religions and world-views – and not the hegemonic presence of one confession over the RE subject – would be significant for the perpetuation of the significant threshold of religiocentrism among the student population. This feature would be related to the students’ relatively high perception of abnormality (31%), immorality (45%), fanaticism (71.4%) and riskiness (40.8%) of believers of different religions, and to the feeling of discrimination experienced by students from minority religions. In this same direction, this character of repetition of conservative familiar moralisation could be viewed as lying at the base of the significantly low enthusiasm for the RE subject among the surveyed students, particularly regarding the other subjects of the curriculum¹²². In this sense, the interpretation presented here of the results of Beltrán-Cely’s survey can lead towards the highlighting of both the significant presence of mono-doctrinal (mainly Catholic but also Evangelical) Christian teaching – in addition to the aforementioned tendency of conservative moral socialisation – as distinctive of RE in Colombian education. The large heritage of Catholicism in Colombia will then find expression in the design and delivery of RE in this country’s schools, mainly through a strongly moralistic content with little academic weight. This modality would, in turn, be configuring RE as a morally conservative and institutional platform through which the Christian majoritarian religious culture – and with it, the social and political prominence of the Catholic Church – could be reproduced inter-generationally.

2. Meza-Rueda *et al.* (2013-2015)

A highly consonant account of the RE subject in Colombia comes from the more qualitatively based approach by Meza Rueda *et al.* (2015). This group, composed of theologians of the Jesuit Universidad Javeriana, carried out an investigation on RE in Colombia with two broad

¹²² 56.3% of answers indicating *little or no interest whatsoever*; 2.24/10 of overall concern; 2.4/10 of overall perception of contribution to personal formation.

objectives: 1) to formulate pedagogical guidelines for this subject in connection with liberation theology¹²³; 2) to assess different concrete situations of RE against these guidelines. With these purposes, the authors developed a theoretical framework on the subject and then proceeded to the evaluation of RE in fourteen state schools around the country¹²⁴. For this empirical phase, they applied a semi-structured interview to RE teachers and students of years six and ten of these schools, along with the evaluation of these institutions' guidelines for RE. These authors' principal empirical findings portray the RE subject in these schools in the following terms:

1. Confessionally determined, especially by the Catholic doctrine. In this respect, the use of the Colombian Episcopal Conference' guidelines for RE, the Catholic liturgical calendar, plus the emphasis on the study of the Bible, the Catholic catechism, liturgy, sacramental life and religious devotions, stand out for the authors as prominent signs of this influence¹²⁵.
2. Focused on memorisation instead of analysis, particularly in relation to the contents of the faith.
3. Assigning students a passive role with respect to their learning, especially inside an asymmetric relation with respect to the teacher.
4. With predominantly heteronomous instead of autonomous forms of assessment, and with marking determining the modes of teaching and learning.
5. Forgetting the religious diversity of its surrounding educational contexts, and thus not making adequate use of the educational resources available.

¹²³ These guidelines were developed by this group (Meza-Rueda, et al. 2013) as based on five constitutive principles: the *incarnation* of the faith in Christ via a commitment to the less privileged in society; *plurality* and *inclusion* of the diverse religious experiences that share a similar theological emphasis; *critical thinking* as an attribute of a non-privatised faith; *mercy* as the main attitude towards suffering; and *hope* with respect to God's action and inspiration in history.

¹²⁴ The schools were located in the departments of Bolívar, Norte de Santander, Narino and Putumayo.

¹²⁵ The authors of this research compiled the empirically found formulations of objectives for RE as follows: "the preservation of what is perceived as the confessional identity or the *catholicity* of culture; the desire for the students to be *good* men and women with a *good* relationship with God; the building of the meaning of life; the deep knowledge of God and of the Church; and the formation of students committed to God through a profound spiritual, personal and communitarian experience, lived from the values of the Gospel" (Meza Rueda *et al.*, 2015, p. 257). Similarly, they illustrate this via an educational objective found in one school's RE programme: "RE seeks for the student to identify the principles and values of the Christian faith, develop personal attitudes and behaviors consistent with the Christian faith, participate in religious activities individually and in community; and be able to commit with the rescue, promotion and experience of authentic human values, such as respect for human life and for the family, justice, freedom and peace, motivated by faith" (Meza Rueda *et al.*, 2015, p. 257).

6. In a secondary position concerning the other subjects of the curriculum, with which there seems to be no meaningful pedagogical articulation (Meza-Rueda *et al.*, 2015, p. 259).

This scenario configures for the authors an RE situation as determined not only by Catholic doctrine but also actively by traditional and catechetical forms of teaching. These pedagogies, which the authors characterise as rote-based and assigning students a passive, secondary and heteronomous role regarding learning and evaluation, evidence for them also the strong presence of Catholicism in public education.

For Meza-Rueda *et al.*, this review of different situations of RE in Colombian schools sheds light also on some of the found curricular formulations that may be deemed as compatible with their posited *liberating* RE, i. e., emphasis on integral formation, orientation towards toleration and respect, promotion of human rights, openness to reality and alterity, and ecological concerns. However, these same authors assess these convergences as attributable exclusively to individual initiatives coming from the teachers, in particular due to the lack of official educational guidelines on the subject from the Ministry of Education. For them, this absence concerning consistent policies for RE is related to the excessive decentralisation that transferred the curricular responsibility for RE to each school (Meza-Rueda *et al.*, 2015, p. 259). Correspondingly, the examined schools exhibited a marked tendency to base RE on the traditional socio-religious dynamics of the population – pointing mainly to Catholicism –, influenced to a lesser extent by the spiritual and pedagogical convictions of the teacher. This situation led in their view to the amalgamation of the RE subject with the *Ethics* proviso, delivered with a strong, religiously conservative, moral emphasis. With the final addition of *improvisation* to their characterisation of RE in the institutions reviewed, these authors finally assess the current state of this academic subject generally as obstructing the pursuit of a more theologically liberationist version of itself.

3. Beltrán-Cely (2017)

More recently (2017), Beltrán-Cely readdressed the issue of RE in Colombia, in the context of the formulation of the capital city's public policy on fundamental liberties of religion, worship, and conscience. In this work, this sociologist illustrates on religious leaders' perceptions

around RE and sex education (SE)¹²⁶, and levels of perceived discrimination. This time, this Colombian sociologist surveyed five hundred and seventeen religious leaders of diverse communities in Bogotá and nearby towns¹²⁷. Regarding RE, these leaders were asked whether:

1. The RE teachers were adequately prepared, to which the 66.5% of respondents answered in the negative.
2. The contents of the RE class were adequate for the integral formation of students, to which 65% answered negatively, 19.3% positively and 15.7% NR/DK.
3. Pluralism was promoted in the RE class, to which 59.2% answered negatively, 20.1% positively and 20.7% NR/DK.
4. The RE class fostered respect for the students' religious beliefs, to which 57.4% answered negatively, 25% positively, and 17.6% NR/DK.
5. Religious tolerance was promoted in the RE class, to which 59.4% answered negatively¹²⁸.

In relation to their perceptions of religious discrimination, the religious leaders were asked if:

- Children of their communities faced situations of intolerance or religious discrimination at school (57.8% no, 18.8% yes, 23.4% NR/DK).
- They had faced mockery or discriminatory treatment due to their dietary customs (77.4% no, 21.9% yes, NR/DK 0.8%) or their religious clothing (68.5% no, 30.9% yes, 0.6% NR/DK).
- They had faced physical aggression (89.2% no, 10.3% yes, 0.6% NR/DK), threats against their lives and personal integrity (87% no, 12.6% yes, 0.4% NR/DK), threats of kidnapping (95.6% no, 3.9% yes, 0.6% NR/DK) or extortion (95.6% no, 4.1% yes, 0.4% NR/DK).

¹²⁶ The Sex Education subject was established as mandatory in secondary and university levels by Law 1146 of 2007.

¹²⁷ The religious communities to which these leaders belonged were Catholic, Evangelical Protestant, Unitarian Pentecostal, Adventist, Muslim, Vaishnava (Hare Krishna), Messianic Jews, Mormon, Buddhist and Hindus.

¹²⁸ Regarding SE, these religious leaders were also asked three questions (with their corresponding registered answers): *are the SE contents adequate for the integral formation of students?* (74.1% disagreed, 9.3% agreed, 16.6% NR/DK); *is respect for the students' moral convictions promoted in SE?* (70.2% disagreed, 10.6% agreed, 19.7% NR/DK); *are SE teachers adequately prepared?* (66% disagreed).

- They had suffered intentional damage against their communities' facilities (66% no, 33.3% yes, 0.8% NR/DK).
- Mass media had presented malicious or offensive information that affected the image of their religious communities (70.4% no, 29% yes, 0.6% NR/DK).

Concerning these results, an important margin of dissatisfaction can be highlighted on the part of these religious leaders concerning not only RE but also SE. Regarding RE, the highest levels of disapproval occurred on *teachers' aptitude* (66.5%) and *contents' adequacy* (65%) items, with the negative answers for both aspects reaching over 60% of the respondents. Below this margin are the mainly negative answers on the items of whether toleration (59.4%), pluralism (59.2%) and respect for students' religious beliefs (57.4%) were being fostered in RE. This stronger preoccupation for the teachers' suitability and the RE curriculum – over the specifically religious concerns on tolerance, pluralism, and respect for religious beliefs – could be considered as significative of the moral interest predominantly invested in this area, leading to the accentuation of the general educational features of the subject. This tendency can be viewed as corroborated by the SE answers. In this area, higher levels of discontent can be perceived with respect to RE, especially if we compare the negative answers on the *adequacy of the contents*-item (SE 74.1%; RE 65%). Something similar can be pointed out in the leaders' perception on the degree of respect for students' moral beliefs in SE, registering higher dissatisfaction in this subject (70.2%) than in the analogous question for RE (57.4%). Only concerning the negative perception of the teacher's preparedness, the answers for RE (66.5%) slightly exceed the SE ones (66%). In this sense, the overall negative assessment of RE on the part of the surveyed religious leaders could be attributed to the moral significance generally conferred on this area, something that would be corroborated by the proportionally lower concerns for its specific religious characteristics.

In a similar vein, the chiefly and superiorly negative views on the features of SE addressed in the survey would illuminate the predominantly moral concerns of these religious leaders for the youth's general education. This would mean that the preoccupation with religiously inspired morality – instead of a specifically religious concern – would be mediating in the surveyed leaders' low considerations of the margins of tolerance, pluralism, and respect for students' beliefs that are being promoted in RE. This interpretation could be considered as also corroborated by the relatively low perceptions of the surveyed population on the levels of religious discrimination suffered by them or their religious communities. In this respect, the

highest positive results registered on damage to religious facilities (33.3%), mockery or discrimination due to religious clothing (30.9%), and presentation of information on mass media (29%) – plus the relatively low perception of discrimination of their communities' children at school (18.8%) – are illustrative of the relatively low levels of concern with specifically religious discrimination, both inside and outside RE.

4. Conclusions on the reviewed literature

These three investigations, which constitute the totality of the available empirically-based diagnostics on RE in Colombia, offer – despite their limitations – a relevant landscape of this subject's situation in the country. One of the first emergent features of this literature is the salient presence of conservative Christianity in the educational system. Especially in the form of Catholic doctrine – via the prevalent usage of this Church's guidelines for RE – and recently of Evangelical Protestant faith and spirituality, this religious influence represents a lingering source of inspiration and information for the delivery of RE in the country. Expressly contradicting constitutional and jurisprudential mandates on the separation of Church and state, this substantial threshold of confessionalism in RE may be seen as revealing the continuity of the country's socialising tradition in its institutional realm. These research materials will highlight then the permanence of this considerable margin of doctrinal determination of the RE curriculum, reflecting in this manner the historical prominence of social centrality of Christian doctrine and conservative morality in state-building in Colombia.

However, content-conditioning would not be the only path through which this socialising presence would have been felt in the educational system. Traditional forms of didactics would be also related to this influence, in particular rote-centred and other non-rationalistic models of teaching and learning. As especially Meza-Rueda *et al.* highlight, these features of the pedagogic situation illustrate the persistence of an authority-based attitude in Colombian education, strongly connected with Catholic catechism and its prominent role in this country's history. Concerning both contents and pedagogical methods, a traditionalistic modality of education could then be characterised as prevalent in this country's education, further fostering cognitively passive and acquiescent attitudes in learners. Assuming as prevalent in this context the educational intentions of individual soteriological promotion – with the correspondent postponement to intellectual maturity of theological rationalisation – and the preservation of public morality, RE in Colombia could be seen to answer to indoctrinatory modes of

socialisation. In this scenario, thus, the available information would support the comprehension of RE in indoctrinatory-related terms, construing it as a socialising – rather than educational – instance for new generations according to established and emergent religious traditions in the country. In this regard, important steps would still be needed for the consolidation of the secular character of this subject in Colombian education.

In this same sense, another distinctive feature of this educational situation would lie in the emphasis on moral concerns, as identified by the literature. This transition towards issues concerning sexuality and gender identity would represent a relevant updating of the RE curriculum, particularly concerning emergent trends in public opinion. On these grounds, RE would be renewing thus its relevance for new generations, addressing matters in direct connection to their life-worlds and experiences. In this manner, the indoctrinatory character of RE in Colombian schools would have shifted from the explicit teaching of doctrinal contents towards the inculcation of related moral convictions over the cognitive background of a shared religious culture. In this scenario, the adherence to a determinate confession would potentially take place based on the recognition of the faith's pertinence for the simplification of complexities posed by life-circumstances. Particular comprehensions of experience – and especially of *sexually related experience* – will then perform here as descriptors of *reality*, providing the support for the appropriation of its moralist interpretation and thus for further religious adherence. Correspondingly, non-evidential modes of holding beliefs would constitute the distinctive hallmark and necessary consequence of this educational process, contributing to the emergence of analogous cognitive disposition in learners. Some of these elements will emerge in the following section regarding RE and the secular state in Colombia.

6. State of secularism in Colombia

Other sources illustrate in this respect this pervasive and ubiquitous presence of Catholic doctrine and conservative Christian morality in Colombian education. Along these lines, the 2010-2017 *Report on the State of Laicity in Colombia*, compiled by the Atheist Association of Bogotá (2018), brings about a significant evaluation and illustrative cases on the separation between Church and state in education and other areas of public life in the country. Concerning education, the authors of this material significantly conclude:

The Colombian state has a declared secular character, which in practice sees itself affected by a long tradition of Catholic influence in education. In most of the rural areas and of the

intermediate cities, the curriculum and public acts have a strong Catholic denominational weight, as if the declaration of the secular state had never happened (Corporación Bogotá Atea, 2018. Own translation).

In this sense, the report's authors synthesise several features of the state of laicism in Colombian education: 1) RE continues to be confessional, usually limited to Catholicism (Corporación Bogotá Atea, 2018, p. 64). This situation increases in rural areas and intermediate cities. 2) Most state schools lack the alternative plan required by Decree 4500 of 2006 for students opting out of RE. This fact is due, according to the Report's authors, to ignorance of the existence of such legal requisite. 3) These features become accentuated in *concessioned schools*, which are state institutions administered by private individuals or organisations. In the authors' opinion, many concessioned schools administered by religious communities effectively work as private religious institutions. 4) Different religious acts – such as Masses, prayer, preaching and religious singing – are still celebrated in state schools. According to the report, some of these celebrations are mandatory for students. 5) For a student, the possibility of dropping out of RE is minimal, mainly due to institutional ignorance on the matter, lack of dissemination of such possibility by the school's staff, and explicit denial of that alternative by the school authorities. This last scenario is attributed by the authors of the report to moral stigmatisation of the opting-out students by these authorities, a situation they described as relatively common in Colombian schools.

Regarding the orientation of RE, the report establishes two probable profiles, despite recognising the lack of relevant official data in Colombia¹²⁹: in the first case, the class is developed in a non-indoctrinatory¹³⁰ fashion, in which multiple religions are presented to students as possibilities to be adopted by them. This scenario is portrayed by the authors as strongly dependent on the university formation of the RE teacher, particularly if that formation was in social sciences or philosophy in a public university. In the second case, the guidelines would favour Catholicism, even in an evangelising fashion, or present theism as a better option than atheism or agnosticism. In this case, the authors depict the teacher either as a graduate in Religious Education or as a philosopher from a Catholic university. The report portrays then

¹²⁹ In this regard, the report quotes the aforementioned study by Beltrán-Cely (2008).

¹³⁰ The report does not offer a clear-cut definition of *indoctrination*. However, its usage of this concept revolves permanently around the teaching of religious doctrines in an either objectivistic or privileging manner concerning other faiths (given the institutional context that this document describes, the presence of the *intention*-criterion can be presupposed on the delivering side). No mention is made in terms of pedagogies or consequences of this teaching for pupil's cognitive development.

the situation of RE in Colombia as characterised mainly by the second type of profile, which is perceived by its authors as majoritarian in Colombian schools. This perception is additionally illustrated by the authors through multiple examples of Catholic curricular indoctrination in RE and of the functioning of state schools across the country, such as expressly-doctrinal milestones, religious rituals in these institutions and clerical attempts to exert influence on their RE subject¹³¹. The authors then finally evaluate negatively the state of secularity concerning education in Colombia, assessing as *deficient* the two indicators formulated by them for this item (*curriculum free of religious indoctrination* and *public school environments free of religious acts*).

In this sense, this report presents a relevant and current revision of RE in Colombia. Its conclusions on this subject reveal a strongly traditional influence over this academic subject, in agreement with the social significance of Catholic Christianity in the country. In this respect, this institutional and cultural inertia gains enough strength even for restricting the access of students to constitutional provisions on religious and associated freedoms. Similarly, it strongly influences the content-tendencies of the subject in different schools, allowing for direct doctrinal or moralistic teaching even in state institutions. As commented above, this religious and moral traditionalism in RE can be related also to important trends in Colombian public opinion, particularly concerning the visibility gained by LGBTI and related issues in the media. In this respect, the report highlights the rights-related struggle of this social minority and the consequential conservative reaction on the part of the political establishment¹³². This strongly polarised ideological dispute would be influencing in the report's view RE's curricular formulations, particularly concerning the mainly conservative, majoritarian educational community, highly influenced by Catholic educational ideals and traditions. In this manner, the traditionalism characterising the RE curriculum would equate not only to a continuation of the historical religious tendencies of the country but also to a defensive mechanism of the

¹³¹ The examples include also the Catholic presence in the Directive Council the National Training Service – SENA, the public national institution for technical and industrial formation. As the Inform illustrates, several of these situations have originated multiple lawsuits from parents, citizens and organisations with respect to the separation of Church and state and the equal treatment of religions. In all the situations reported in this document, the tribunals decided the legal actions in favour of the petitioners and in the direction of these two principles.

¹³² Regarding this issue, the report relevantly alludes to the trajectory of the aforementioned former public prosecutor Alejandro Ordóñez Maldonado. In particular, it remarks on this politician's proceedings against abortion, euthanasia, gay adoption and homosexual marriage as Inspector General during his two consecutive terms in office. Similarly, the report also refers to the homophobic signs that the "No" campaign's discourse and public events exhibited during the Colombian peace agreement referendum in 2016. See in this respect footnote 111 above.

conservative Christian majority against the public recognition of gender and sexual orientation-related claims in public institutions. Under this light, the traditional profile for RE would amount to an educational device anchored in the majoritarian conservative reaction against what is perceived as an affront and a threat to public morality – with a particular nationalistic emphasis when the enemy is portrayed as endorsed by the liberal institutional system of Human Rights. Thus, the special significance gained by RE in public opinion would be related to its understanding as the public arena for this polarised ideological contention, a condition that would render it especially vulnerable to political intrusions of different kinds. In this respect, it would be of no surprise for this academic subject to find itself increasingly distant from purely educational considerations, progressively acquiring the features of an ideologically charged, sympathy-raiser issue in public discourse.

As commented above, this report illuminates the moral emphasis placed upon RE, especially regarding socio-cultural dynamics of religious affiliation and trends in public opinion. In the context of an increasing stigmatisation of sexually – instead of religiously – related alterity, RE seems to emerge then as a prominent socialising mechanism for the perpetuation of morally conservative, religiously prone dispositions in learners. Deployed under the formative conviction of moral and spiritual nurturing, this school subject would conform to its analytical characterisation as *indoctrinatory*, especially considering its consequences for the consolidation of epistemic traits in learners' habits of thought. This assessment would correspond to what was highlighted above regarding cultural and political pluralism in the country. Concerning also the growing role of Evangelical communities in the delivery of RE¹³³, this conservative alignment – in educational terms – of the national thresholds of religious diversity would also reflect the country's accommodating tradition regarding Church-state relations. In this manner, this shifting emphasis on conservative morality in sexual and gender-related matters would support the comprehension of RE as currently performing socialising-indoctrinatory functions, in connection mainly with conservative reactions to diversity. In this and as was mentioned earlier, RE in Colombian schools could be seen as strongly informed by the state-building process in this country, adopting however alternative facets to the light of

¹³³ Concerns remain however in relation to the possible differences between Catholic, Evangelical Protestant and other religions' delivery of RE in the country. Relevant as these considerations undoubtedly are for the present work, they would exceed its scope and reach, especially in empirical terms. Compensating attempts in this direction could be pursued in further related researches.

changing socio-cultural circumstances. These considerations will be developed further in the conclusions section below.

7. Conclusions

The previous revision illustrates the origins and main tendencies of RE in Colombian education. As demonstrated, Catholicism constituted an important cultural source of not only this academic subject but also of the country's matrix of identity itself. Since the origins of the Spanish colonisation of the Americas, Roman Christianity can be seen as providing a striking unifying force for the nation-building process of the Colombian republic. In this scenario, Christian educational ideals can be viewed as actively shaping the moral education infused to successive generations, via either family or school-based socialisation. The educational functions that the Catholic religion foundationally and generally performed in Colombia established a constitutive background for the gradual emergence in this country of a public education system and thus of its important RE subject. This can be seen for example in the centrality of the RE issue in more than one national conflict during the nineteenth century. Throughout this process, different initiatives for the modernisation of education can be portrayed as colliding with an educational tradition that in Colombia was strongly shaped by Christian scholasticism. This opposition, as was highlighted above, marked a constitutive tension in the early history of Colombian education, stirring up a constitutive alignment between modernists and traditionalists that traverses the colonial and republican periods in the country's history. This division, which pointed to the role of both education and religion in society, is evidence of the historical and ideological tensions underlying not only RE but Colombian education itself. It would be natural then to comprehend RE as the subject carrying the highest share of the religious inheritance of the nation. Simultaneously, this school area could be seen as providing the most influential religious institutions – and the majoritarian religious culture – with an important avenue for perpetuating their educational validity, in the particular form of a mandatory, secularly consecrated school subject oriented mainly towards socialising objectives.

Relatedly, the degree of economic, social and institutional modernisation that the country experienced during the twentieth century brought about significant cultural and institutional changes associated with its religious education. Both in the direction of the significant influence of modern formation (associated with the greater democratisation of education) and

the emergence of important degrees of ideological pluralism, the religious and educational inheritance of the country faced new circumstances of legitimation. This new situation implied the emergence of new problematisations of the conservative religious establishment underlying the bi-partisan status quo. Thus, the processes leading to the armed conflict¹³⁴ and its escalation symbolise well the new religious and cultural face of Colombian society, characterised by alternative actors and their prospects for the modernisation of the state. The arrival of proselytising Pentecostal missions in the early twentieth century and the consolidation of a thriving middle class associated with technical and professional training illustrate the new educational demands and ideals that collided with the institutionalisation of traditional socialisation through public education. This transition, leading to the 1991 constitution, coincided with the incorporation of different international Human Rights provisions by the Colombian legal system. Consequently, an important threshold of institutional and cultural modernisation can be pointed out as brought about by the social changes experienced by the country during the twentieth century. In this line, a new stage of nation-building in Colombia emerged from this historical transformation process, mainly via the partial and gradual detachment between Church and state. This feature, in turn, opened up new instances of educational interaction between different religious and educational actors, on the one side, and the state, on the other.

This process of progressive modernisation of the state and of state education exhibits, however, important continuities with respect to the country's religious and political history. Regarding this facet, the moral ascendancy of Christian educational ideals in Colombian society let itself be felt in the constitutional modernisation of the country, particularly through access to direct, constitutive interlocution with the state. In this manner, the fact that the only public law-agreements signed between the Colombian state and religious institutions are the Catholic and the Evangelical Concordats illustrates well the incorporation of societal circumstances into the progressive secularisation of the state. The explicit provision of human rights for the parental *right* or *liberty* to educate their offspring according to their moral and religious convictions, performs in this context the essential role of a mediator between traditional socialisation and

¹³⁴ The Colombian armed conflict (1964-present) is considered a low-intensity military confrontation (Felter and Renwick, 2017) developed between the state, different communist guerrillas and paramilitary groups. While originally connected with the period of socio-political unrest known as *La Violencia* (1948-1958), the conflict in Colombia has also been marked by the continued involvement of the US in support of state forces, and fuelled by drug-trafficking resources. According to official figures, it has produced more than 220,000 deaths in total (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013).

the secular state. Correspondingly, RE appeared in the legislation as a mandatory subject – unlike countries with a similar colonial tradition, like Mexico¹³⁵ – and as a right of parents to determine the education of their offspring. This parent-centred, liberal understanding of RE – sheltered also by the international formulation of the Rights of the Child – was then conciliated with religious freedom in the Colombian Constitution through the implementation of the adulthood-requisite for the access to that fundamental liberty. The materialisation of state neutrality and equal treatment of religions in educational matters was consequently conditioned for students on reaching legal age, leaving religious and moral open deliberation for the age at which students have typically finished their school education. This legal arrangement can then be considered as matching the lack of any type of state intervention on the RE curriculum (subjects, structure, age-related milestones) and effective delivery, granting curricular and organisational autonomy to schools via the PEI. In a certain sense, this institutional landscape can be thought of as configuring a situation in which the most representative religions in the country are provided with a liberally legitimised possibility to perpetuate their socialising role and privileged position through private and state schooling.

This situation can be appreciated in the available empirically-based revisions of RE in Colombian education. In a general sense, relevant sources illustrate an important degree of Christian confessional presence in state schools, especially in relation to Catholicism and Evangelical Christianity. In this respect, confessional teaching, with associated forms of religious exclusivism and discrimination, are registered as still meaningfully constituting different RE curricula in urban and rural areas. Similarly, cramming and rote learning-based forms of teaching – associated with the traditional pedagogies concerning the acquisition of religious dogmas – are also highlighted as predominating in the materialisation of RE in Colombian schools (Meza Rueda *et al.*, 2015). These different modalities of an established

¹³⁵ Mexico, Cuba and Uruguay are the only countries in Latin-America in which RE is not offered in the educational system (Lara-Corredor, 2005, p. 5). This subject is taught in seventeen countries of the region: Argentina – some provinces –, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panamá, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic and Venezuela (Lara-Corredor, 2005, p. 5). With respect to its curricular character, it is optional for schools to offer – and for students to take – this subject in El Salvador and Paraguay, where it appears under the heading of *religious culture*. In Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Peru, Dominican Republic and Venezuela it is mandatory to offer RE in state schools. It is mandatory for parents to express their choice in Venezuela and Chile. In Peru and Dominican Republic, RE is mandatory for Catholic students. This subject is optional for students and parents in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador and Argentina – some provinces. In this last country *Ethics* is substitutive of RE. A similar situation occurs in El Salvador, where it is called *Education in Ethical and Civic Values* (Lara-Corredor, 2005, p.7).

religious influence in Colombian education need however to be complemented with a comprehension of the moral function performed by RE. In this sense, variations of a conservative and religiously inspired, moral content emerge in the reviewed literature as performing a distinctive influence in RE, orienting it in a markedly conservative direction.

In a similar vein, strongly moralistic educational processes could be pointed out as providing an institutional instance for the thematic updating and renovation of the main religious-educational tradition in the country. This historical continuity would be expressing itself in the socialising role still performed by RE. It is the prevailing view of this work that this socio-cultural – rather than *academic* – character of this subject is related to the new relevance that moral and sexual topics have gained in the Colombian public sphere, especially in the light of recent political events and public concerns. Correspondingly, this highlighted moral nature acquired by RE in Colombia – regarding especially the emphasis on sexual and gender-related concerns – complements a similarly accentuated trend in public opinion. In this regard, societal circumstances would provide RE with a legitimating source for the direction adopted by its recent curricular developments, enhancing in this manner its socialising functions over academic ones. In this and other respects, the indoctrinating character of this area of the curriculum would naturally have become pronounced, especially concerning the mobilisation of specific contents (foundations of Christianity, Christian sexual morality) and teaching methods (rote learning, non-evidential naturalisation of a religiously conservative interpretation of experience) towards the achievement of acquiescent consent with faith-truths and related morality. With the consequential fostering of emotionally grounded, non-rational modes of belief-formation in learners – as highlighted by a critical-theoretical perspective on education, this realisation of RE in Colombia will naturally lead towards its comprehension as a socialising mechanism relying mainly on indoctrinatory communicational practices. Concerning this particular understanding of the subject, potential for its curricular reform will be addressed in the following chapter.

Conclusions: Religious Education under Liberal Democracy. Perspectives for a Multicultural Citizenship

The difficulty with religious education is that if the teacher denies having this intention [that of intentionally indoctrinating his/her pupils], it is hard to see what other intention he might have which is compatible with there being such a subject as religious education (White, 1972, pp. 128-129).

In the above quotation, J. P. White summarises his main contention concerning the possibility of a non-indoctrinating RE. For him, if *indoctrination* is defined by the inculcation of *fixed* beliefs – i.e., immune to any further critical review – in learners, then RE will necessarily constitute an attempt at indoctrination. For White, this is connected with the fact that any form of teaching of religion will amount to the establishment of a discursive scenario characterised by the necessary acceptance of metaphysical and theistic presuppositions. Either in the form of ritual or teaching, the participation in such a set-up would mean for a learner the implicit incorporation of a cognitive background, without which any significant learning about religion is, in his view, possible. For White, even a deliberative approach to RE that fosters in pupils independent thinking “about *all* religious questions” (p. 129, italics in the original) would not amount to an avoidance of the inherent indoctrinating tendencies of this subject. In White’s view, the consideration of these questions would necessarily require a general rational agreement on metaphysical-theistic presuppositions among the students, something that is, for him, utterly impossible given especially the breadth of human religious diversity. In this respect, RE appears in White’s perspective as an institutional instance for the automatic implantation of unshakable beliefs in learners, and thus as an indoctrinatory mechanism.

Several questions can be raised about these epistemic charges levelled against RE. Not only the indispensability of religious belief for the conception of any successful RE¹³⁶ but also the possibility of meaningful learning through alternative epistemic perspectives can provide relevant insights in this respect. Besides the fact that it is possible to conceive of an individual with a good religious education who does not hold her beliefs unshakeably – in White’s sense –, one facet of that author’s criticism stands out for the sake of our argument here: the inherent epistemic agreement on the truth-status of theism that White considers indispensable for the

¹³⁶ See in this respect Hand (2006), exploring and finally questioning the argument for the logical necessity of religious belief for the attainment of any religious learning.

materialisation of any religiously educative session. The assertion that a consensus is *impossible*, at least in common schooling-circumstances, is necessarily based on the assumption of modern science's assessment of truth-claims as the only legitimate grounds for any epistemic consensus to count as a *rational* mode of education. Thus, the impossibility of reaching such an agreement with respect to certain truth-claims – especially of those traditions not corresponding to a scientific rationality –, plus the posited character of this consensus as a requisite for any learning from/about religion, will make of RE, in White's eyes, a form of indoctrinatory teaching. This epistemic primacy given to scientific rationality, by which objectivist literalism is naturalised as the religious hermeneutics *par excellence*, would then necessarily disregard religious and other perspectives – especially those embedded in culture and shared on a traditional basis – as unfit for liberal education. Hence, the liberal socialisation of new generations through common schooling would not only exclude but even oppose RE provisions of different kinds. As can be seen in this argument¹³⁷, this form of perfectionist, substantive liberalism leads directly to illiberal consequences in which religious nurturing, even of a private nature, would be discredited as irrational and utterly incompatible with liberal democracy, especially in a multicultural society.

In search for an epistemically contextualised understanding of liberalism, this research sought foundational inspiration in Jurgen Habermas' comprehension of the role of religion in liberal democracy. Locating himself between the extremes of a religiously revivalist populism and a naturalist reduction of intersubjective phenomena, this philosopher will finally remark on the importance of promoting cognitive changes in the direction of a sense of mutual epistemic understanding between religious and non-religious citizens. This formulation, posited by him as a core requirement for the historic perpetuation (and evolution) of liberal democracy, is itself grounded in Habermas' thought in the cognitive and ethical relevance that, in his view, religions have for political modernity. This inter-religious and secular-religious understanding, however, requires in Habermas' view the assumption by the subject of an epistemic attitude by which a presupposition of rationality is adopted towards alternative world-views. In this manner, mutual perspective-taking among interlocutors can take place, allowing for the emergence of subsequent forms of moral understanding. The emergence of this cognitive disposition is based for Habermas on epistemic changes suffered by religious and philosophical perspectives, changes that essentially *cannot be driven* by the liberal state, in his own opinion.

¹³⁷ And especially in Locke's case.

A further revision of the Habermasian thought on the matter illustrates in particular two interpretive directions for this assertion: the ontological sense of the possibility of permanently promoting thinking tendencies in specific ideological directions, on the one side; or the political one of doing so in a manner compatible with the liberal safeguard of individual freedoms, on the other. Correspondingly, the *state-driveability* of such epistemic changes can be conceived as viable, via its incorporation in specific educational modalities, and as liberally legitimate, through its orientation toward the thought-development of learners. In this respect, the theoretical perspective on *socialisation* will emphasise the promotion of intellectual skills in new generations via the inter-generational reproduction of culture. From this viewpoint, schooling would constitute an institutional episode of this process, which would need to be thought of as stretching out from the early stages of childhood. Consequently, a liberal society could be conceived as promoting cognitive dispositions that are coherent not only with liberal-democratic presuppositions but also with the contemporary challenges to this system. In this direction, specific modalities of RE could be considered as not only the liberal-democratic filtering of the educational dimension of religion and religious culture but also as a crucial socialising function of liberal democracy through the promotion of congenial cultural conditions. In this light, the approach adopted in this work will highlight the prominent role of adult society in the emergence of an epistemic consensus, mainly as they are entrenched in culture. This would mean that, through socialisation, the older generation would shape logical, cosmological and existential perspectives in the younger ones, providing a relevant input for any form of RE in schools. So, the perspective adopted here will emphasise the intrinsic relatedness of school and society in a way that avoids the conception of the classroom situation as isolated from its cultural and epistemic surrounding circumstances – such as that underlying White’s aforementioned argument on RE.

A revision of relevant literature on the educationalist appropriation of Habermas highlights this social embeddedness of schooling as one of its central features. Starting from the articulation of his formulation of the knowledge-constitutive interests, philosophy of education will foundationally engage Habermas via a criticism of the technocratisation of education and the instrumentalisation of teaching and teachers’ knowledge by a marketised educational system. Subsequently, considerations around the incorporation of discourse ethics to classroom communication and the formulation of educational policy in pluralistic societies will extend the call for communicational reflexivity to deliberational proceduralism in liberal democracies. From these premises, the understanding of liberal education as institutionalised socialisation

towards the achievement of critical thinking skills and historical-societal self-awareness (*Critical Enlightenment*) will open the way for understanding autonomy as intersubjectively embedded, highlighting the nurturing role of cultural familiarity mainly as providing ontological certainty for the emergence of conscience and the construction of identity. This understanding presents convergent instances for the appropriation of Habermas in the field of RE. This emerging Habermasian perspective on RE will correspondingly highlight the importance of recognising – from the socio-cultural perspective of subjectivity just mentioned – the role performed by religious nurturing in the pursuit of education for autonomy. Upon this basis, an RE modality is envisioned that can encompass private educational initiatives without doing violence to the epistemic and moral specificities of their underlining doctrines. Additionally, the justifiability and mandatory nature of a thus conceived religious subject in common schooling stands out as a shared concern of the reviewed authors, stressing the separate addressing of specifically religious issues as a central educational need of post-secular societies. Similarly, this literature will exhibit a pronounced request for a theologically pluralistic and doctrinally un-biased approach for a Habermasian RE, especially as a requisite for the preservation of its religiously representative and liberally non-perfectionist character.

After this exploration, we addressed five contemporary formulations on religious toleration. This subject was selected especially as introducing the consideration of the specifically religious dimension of a Habermasian modality of education. In this line, several features were highlighted from the reviewed sources:

- a) the ostracism to which religions would be condemned if their socio-political dimension is severed from public deliberation and education (Newman).
- b) the liberal limits of classic toleration to generate a sense of belonging among a necessarily plural citizenship (Mendus).
- c) the importance of interpreting tolerance as establishing channels for the recognition of minorities (Galeotti).
- d) the inherent tendency of toleration to foster the comprehension of diversity as a *social problem* and to conceal concrete, bottom-up instances of coexistence-negotiation (Beaman).
- e) the need to complement it with the protection of intersubjective instances of identity formation as constituting fundamental safeguards of individual rights (Lacorne).

In this sense, Habermas' comprehension of toleration can be thought of as harmonising with these approaches. For this last author, the comprehension of this concept needs to overcome its classical, restrictive and paternalistic meaning of simply avoiding coercion in matters of conscience, and to emphasise the appropriation by the believer of the rational ethos inherent in it. Consequently, processes of cognitive interpellation would need to be explored between faith's intrinsic ethicality and liberal democracy's non-perfectionist morality, especially concerning criteria of legitimacy in controversies. For Habermas, the theological endorsement of liberal principles by early modern Christian religious confessions constitutes an emblematic case in this direction.

Consequently, liberal education emerged as a relevant framework for the comprehension of a RE modality that is compatible with liberal-democratic central tenets. Two proposals in this respect stood out as relevant here. The first one is by the British educational thinker Paul Hirst, who conceptualised liberal education as responding to rationally and objectively established *forms of knowledge*. These areas, which are constituted by a distinctive group of concepts related by a logical structure – plus some truth criteria and particular methods to test their logical propositions against experience –, are according to Hirst, seven in number: mathematics, physical sciences, history, literature and the fine arts, philosophy, morality and knowledge of our own and other people's minds. Hirst asserts religion and the humanities as *fields of knowledge*, in connection with relevant disciplines on the matter, but not *forms of knowledge* as such, due to the lack of specific objective criteria for the testing of their truth-propositions. Polemics in this regard lead Hirst to consider RE as an essential subject that could perform an important role in liberal education, as long as an objective epistemic status is not granted to religious truth-propositions. Hirst endorses this stance by defending the legitimacy of different sources – not only the philosophy of knowledge – for the formulation of the basic liberal curriculum.

Another proposal on liberal education comes from the American educationalist Meira Levinson. For her, this form of instruction needs to be based on the value of autonomy but avoiding simultaneously a *perfectionist* reliance on a robust philosophical perspective (as in Locke) that would lead liberalism towards a lack of representability and potential illiberal consequences. For Levinson, this foundation can be found in the reflective recognition of individuals as inexorably truth-claiming and thus as responsible for the consequences of action. In this respect, a liberal mode of education would foster a corresponding sense of personal autonomy through the promotion of four core achievements:

1. *Cultural coherence*, by promoting the presence of a stable intersubjective milieu that provides the learner with a significant threshold of ontological certainty for her development.
2. *Personality development*, in the direction of enhanced intellectual skills and sense of individual awareness, and thus of increasing possibilities for the construction of identity.
3. *The presence of differentiated levels of values*, by which the subject can relate immediate inclinations with higher-order ethical considerations.
4. *Openness to others' criticism of oneself*, as presenting a source of moral and ethical reflexivity.

For Levinson, a liberal modality of education could be developed along the lines of a thus constructed conception of autonomy, allowing for the cooperation between state and private schools of different kinds (including religious ones). The agreement of this moral framework will also lead, in Levinson's view, to the comprehension of the parental position in connection with children's education as a *privilege* instead of as a *right*.

In a similar vein and as quoted in White's assessment of the subject, philosophical comprehensions of *indoctrination* emerged as relevant in this context. In particular, this subject offered itself as presenting a defining instance for the *critical* character of the Habermasian modality of RE. In particular, five important interspersing trends can be identified in this debate:

1. In the first explicitly analytical formulations of the concept (1972-1986), four criteria stand out in this debate as the grounds for the classification of a communicative action as *indoctrinatory*: *content* (mainly doctrines that are non-empirically verifiable), *method* (teaching techniques not based on argumentation), *content-intention* (the presence in the instructor of an explicit purpose to inculcate particular beliefs in learners) and *consequence* (the promotion in learners of a non-evidential mode of holding beliefs). This discussion finally exhibits a transition towards the *consequence-criterion* as offering the most solid logical grounds for the analytical construction of the concept. The systematic disregarding of corroboration as the distinctive cognitive feature of an individual would then be considered as the trademark consequence of

indoctrination, something that would typically – though not *necessarily* – require particular types of contents and methods, as commented above.

2. From a Wittgensteinian perspective (1986-present), the emphasis on the logical scaffolding of evidential thinking, stressing the importance of early, non-rational inculcation of a world-image (*Weltbild*) sustaining argumentative thought. Based on the recognition of the *consequence*-criterion's defining character in these matters, *indoctrination* was conceptualised as indispensable for the emergence of critical forms of thinking, highlighting thus its paradoxical character. This comprehension led to the influential formulation of a non-indoctrinatory mode of belief-inculcation (Siegel), based on the assertion of the *self-inoculating*¹³⁸ nature of the reasoning-supporting beliefs being implanted. Besides being applied to liberal/multicultural socialisation and religious education with similar results, this approach has also recently led even to the rejection on the notion of *indoctrination* itself.
3. Relevant Habermasian contributions to this debate (1986-present) will emphasise the role of the imperative perlocutions that exclude the learner from the interpellation of the scheme of rewards and sanctions underlying the educational situation. Given its unavoidable footprints in the formation of pupil's modes of thought, these authors will comprehend these communicative acts on the basis of their *indoctrinatory* consequences. Either in the form of an *Ideal Pedagogical Speech Situation* (Young) that relies on dialogical communicative practices that avoid pre-formulated answers, or a *Simulated Communicative Action* (Huttunen) oriented towards the cultivation of thinking skills in pupils – more than to the elucidation of validity claims –, non-indoctrinatory modes of education have been correspondingly suggested.
4. From a *virtue-ethics* (2009-present) approach, the concentration on the motivational foundations of evidential thinking as constituting indoctrination's decisive scenario. From this perspective, a general epistemic disposition of open-mindedness – in connection with the intellectual virtues of courage, humility and diligence – was highlighted in the form of core strongholds of a non-indoctrinated mind. Societal influences of indoctrination acquired prominence here, widening this concept's scope from its original focus on the teaching situation.

¹³⁸ That is, naturally open to the future revision they provide for.

5. Finally, a harmonisation of the critical-thinking and the intellectual-virtues approaches through the positioning of high epistemic quality as the principal foundation of autonomous reasoning, with psychological dispositions exhibiting an important instrumental character (2017-present). From this perspective, the Siegelian notion of *non-indoctrinating belief-inculcation* is ratified, particularly in light of the epistemically innocent nature of its content.
6. As can be seen, the philosophical construction of indoctrination will exhibit important continuities concerning at least three levels: the consequences of communicational modalities for the development of general cognitive skills and dispositions in learners, the non-indoctrinatory character of early reasoning-supporting inculcation and the need to consider broader societal sources for the intersubjective shaping of personality. In this light, not only religious nurturing but also non-dogmatic, rationally-based religious learning could be labelled as *non-indoctrinatory*. On this basis, RE's liberal-curricular justification will find grounds in both the Hirstian contention on the need to foster habits of mind in connection with knowledge's main fields and the Levinsonian objective of promoting non-perfectionist modes of autonomic thinking in learners. Similarly, modalities of institutional cooperation between state and private (either religious or secular) educational initiatives could be explored on this basis, promoting in this manner instances of epistemic interpellation between religious and secular perspectives.

The fourth chapter in this sense explored the situation of the RE subject in Colombia as a case study. An initial revision of the historical background of the area threw light on the significant threshold of Catholic influence on the state and nation-building process. After a foundational colonial period in which the Spanish Crown and the Vatican found support in the Dominican and Augustinian orders for the evangelisation of the indigenous peoples and the education of the colonisers, liberal ideals slowly made their way through Royal modernisation (Bourbon Reforms) and later via pro-independence movements. These processes brought about the promotion of a centralised and ideologically secular state system that promoted technical knowledge in the Spanish territories over the traditional scholastic disciplines. The achievement of independence in 1819 cemented in this respect enlightened impulses towards the consolidation of a public education system for the benefit of the general population, characterised by the predominance of modern and industrialist formation and the absence of religious instruction. However, the mainly Conservative, centralist and authoritarian prevailing

position on the matter of the pro-independence leader and country's founding father, Simón Bolívar, led him to rely for the effective implementation of this purpose on the established Catholic orders in the country. This meant the perpetuation of the constitutive socialising role that Catholic doctrine had performed since the colonial inception of the nation.

The first century of the country's independent historical existence saw the oscillation between Liberal-federalist, on the one side, and Conservative-centralist political ideals, on the other, marked by frequent violent confrontation and corresponding constitutional replacement. Despite the fact that general educational plans were proposed by both Liberal and Conservative administrations, the structural precariousness of the state educational institutions and the constant state of war led to the perpetuation of the historical conditions of religious traditionalism, especially among the rural populations. After the *War of the Schools* that was brought about by the radical Liberal attempt to secularise education in a complete manner, this process finally resulted in the Conservative hegemony known as *La Regeneración* that sowed the seed of today's Republic through centralist unification and educational enshrinement of Catholic teachings. This Catholic-Conservative establishment was subsequently ratified by the 1886 Constitution and by the Concordat with the Roman Catholic Church that exclusively granted it official recognition and different educational prerogatives. Political substitution was achieved by the 1930s, without challenges to the constitutional and administrative structure of the state. The shifting social-democratic emphasis of public policy strengthened in this respect the institutional capacity of the educational system but left untouched its underlying ideological guidelines. Thus, the teaching of Catholic doctrines continued to perform a prominent role in Colombian education, reflecting its centrality in society. In this line, both the emergence of political violence after 1948 and the increased margin of religious diversification presented the educational status quo with renewed demands for legitimation. This situation led to the constitutional reformulation of 1991, which secularised the state and prompted the official recognition of religious diversity.

In line with the international Human Rights instruments ratified by Colombia after 1975, this new legal situation paved the way for an educational reform in consonance with the new institutional situation. This process gave rise to Law 115 of 1996 on education and 133 of the same year on religious diversity. These two legal milestones established RE as a fundamental subject of the national curriculum, corresponding to an – ontologically assumed – *spiritual* dimension of the human being. This formulation was articulated in a complementary manner to the legal consecration of moral and religious education of minor-aged children as a parental

right. Thus, the constitutional protection of freedom of belief was subjected, in educational matters, to the attainment of the legal age, when the student could exert her right to be exempted from RE. In a similar vein, the curricular content of this area was restricted, in its delivery in state schools, to the doctrines of those Churches holding a public law agreement with the Colombian state, a status exclusive to the Catholic and some few prominent Evangelical churches. Subsequent decrees by the Education Ministry during the Conservative governments of the early 2000s ratified this institutional arrangement, allowing the main Christian branches and organisations to accommodate to the margins of legal and political modernisation undergone by the country during the last decade of the twentieth century. In an educational system characterised by the renewed foundational influence and confessional presence of Catholicism, this transformation led to the perpetuation of the historic socialising role of Catholic doctrine in Colombian society.

This assessment finds grounds in academic investigations on RE in Colombia. Besides corroborating the significant threshold of persistent Catholic influence on this subject's delivery in the country, different works additionally highlight two other prominent markers of this doctrinal presence in Colombian education. These correspond to the influx exerted by traditional and rote-based pedagogies associated with the learning of religious dogmas, on the one hand, and the conservative moralisation of the *Ethics* subject's contents, on the other. By providing instances for the reinforcing of a passive learning attitude, favourable to compliance with cognitive authority, and its curricular harmonisation with renovated generational concerns, these two educational scenarios constitute vital instruments for the perpetuation of the conservative Christian influence on Colombian RE. In a similar vein, significant margins of indoctrinatory teaching can then be perceived as being deployed through RE in both state and private schools in the country, an educational situation strongly related also to the professional preparation of the RE teacher. This dimension, in which the Catholic Church still holds considerable prerogatives (i.e. through the formation provided by Catholic universities and the provision of the legally required certificate of suitability for instructors), illustrates the dominant position occupied by this institution in Colombian general education. In connection also with the rising social and political significance of charismatic Evangelical churches, the modernisation of the Colombian state system can then be viewed as harmonising, through RE's institutional arrangement, with a multi-faceted perpetuation of the conservative-Christian moral socialisation that is traditional in the country. From this perspective, this socialising role can be considered as the decisive underlying aim of RE in Colombian basic education.

5.1. Considerations for a RE proposal in Colombia

Important considerations can be made then concerning the current status of RE in Colombia, especially in the light of the educational guidelines outlined in this work. In this respect, relevant reforms could be envisaged towards the harmonisation of this curricular subject with this country's liberal-political foundations.

From a historical perspective, the existence itself of RE in the national curriculum can be seen as grounded in the particular republican experience of the nation, reflecting the historical vicissitudes that forged its processes of state-building. Given also the aforementioned social and political centrality of conservative-Christian socialisation in Colombia, the subject of RE could be considered as a milestone of the Colombian educational tradition, especially in relation to prominent moral traits of the country's religious and political culture, as explored earlier. In this respect, this curricular area exhibits relevance for the pursuit of the religious-secular cognitive understanding posited by Habermas. The focus on religious matters, a feature absent in the curricula of alternative fundamental subjects – i.e. social sciences – would allow for the addressing of this objective as a function of the approach to specifically religious questions. The materialisation of this possibility would necessarily require the avoidance of an exclusively descriptive-informative pedagogical perspective for RE. The extensive reliance on approach in this direction would inevitably restrict to objective information the pupil's threshold of epistemic learning concerning religious matters. Necessary for the promotion of an *understanding*-cognitive disposition in learners, a corresponding epistemic reflection on political-philosophical matters would need to be guaranteed, especially concerning enlightened rationalism and other secular approaches to religion. This formation, usually provided by the non-fundamental subject of *philosophy* offered in the last two years of secondary formation in Colombia, would thus complement the religious level of comprehension provided by RE. Consequently, the addressing of the religious-secular understanding as an aim for RE would have to be restricted to the same age stage of the corresponding philosophical formation, guaranteeing thus the adequacy of the content regarding pupils' cognitive skills. From these grounds, an important comprehension-related background could emerge for the promotion of an integrated, cross-disciplinary approach to the Habermasian learning objective highlighted here.

The pursuit of this educational objective also calls for the guaranteeing presence of a foundational formation in RE. This basic instruction would constitute an indispensable requisite to be provided by early stages of formation in this area, preceding in this respect philosophical instruction. This modality of RE, preparative for the specifically inter-epistemic approach, would need to be considered in Colombian education for the initial or intermediate years of secondary school, given especially its introductory character to specifically epistemic considerations. The effective implementation of this modality would require, in turn, the guaranteeing of both a multi-religious content and a non-biased approach to it for both the foundational and more advanced stages of RE. These characteristics would guarantee the promotion of at least fundamental levels of knowledge about religious diversity as a basis for the later pursuit of more abstract learning goals. Similarly, the approach to this foundational formation would have to guarantee adequate margins of representation of the nearest different religious expressions in the learners' environment, without losing sight of the background theological and objective information indispensable for the contextually adequate comprehension of such manifestations. A curricular decision along these lines would also allow for the enhancing of the capacity of representation of the RE curriculum, especially in relation to minorities' claims for recognition in liberal society – in Galeotti's sense. This promotion of religious diversity, in consonance with the most immediate socio-religious circumstances of learners, would harmonise the pursuit of emerging levels of tolerance, especially concerning the acknowledgement of the existence in society of alternative religious truth-claims. In the Colombian scenario, the concrete implementation of this content would necessarily foster a more founded understanding of not only the different religious manifestations present in the territory but also of the diversity within the major Christian branches of the country, along with their role in the history of the nation. The materialisation of this provision would require in Colombia an important margin of state intervention regarding the guaranteeing of both RE's multi-religious content and a theologically and politically impartial approach, especially in its foundational stages, with the explicit aim of avoiding distortion and misrepresentation. Although a public action in this direction would undoubtedly and at least partially impinge upon the autonomy granted to religious organisations and to parents to determine the religious and moral education received by children, its justification could be construed via the liberal need to guarantee an adequately and reasonably pluralistic religious formation of citizens. A juridical re-formulation in this direction of religious liberties and parental rights with respect to RE – in Levinson's sense – would be then required.

The RE proposal sketched here would rely on a dual model of learning *about* and *from* religions, correspondingly emphasising one of them during each of the two stages (foundational-epistemic) of the religious formation highlighted above. In this respect, an initial and objective familiarisation with the history and present of religious diversity would privilege learning processes about religion as a contribution also to the general secondary formation of students. This phase would give way to an epistemic deepening on different religious world-views and their logical characteristics, in the sense of promoting the questioning of the concept itself of “religion” along historical and philosophical lines. This latter stage would request the avoidance of the presentation of religious truth-claims as empirically verifiable assertions or as truth-asserting propositions, particularly because it would transgress on the epistemic particularities of religious expressions and thus misconstrue their knowledge-character, following Hirst’s contentions on the matter.

As stated above, this training, in connection with an adequate, parallel political-philosophical formation along these pedagogical lines, could well contribute to the mutual epistemic understanding of religious and non-religious perspectives. In this sense, this outlined modality for RE would not necessarily antagonise religious nurturing initiatives of a private nature. Conversely, familiar and ecclesiastic provisions for the education of new generations could be viewed in this light as necessary preliminary stages for the ultimate comprehension of the cognitive dimension of religious doctrines and perspectives. This educational accommodation of private religious provisions would require, in turn, the observation on their part of at least the weakly-liberal fundamental clauses of 1) the recognition of human equality as necessarily truth-claiming and thus as self-responsible, and 2) of the respect to minorities, in Levinson’s sense. Such a political safeguard could allow for the private provision of a substantial margin of cultural coherence, understood as a platform for the achievement of different cognitive (analytical, synthetic, creative) and ethical (moral discernment between different values, inbuilt self-criticism) educational objectives. This posited integration between private-nurturing and public-liberal RE provisions would then mean that public funding of private initiatives could be deployed where the aforementioned weakly liberal foundations are effectively safeguarded. This means that educational institutions of a religious nature would have to respect the non-perfectionist liberal framework here outlined in order for them to be qualified for public schooling. Such a harmonisation through coercive means between private educative ideals and

liberal conditions could find support in parallel legal milestones concerning the limitation of freedom of speech in the country¹³⁹.

As can be seen, this proposal for RE would undoubtedly require the collaboration of multiple disciplines for the structuring of the curriculum. Either on the foundational or the epistemic stage, insights from different fields of knowledge would have to be gathered for the pursuit of the educational objectives highlighted here¹⁴⁰. This interdisciplinary character would contribute to the widening of the scope of knowledge, analysis and relevant evidencing for different religious enquiries, promoting non-indoctrinatory forms of learning and of holding beliefs. This educational scenario would also require a greater specification of the RE teacher's profile beyond its present legal characteristics in Colombia. Specifically, a determinate professional qualification on theology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, education or religious education would be required for the RE teacher of the latter stage. In this respect, the option of *Baccalaureate on Science and Biblical Studies*, as it is contemplated in the relevant legislation, would need to be complemented by postgraduate studies in any of the fields specified above, at least for the teaching of RE in the last two years of secondary education. Similarly, the *certification of suitability*-requirement would in this respect be rendered irrelevant, as the doctrinal and moral integrity of the teacher would no longer constitute a necessary requisite for the educational objectives associated to any of the two stages here outlined for RE.

Finally, important questionings can emerge from the political character of the objectives here considered for RE. Concretely, the assigning to this subject of the objective of the religious-

¹³⁹ See for instance the anti-discrimination Law, 1482 of 2011. This piece of legislation limited freedom of expression in the cases of open racism, discrimination or harassment on the basis of nationality, sex, sexual orientation and apology of genocide.

¹⁴⁰ Compare for instance with the following consideration of RE in Colombia: "The Law 133 (Art. 6) abided by the provisions of the International Covenants on Human Rights, in the sense of guaranteeing parents a religious education for their children, which is "according to their own convictions". From this option it can be deduced that religious education at school is not a subject of "religious culture", understood as the study of the different religions present in culture, nor of philosophy, psychology or sociology of religion. The ERE [*educación religiosa escolar*, school RE] is about the study of a precise religious experience, which corresponds to the religious creed of parents and students. This option requires religious confessional education in terms of content" (Lara-Corredor, 2005, p. 14. Own translation). From these foundations, this Catholic theologian deduces that churches or religious organisations are the appropriate actors for the orientation of the RE subject in Colombian schooling, given the fact that, for Lara, "a non-confessional state is incompetent for pronouncing on religions' internal affairs" (Lara-Corredor, 2005, p. 14). Similarly, this author endorses the certification of suitability emitted by churches as a guarantee of the condition of the RE teacher as an "official witness of the creed he professes" (p. 14) and of the inscription of his labour – for Catholic RE – to the evangelising action of the Church.

secular understanding posited by Habermas can well indicate its assimilation by educationally foreign aims. This interpretation, voiced by different authors on this subject (Conroy *et al.*, 2010), will highlight then the eroding of the specifically religious attainments that naturally belong to the RE subject. Concerning this risk, the proposal here outlined would have to be viewed as not excluding other possible spiritual explorations by the learner, as commented earlier in this work. It is envisaged here that the sustained and pedagogically systematic exposition of learners to multiple religious contents, on the one side, and the encouraging of epistemic explorations about religious perspectives, on the other, could enhance pupils' interest in the multiple cognitive possibilities offered by religious world-views. In a similar vein, the potential concatenation of this RE proviso with religious nurturing initiatives deployed in earlier stages of formation – given the effective safeguarding of central liberal tenets – would also allow for the existence of a plural scenario of religious educational goals along the deployment of this subject in the school curriculum. Thus, the pursuit of the religious-secular understanding would not necessarily imply a colonisation of RE by educational ends of a different character. On the contrary, the posited abstract and epistemically open character of this subject would harmonise simultaneous endeavours towards alternative educational attainments that do not contradict the liberal foundations that support it. In this manner, this understanding of RE would allow for the liberal state's meaningful engagement with this area as a core dimension for the promotion of liberal-democratic values and citizenship. Such an articulation would, in turn, represent a contribution – at least from a Habermasian perspective – for the historical continuity of liberal democracy, especially in an ideological environment – as the contemporary one – characterised by the rising pugnacity of prominent anti-liberal initiatives.

5.2 On the curricularisation of these provisions

As explored above, this work highlighted the importance of a pluralist RE for liberal, common schooling as a significant platform for the promotion of a religious-secular understanding among citizenship. This learning objective, understood as advancing the weakly-liberal foundation of Colombian democracy, is then envisaged as being delivered by an inter-religious, theologically informed and multi-disciplinary religious instruction in that country's secondary education. Concretely, foundational and epistemic stages were suggested for the middle (8, 9) and last (10, 11) years of secondary school, providing thus general familiarization and theological and moral instruction on religious diversity. In a similar vein, trans-curricular

connections were envisaged especially for the epistemic stage, especially as highlighting the philosophical and political implications of inter-religious knowledge.

In this respect, the curricular realisation of these educational purposes will have to consider for years 8 and 9 initially the premise of incorporating general information, delivered from an unbiased approach, on religious diversity. This provision will lead to the understanding of the main features of wide contemporary religious traditions (Judaism-Christianity-Islam; Hinduism-Buddhism-Sikh-Jainism-Krishnaism; diverse pagan and animistic religions-speculative/meditative schools of thought and practice), which could be delivered along cosmological, doctrinal, ritual, ethical, moral and socio-political lines. These categories (among others) could also perform as transverse pedagogical axes for the development of instructive comparisons among religions¹⁴¹. From this cognitive background, a doctrinally and worldview-informed understanding of local expressions – in connection with branches of the traditions above - can be deployed, recurring to practitioners as well as relevant doctrinal materials. This option would allow for the exploration of the experiential and emotional dimensions of spirituality. For the case of urban contexts with a broader margin of religious pluralism, the selection-criteria would privilege the exposition of the aforementioned major religious branches, given the importance of preparing learners for interaction in an increasingly globalized context. In rural settings, the availability-factor would undoubtedly take precedence (including indigenous and afro-syncretic traditions). In connection with the country's Christian heritage, in both cases space would have to be made for the exposition of diversity within Christianity, in both faith and secular schools.

This general instruction should give way to a deepening on specific religions in years 10 and 11. Here, students can be allowed to focus on one form of religious consciousness, especially

¹⁴¹ It is understood that the implementation of a RE curriculum in this direction in years 8 and 9 of Colombian secondary education would require a substantial assignation of curricular time in order to cover the syllabus completely, especially given the scope of religious expressions considered. However, given the foundational character of this instruction, the addressing of these subjects in the classroom would not need to include time for deepening into the worldview or similar philosophical discussions regarding the different religious expressions discussed by the teaching. In this respect, this provision would place itself between a fact-based and an epistemic approach to RE, delivering formation on religious diversity along the aforementioned thematic lines. This will allow for an overview of different religious traditions considering especially their historical-genetic connections as a valuable educational goal for this stage of learning. However, the curricular specification of this provision will necessarily have to be left for subsequent studies in this direction.

by exploring its multiple dimensions (doctrinal, epistemic, ritual, ethical, moral, socio-political). The distribution of options should be given to the extent possible to the students themselves, with the teacher intervening to guarantee a fair degree of pluralism¹⁴². At the end of year 10, the presentation of the students' work can take place, with corresponding group discussions. Year 11 could in this respect be devoted to trans-curricular initiatives. Here, explorations of the connections between RE and other subjects can be of benefit for the learning process, especially as a means for students to appropriate specific contents in a wider cognitive frame including several areas of knowledge. In this regard, the absence of RE from the state exam *Saber Pro* will provide curricular time for this multidisciplinary learning, potentially benefitting also other subjects. In this last year, an important instruction could be delivered in relation to confessional, institutional and/or civic identity, in connection to the school's values and character. Particularly after an unbiased, multi-religious and epistemically-informed formation is guaranteed, a deliberative instruction on a particular worldview and set of moral values could certainly prove fruitful for a liberal-democratic formation and the promotion of the religious-secular understanding here outlined.

5.2.1. Two examples

The aforementioned Jesuit Colegio Mayor de San Bartolomé (Colegio Mayor de San Bartolomé, 2020) offers as an example of weekly subjects for RE the following:

- For years 8 and 9, ecological concerns (in terms of a criticism of anthropocentrism and narcissism), creation myths (referring the Babylonian examples of Atra-Hasis and Enuma Elish along with the Genesis), and the tremendous and fascinating mystery (*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, in an expressly Ottonian vein) in relation to everyday life and sin (referring in the last case to the healing of the paralytic in Mark's Gospel).
- For years 10 and 11, the meaning of life (from an existentialist – Kundera, Frankl - perspective) and the denunciation of inequality as a theological interpretation of history (in an explicit liberationist key).

¹⁴² Belonging to a particular religion should not constitute an obstacle for the student to develop this study. On the contrary, it can provide a valuable opportunity to appreciate the learners's appropriation – and potential re-signification - of her own tradition's contents, especially given the cognitive role performed by the previous familiarisation with alternative religious worldviews.

In the light of the reforms here suggested, the multi-religious formation provided in years 8 and 9 could be delivered in a systematic way, including a more extensive pluralistic content. The ecological concerns and the theological-anthropological instruction on the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* could perform as transverse axes, the latter serving for instance as an introduction to the subsequent epistemically informed formation. Similarly, the existentialist and socio-political emphasis of year 10 and 11 lessons could be preserved, using them as categories for the student's deepening on religious consciousness. A final comparison and discussion about these issues across diverse religions would in this respect present important learning opportunities.

The *Colegio Integrado* [integrated school] *Eduardo Camacho Gamba* (Colegio Integrado Eduardo Camacho Gamba, 2020) offers an example of RE in a public school. The 2018 curriculum offers the following macro-subjects:

- Year 8: Early Christianity as an example of communitarian sense of belonging (addressing the issues of the love of one's neighbour and the ethics of work and politics).
- Year 9: human dignity (sexuality, family life, abortion, euthanasia and peaceful coexistence)
- Year 10: the meaning of life (including descriptors on different religions, Catholic social teaching and Jesus as a role model).
- Year 11: social commitment (human justice and solidarity of the Christian believer).

As can be seen, pluralist content constitutes only a tangential presence in the curriculum. The implementation thus of the reforms here envisaged would require of this instruction to be complemented by a substantive multi-religious formation. Correspondingly, each macro-subject could be developed across different religious possibilities, especially in years 8 and 9. As in the previous case, the existentialist and socio-political emphasis of years 10 and 11 would provide a meaningful platform for deploying a more epistemic-philosophical deepening on particular spiritualities and for a multi-disciplinary engagement with social realities, as pretended in year 11 topics.

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