This article builds on the recent Special Interest issue of this journal on *Philosophy for children in transition* (2011) and the way that the debate about philosophy in schools has now shifted onto whether or not it ought to be a compulsory part of the curriculum. This article puts the spotlight on Catholic schools in order to present a different argument in favour of introducing compulsory philosophy lessons into the curriculum. It is explained that in faith schools, such as Catholic ones, there is an additional need or imperative to have compulsory philosophy as part of the curriculum. This is because it serves as an effective way of avoiding the inherent dangers of confessional education, particularly the indoctrination challenge. It is argued that Catholic schools also have some intriguing theological reasons that can be used to justify the inclusion of compulsory philosophy in the school curriculum. It is proposed that when it comes to philosophy in schools there is a distinctive Catholic school perspective. As part of this it is explained why Catholic schools, perhaps more than others, need philosophy to be a compulsory part of the curriculum.*

Key words: Philosophy in schools, Catholic education, Hirst, non-confessional education, mystery
Philosophy in schools: a Catholic school perspective

Introduction

In recent years there has been a flurry of interest in philosophy in schools. In 2011 the *Journal of philosophy of education* dedicated a special issue on ‘Philosophy for children in transition’. A few years earlier Hand and Winstanley edited a well received collection of essays on *Philosophy in schools* (2008). It would appear that a majority of philosophers of education and philosophers with an interest in education consider philosophy in schools to be a good thing that ought to be further promoted. Now that initiatives such as Philosophy for children (P4C) have been joined by SAPEREi and the Philosophy Foundationii it has become much easier to practically implement philosophy in schools. All three initiatives help many schools to introduce philosophy to at least some of their pupils. Philosophy is already present in many schools and the debate has now shifted onto whether or not philosophy ought to be a compulsory part of the primary and secondary curriculum. This article will put the spotlight on Catholic schools in order to present a different argument in favour of introducing compulsory philosophy lessons into the curriculum. It will be maintained that in faith schools, such as Catholic ones, there is an additional need or imperative to have compulsory philosophy as part of the curriculum. This is because philosophy has the potential of helping to avoid the risk of indoctrinating pupils. Concerns over both explicit and tacit indoctrination remains an inherent danger in the confessional form of education that typically characterises Catholic schools. However, it will be argued that Catholic schools also have some intriguing theological reasons that can be used to justify the inclusion of compulsory philosophy in the school curriculum. The focus in what follows will be on the Catholic school perspective for introducing compulsory philosophy in schools. However it might well be that many of the points raised are not exclusive to Catholic schools and could be extended to include all types of faith school, both within the Christian tradition and all faith traditions. In the light of official Catholic Church teaching on education there is an overt assumption that Catholic schools aspire to a confessional approach to educationiii. As such the curriculum in a Catholic school stands in particular need of including compulsory philosophy lessons. It is this Catholic perspective, rather than the broader case for philosophy in all forms of faith school that is being considered here.
In what follows it will be proposed that when it comes to philosophy in schools there is a distinctive Catholic school perspective. As part of this it will be explained why Catholic schools, perhaps more than others, need philosophy to be a compulsory part of the curriculum. However before scrutinising the finer details and supporting argument for this claim some attention needs to be given clarifying it from the bewildering diversity of ways in which philosophy is already in the school curriculum. This ground clearing is needed because the reasons for introducing philosophy in the Catholic school are distinct from the typical ones used to justify its inclusion on the curriculum.

The ways in which philosophy is already present in the curriculum
As an academic discipline philosophy has a long established history that would, within a western perspective, trace its origins back to the philosophers of Ancient Greece. Even within the modern university philosophy continues to be regarded as a high status academic subject. Many of the advocates of philosophy in schools share the conviction that philosophy is an intrinsically valuable pursuit that is worth studying for its own sake. Philosophy is already present in the curriculum in a number of ways, from specific programmes (such as P4C) to formal qualifications in Advanced Level philosophy. Philosophy also figures prominently in other courses, such as in the epistemology that constitutes the Theory of Knowledge unit of work within the International Baccalaureate qualification or in the use of logic and reasoning skills that are a central part of the ‘Critical Thinking’ Advanced Subsidiary qualification. Moreover, philosophy is present within some of the subjects that typically make up the curriculum, for example both history and English literature routinely employ philosophical ideas and themes. In history lessons pupils are routinely challenged to consider the problem of bias in evaluating historical sources. This evaluation often hinges on epistemological issues about knowledge and certainty. Within English lessons both the plot and the characters in even the simplest of narratives routinely explore ethical debates and dilemmas. One obvious way in which philosophy is also present is through religious education. In addition to the philosophy of religion, religious education normally includes a range of ethical issues, but of course this philosophy is often embedded within religious texts and beliefs. It is not uncommon for religious education to be renamed as philosophy and ethics in many English comprehensive schools. Despite being present in these ways, philosophy is not currently compulsory, other than through its presence within the religious education programme.
Having briefly surveyed how philosophy is present in the curriculum attention will now be
given to the characteristics of these differing approaches to philosophy. When it comes to
philosophy in schools there is an obvious distinction surrounding the age-group of the pupils
to be taught. Some philosophy in schools is overtly aimed at primary school pupils whilst
other approaches are geared towards older secondary school students. The most obvious
example of the latter would be where philosophy is being taught as a discrete academic
subject, such as A-Level philosophy or within the International Baccalaureate. These
qualifications are for older secondary school students, they allow students to progress onto
higher education and also provide a specific progression route for those who want to take up
philosophy at university. The proportion of pupils taking these qualifications is increasing
but it remains a small one in terms of the total cohort of students. The primary goal of the
AQA philosophy course is to introduce students into academic philosophy:

At AS, the specification concentrates on a number of key philosophical themes,
intended to provide students with a broad introduction to Philosophy. At A2, students
will specialise further, selecting two themes to study in depth and focusing on
philosophical problems through the study of a key text. (AQA Philosophy
Specification, 2014, p. 2)

Although narrower in scope the Theory of Knowledge unit for the International Baccalaureate
is similarly aimed at introducing students to the central issues in epistemology:

Theory of Knowledge is a course designed to encourage each student to reflect on the
nature of knowledge by critically examining different ways of knowing (perception,
emotion, language and reason) and different kinds of knowledge (scientific, artistic,

Both the International Baccalaureate diploma and the AQA specification share a focus on
broadly analytic philosophy which is presented to students as a way of engaging with an
ancient and intrinsically worthwhile academic pursuit.

When it comes to younger, primary aged pupils there are a number of broadly similar
approaches to philosophy that are basically variants of the Philosophy for Children
programme (P4C). For over thirty years the approach first developed by Lipman in the USA,
P4C, has spread into a significant number of primary schools in the UK. Lipman (1977) has
led the way in arguing that young children have a propensity for asking questions and he claims that

The child’s context is full of wonder because they are still acquiring frames of reference. (Lipman, 1977, p.15)

He argues that children need to be exposed to philosophy in order to keep this sense of wonder alive. Lipman championed the cause for promoting philosophy amongst primary age pupils. In doing this he is challenging an assumption, rooted in Plato, that maintained that children lacked both the experience and cognitive capacities to be able to engage in the rigors of philosophical enquiry. Lipman successfully developed a way of teaching primary aged pupils philosophical ideas, through the use of a distinctive pedagogy based around classrooms as communities of enquiry. One of the important features of Lipman’s methodology is that it sought to use philosophy as a way of enabling primary aged children to become both more thoughtful or reflective and also more considerate individuals.

Building on the work of Lipman others such as SAPERE (the Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education) have sought to help primary aged pupils to

Think critically, caringly, creatively and collaboratively. (SAPERE, 2012, p.1)

Through the community of inquiry children are guided in how to work together collaboratively. SAPERE is not the only organisation that has focused on bringing philosophy to primary aged school children. The Philosophy Foundation (Worley 2011) seeks to introduce these pupils to a wide range of philosophical problems through using simplified versions of the kinds of philosophical puzzles and conundrums that are found in typical undergraduate philosophy courses. What is distinctive about Worley’s approach is that the teacher has the task of being the in-class philosopher with the role of nurturing or guiding pupils in the process of ‘doing’ philosophy.

Another influential idea within the various approaches to philosophy in schools relates to the purpose of studying philosophy. It is frequently argued that philosophy in schools is an effective way of developing critical thinking skills, for example Winstanley maintains that

Philosophy is a powerful subject and that philosophizing, or philosophic enquiry, is the optimum pedagogy for fostering the essential skills and dispositions of critical thinking. (Winstanley, 2008, p.85)
Though engaging with philosophical problems pupils will be challenged to develop their thinking skills, and the purpose of philosophy is to use it to develop these skills. Another variant of this approach is found in Siegel’s arguments about why epistemology, as an essential sub-discipline of philosophy, ought to be taught in schools. Siegel (2008) identifies various reasons for this, ranging from harnessing natural pupil interest in epistemology to a set of arguments about how philosophy develops rational development rather than simply ‘critical thinking’.

…..educating for critical thinking requires that students be educated not simply to be critical thinkers, but to understand and reflectively endorse that educational aim as well, on the basis of reasons that warrant its status as an educational ideal. (Siegel, 2008, p.84)

The underlying point is that philosophy ought to be part of the school curriculum because it is a particularly fruitful way of developing certain kinds of skills and dispositions.

**Philosophy and the curriculum of Catholic schools**

Having mapped out the range of approaches typically used to justify the inclusion of philosophy in the curriculum attention can now shift to identifying the distinctive reasons that Catholic schools would have for needing to include philosophy as a compulsory part of the curriculum.

One of the inherent challenges facing Catholic education and schooling is the ambiguity associated with the meaning of ‘Catholic education’. There are two dominant ways in which the concept of ‘Catholic education’ can be taken. The first, and perhaps more obvious sense, is to interpret it in terms of the education or formation of someone as a Catholic Christian. This kind of education is typically regarded as catechesis, which is the nurturing of faith and commitment to Catholicism. This could be characterized as a more explicit form of confessional education. The alternative way of taking the phrase ‘Catholic education’ is to refer to a distinctly Catholic account or approach to what counts as education as a whole. This is to take ‘Catholic education’ as a way of referring to a theory of Catholic education in which catechesis is not the sole goal or intention. Amongst advocates of Catholic education (such as Arthur (1995), McLaughlin (1996), Groome (1998), Conroy (1999), Sullivan (2001), Grace (2002), Hayes and Gearon (2002), Miller (2007) and McDonough (2012)) there have been a range of attempts to describe how a general education can be combined with attempting to nurture faith amongst pupils. This is a more general form of confessional
education. For many of these advocates the concern has been over how to keep the balance right between the more general account of education and the more explicit form educating pupils to be Catholics. For example, part of Arthur’s critique in *The Ebbing Tide* (1995) is that there has been a failure to keep this catechetical (what he refers to as the holistic) characteristic central. Similarly Grace’s (2002) sociological study of Catholic schools in the UK demonstrated that many were being deflected from their true (catechetical) mission because of the pressure of market forces being introduced by successive government initiatives. However, it is the confessional nature of Catholic education that has triggered ongoing concerns amongst philosophers (for example Hand 2003) that it is integrally bound up with indoctrination and hindering autonomy. Over four decades ago Hirst (1971) explained how these confessional forms of education are best characterised as primitive theories of education. This is the basis of his argument that Christian education is a contradiction in terms. In contrast liberal theories of education can be characterised as sophisticated ones because they are not primarily aimed at handing on more tribal beliefs and customs. Developing reason and autonomy are the key characteristics of a sophisticated theory of education.

However, the connection between a more general theory of Catholic education and the formation Catholic Christians can be challenged. This is primarily through uncoupling the meaning of Catholic education from catechesis and nurturing faith. This is to argue against the widely held assumption that equates an integral relationship between the theory of Catholic education with catechesis. If the meaning of Catholic education is uncoupled from catechesis and nurturing faith, the emphasis could instead be put on the ways in which this theory of education is primarily aimed at developing reason and autonomy. This would make it possible to take it as an example of a sophisticated theory of education. The advantage of uncoupling the more general theory of Catholic education from catechesis is that it dissolves the concerns about Catholic education involving indoctrination and undermining autonomy. It is important to remember that the catechist, as opposed to the educator, works with a specific assumption about having a shared faith with the student (or catechumen). This difference is drawn out in a typical definition of Catechesis.

When believers, with fellow believers deepen their personal faith by their dialogue, activity and worship with fellow members of the Church. (Rummery, 1975, p. 172)

The catechist is seeking to foster and nurture a shared faith between herself and the person being catechised. Catechesis tends to give priority to the content of what is being taught,
wanting to ensure that the catechumens are properly nurtured in the central tenets of the faith. The catechist is concerned to foster a particular response to what is taught. Whilst this does not preclude criticism and evaluation, the broad approach of catechesis can also be characterised as apologetics. This stance involves attempting to give a positive defence of the Catholic faith. An effective apologist is able to explain the central tenets in a way that dissolves criticisms and objections. There is an overlap with process of catechesis which seeks to foster faith or transmit beliefs to those who are being catechised and the role of the apologist. It is this relationship between catechesis and apologetics that goes to the heart of concerns about confessional education. A primary aim of this kind of education is to hand on the central beliefs to the pupils and to teach them how defend it from criticism.

It is at this point that the concerns raised by Hirst begin to have their force. Hirst maintains that there are a number of difficulties with both the concept of Christian education and the distinctions between education and catechesis. At the conceptual level he argued that Christian education is a contradiction in terms (1972). In this he is, like R.S. Peters, using the insights of conceptual analysis to clarify the meaning and more controversially the content of education. He argues that ‘education’ is a concept that does not need to be qualified in terms of supporting ideas or frameworks. This means that to refer to ‘Christian education’ is to introduce a redundant concept because adding ‘Christian’ to the concept of ‘education’ does not take it any further. When it comes to the distinctions between catechesis and education, Hirst (1981) argues that they reflect two differing concepts of education, one primitive and the other sophisticated. In primitive education the priority is the way in which the group or society seeks to pass onto the next generation its rituals, values and beliefs. Catechesis is like this because it is concerned with handing on the faith, beliefs, values and rituals in their entirety to the next generation of Catholics. In contrast the sophisticated concept of education involves a recognition that the beliefs being handed onto the next generation are not of the same status. Some are objectively true on rational grounds and education involves passing on beliefs and practices according to their objective status and with appropriate justification. The sophisticated concept of education is concerned with developing reason and learning how to distinguish between what is belief, conjecture and subjective preference. Hirst argues that catechesis and education have some significant differences:

Education in this second sense therefore, just because it is bound by the limits of reason, stops short of seeking to determine the personal development of pupils in terms of belief, action, attitudes, etc., where reason itself stops. It does all it can in
terms of reason to prepare for personal commitment and faith, but beyond that it cannot go. It is concerned with all that reason can provide for the rationally autonomous life, on controversial as much as on non-controversial issues. But the life of reason it seeks to develop, it cannot of itself seek to complement by developing the life of faith. (Hirst, 1981, p. 88)

Hirst argues that education and catechesis have distinct aims and any attempt to combine education with catechesis would be to engage in a self-defeating activity.

However, these concerns and arguments raised by Hirst are not equally persuasive. The first, about Christian education being a contradiction in terms, can be more easily challenged in a large part because philosophers of education are less inclined to push conceptual analysis to the same kinds of extremes that Hirst and Peters want to. The meaning of education can be enhanced or framed through linking it with supporting concepts. Perhaps the most obvious example is the linking of education with ‘liberal’. The concept of ‘liberal’ brings important supporting ideas to the meaning of education and this is now a widely endorsed concept. Hirst can be challenged over his rejection of the coupling of ‘Christian’ and education as it too can be characterised as a guiding framework that brings supporting ideas to the meaning of education. The Theos report Doing God in Education (Cooling 2010) can be cited as an example of how this can be done. One of the ways of ‘doing God in education’ is to identify and promote opportunities to combine theological ideas with the delivery of the various subjects of the curriculum. For example Cooling explains the materials produced as part of the Charis Project and, more recently, for the What If Learning initiative illustrate that there are repeated opportunities for specific Christian teachings to be combined with different subjects. For instance, in mathematics the concept of tithing can be used as a source of examples when teaching percentages or fractions. Physical education can be taught in a way that helps pupils to see themselves in holistic terms, involving their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. In science lessons pupils can learn about the fine tuning in the universe, in which so much is ‘just right’ for the development of human life. This anthropic principle provides a way of expressing God’s creative power and the sense of awe and wonder which appear in many biblical teachings. As Cooling has demonstrated, there is no denying that there are plenty of examples of how theological ideas can be combined with almost all subjects across the curriculum.
The second argument which distinguishes between catechesis and education raises more challenging concerns which are far harder to overcome. Hirst couches his concerns over the distinction between education and catechesis at a conceptual level. However, the concern here is a more challenging moral objection to catechetical or confessional forms of education. Given that education is concerned with fostering reason it would be morally unacceptable to attempt to hand on controversial and unknowable/unjustifiable religious claims to pupils as if there were knowable and justifiable in the way many other kinds of truth claims are. In more recent years this moral challenge has been reaffirmed and developed by Hand. (2003, 2004, 2012)

The trouble with beliefs imparted in this way is that they come to be held independently of relevant evidence and argument, and are thus highly resistant to rational criticism and revision. This sort of teaching is rightly regarded as indoctrinatory, and indoctrination is rightly condemned because to damage someone’s capacity to criticise and to revise her beliefs is to do her a kind of harm. (Hand, 2012, p. 551)

A theory of Catholic education that advocates a confessional account of education is faced with this moral objection. Of course one way of avoiding this objection would be to recognise and affirm a clear distinction between catechesis and education, and similarly to distinguish between confessional and non-confessional theories of Catholic education. In order to defend Catholic education as a sophisticated theory of education (akin to liberal education) it is necessary to reject the catechetical or confessional sense of Catholic education. The latter cannot be properly defended in the light of the indoctrination challenge. As such, persisting with it would undermine attempts to justify Catholic schooling.

**Why have philosophy lessons in Catholic schools?**

Once the meaning of Catholic education is not taken in confessional terms then the relevance of introducing compulsory philosophy can begin to crystallise into shape. This is because having compulsory philosophy lessons would be a practical way in which the Catholic school could guard against confessional education. These lessons would provide the opportunity for pupils to be challenged about their beliefs and values, both religious and secular. This is to attach an almost symbolic quality to philosophy lessons, in that they can be a way of ensuring pupils are enabled to be open minded and critically aware. The presence of philosophy
lessons in a Catholic school would be an apt way of signaling to pupils and the wider community that indoctrination or confessional education is not part of their raison d'être.

There is a further practical issue connected with introducing compulsory philosophy lessons into Catholic schools. In countries such as the UK the overwhelming majority of pupils in Catholic schools are children who have been baptised as infants and many of these come from homes where the intention is to bring them up as practising Catholics. These pupils are in a unique situation in that there is at least a tacit assumption that they will (hopefully) grow up to be believing members of the Catholic faith. Their parents and other members of the Catholic community would share this assumption and presume that the Catholic school has a role to play in helping parents to bring this about\textsuperscript{xi}. It could be argued that pupils in this situation are potentially at a higher risk of being indoctrinated. For these pupils it could be argued that their Catholic schooling needs to actively guard against their indoctrination. Through engaging with compulsory philosophy lessons the school is able to challenge these pupils to think through their beliefs and values. The school has a responsibility to provide a counter balance by offering space and opportunities for critical reflection within the curriculum. Compulsory philosophy lessons would be one practical way of achieving this and thus they would help to make sure that there is not even any tacit indoctrination happening in Catholic schools.

It is important to recognise the supposition at play in this argument about the complementary relationship between philosophy and Religious Education. One of the key roles of philosophy is to provide pupils with the opportunity to raise questions about human existence, rather than simply narrower ones about epistemology or matters of conceptual analysis. In contrast the role of Religious Education is to provide pupils with insight into the ways in which religions like Catholic Christianity respond to the fundamental questions of human existence. Of course this way of characterising the relationship philosophy and Religious Education has obvious resonances with the traditional Catholic approach to the inter-relationship between philosophy and theology. A distinctive feature of Catholic theology is a recognition of the importance of philosophy. There has even been tendency to refer to ‘Catholic philosophy’ as if there is Catholic version of philosophy\textsuperscript{v}, as opposed to Catholics who have engaged in philosophy or sought to use philosophy to frame theological arguments and beliefs\textsuperscript{vi}. Part of this is regarding philosophy as the handmaid or prerequisite to being able to engage in
theology. In terms of the school curriculum the introduction of compulsory philosophy lessons would better reflect this traditional Catholic approach.

Beyond these more practical reasons about the need to introduce philosophy into the curriculum of Catholic schools there are some substantive theological considerations that would add further weight to the argument. These considerations are wrapped up in fundamental or systematic theology which draws attention to the presence and significance of mystery in human existence. Here attention will be given to fundamental systematic Catholic theology. However, it ought to be noted that beyond this it could be argued that philosophy in schools could be used to justify or support the way Catholic schools contribute to the common good.

Various Catholic theologians, such as Karl Rahner (1976), have pointed out that mystery is one of the central issues in theology. In describing God as ‘other’ or beyond human comprehension is to draw attention to the profound mystery that lies at the heart of all talk about God. An aspect of this is found in the way Catholics frequently refer to various mysteries of their faith. Mysteries such as the Trinitarian nature of God or the incarnation or of transubstantiation are ubiquitous features of Catholic belief and practice. Catholic theology repeatedly points to the presence and significance of mystery in life. In terms of Catholic theology the presence of mystery in human existence serves as an indicator or reminder of God as the ultimate or absolute mystery. Like the horizon, which is always around us, we can live life hardly lifting our heads to notice it. However, when something mysterious occurs it can be like a trigger that forces us to think about the profound mysteries of human existence. This is not a simplistic attempt to equate every mystery with God but a more subtle theological claim that the mysteries of human life can allow us to ponder the more fundamental questions or issues of existence.

Although a detailed analysis of the concept of mystery is beyond the scope of his article, it should be noted that mystery is related to concepts such as puzzles, conundrums, secrets and unanswered questionsxii. The generic meaning of mystery pivots primarily around referring to anything that is kept secret or remains unknown and unexplained. ‘Mystery’ functions as a way of referring to the state or quality of being obscure, and as such it is often regarded as synonymous with a secret, puzzle, enigma, riddle or conundrum. An important characteristic is the way that ‘mystery’ is connected with stimulating or arousing curiosity, interest and a
sense of suspense because the facts of the matter are concealed. Mysteries can be placed into three categories that are built around a basic distinction between solvable and unsolvable mysteries. The first category contains mysteries that are solvable in practice. The second would be mysteries that are solvable in principle but perhaps not in practice. The third category contains mysteries that are unsolvable in principle. Although this classification can be readily spelt out the task of accurately classifying individual instances of mysteries is a far more complex and potentially contentious issue. Some mysteries such as the origin of Stonehenge or the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 in March 2014 might be candidates for being unsolvable mysteries. At a conceptual level there is nothing incoherent in maintaining that a mystery could never be solved. There is not a necessary connection between mysteries and their solvability. It is usually assumed that all mysteries are capable of being resolved, at least in principle and if given enough time and resources. This makes unsolvable in principle mysteries an intriguing and challenging idea. However, working out what would count as examples of mysteries that are unsolvable in principle is a far more difficult task than resolving intriguing puzzles. They would be more like conundrums in that they could not, even in theory, be uncovered. With unsolvable in principle mysteries a fundamental logical claim is at stake. For example, in the mystery about whether there is an edge or end point to space there are some logical and conceptual issues about whether space is something that could have an end point and whether it is even coherent to speak about a point beyond the ‘edge of space’. The mystery here reflects important logical issues thrown up in the very concept of space and as such it is impervious to any practical considerations about how to test it out in practice. Mysteries that are unsolvable in principle, more than other mysteries, are able to function as a starting point or threshold for engaging with theology. In large part this is because mysteries repeatedly trigger questions and issues that are closely connected with central theological themes. For example, the complexity of debates within religious language pivot on the ‘otherness’ of God. Human language is profoundly limited in attempting to speak of the ‘other’ and has to resort to apophatic utterances or nuanced analogies of attribution or of being. Similarly religious experiences frequently purport to involve some profound mystical experience of the ‘other’. A typical characteristic of theological discourse is to refer to the mysteries of the faith, such as the Trinity or Transubstantiation. Crucially theology offers enlightenment or a way of making sense of mystery whilst not removing or resolving what is mysterious. Theology offers an explanation or response to many of the profound mysteries of human existence. Not least by naming or identifying absolute mystery with God. The presence of mysteries, particularly ones which
are unsolvable in principle, are able to trigger issues which bring you to the threshold of theology. A further way in which mystery is a threshold to theology are the ways in which many aspects of Catholic faith remain mysteries and are not solvable even in the beatific vision. There is a relationship between appreciating mystery and the way that this can lead to being mystified (when faced with absolute or permanent mystery). Theology offers insights in how to make sense of this situation and in many instances offers a way of demystification.

Philosophy lessons would provide a practical way of ensuring that all pupils learnt how to recognise and think through the implications of mysteries in human existence. For eminently practical reasons pupils need to learn how to both recognise mysteries and be able to categorise them. The categorisation of mysteries is not a task that both clear and uncontroversial. This particularly true of the kinds of mysteries that are unsolvable in principal. This is because these mysteries, as perhaps instanced in the Kantian antinomies, are examples of the logical conundrums that philosophers typically consider. Philosophers before and after Kant have sought to grapple with these kinds of substantive logical quandaries. Indeed some philosophical training or experience of engaging in philosophy is normally a pre-requisite of being able to grapple with these issues. For these practical reasons pupils would need to do some philosophy in order to ensure that they could recognise and begin to work out the possible significance of unsolvable mystery. As part of this it would be necessary for pupils to be taught by teachers who had received some kind of philosophical training and who were sufficiently skilled in ‘doing’ or delivering philosophy. It might well be that many subject teachers would lack the philosophical training and the curriculum time available, to be able to draw attention to the unsolvable mysteries as they cropped up within their own subject. It would of course be possible for this to be tackled across the curriculum as a whole through individual subjects. In theory this is possible but in practice, particularly in the subject based curriculum in countries such at the UK, it is very difficult to achieve. Instances of cross-curricula themes such as citizenship, environmental awareness and spirituality all proved stubbornly difficult to implement. Given this, one practical way of overcoming these difficulties is to have philosophy lessons delivered by philosophy specialists. This is because philosophy is a particularly apt subject for drawing attention to logical puzzles and different kinds of mysteries. Philosophy is able to clarify the salient issues in the puzzles and problems that crop up in our attempts to make sense of our experiences. It can do this by drawing attention to the unsolvable mysteries that are present in the rest of the curriculum. Profound puzzles and mysteries will crop up in the course of many
subjects in the curriculum. In addition some unsolvable in principle mysteries are bubbling up beneath many themes in the curriculum as a whole and philosophy lessons would be practical opportunity for pupils to give them serious attention. In addition philosophy lessons would aim to both foster reason and to help pupils to critique it. The special quality of philosophy in this respect is drawn out in Pring’s observation that

Philosophy begins when one is systematically puzzled about what is meant by what is said and written. (Pring, 2008b, p.18)

In philosophy lessons pupils would be helped to recognise the inter-relationship between reason and unsolvable mystery. Hence this subject would provide a practical way for ensuring that the curriculum in a Catholic school did draw sufficient attention to unsolvable mystery.

The introduction of compulsory philosophy lessons is closely connected with what is distinctive about Catholic education. In that it would help to ensure that pupils did recognise that mystery is part-and-parcel of the human condition. Being able to recognise and appreciate this aspect of the human condition can play a role in bringing pupils to the threshold of theology. Given that a Catholic education is bound up with recognising mystery it is essential that pupils do not ignore it and learn how to distinguish between different kinds of mysteries in human existence.

It is here that the crucial characteristic of philosophy in the curriculum of Catholic school comes into sharper focus. In philosophy lessons pupils would learn that some mysteries are unsolvable in principle. These lessons would ensure that pupils appreciate and understand unsolvable mysteries and not simply learn how to recognise examples of them. There are some problems, such as the Kantian antinomies, that are in principle unsolvable. This is to affirm a tradition in philosophical reflection that draws attention to our inability to resolve all problems, puzzles and mysteries. Kant is able to use the antinomies in order to demonstrate the inherent tensions within the way reason functions and that there are limits to what can be known. This emphasis on the limitations of our knowledge is echoed in Wittgenstein’s often repeated observation that whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent. There are some things which we cannot speak about and this limitation needs to be recognised and accepted. One of the roles of philosophy lessons would be to work out where these limitations lie. There is here an echo of Socrates’ observation that the only true wisdom or knowledge is about coming to know that you know nothing. It is being maintained that an
important characteristic of philosophy lessons in Catholic schools would be to help pupils to be able to work out what is knowable and what is unknowable. The kind of philosophy that ought to be introduced into the curriculum of a Catholic school is one that engages pupils in the task of appreciating and understanding the significance of unsolvable mystery.

The principal aims of philosophy in Catholic schools can be listed as follows. First, these lessons would seek to engage pupils with the questions triggered by the presence of unsolvable mysteries in the rest of the curriculum. This is to pick up on and reinforce the teaching that pupils would have gained when learning about topics such as cosmology, atomic qualities or infinity. These topics provide apt opportunities for teachers to draw attention to unsolvable mysteries. To ensure that sufficient attention is given to this, philosophy lessons would provide a practical point in the curriculum to make sure that pupils did engage with the questions caused by these kinds of mysteries. Second, philosophy lessons would have the task of ensuring that pupils understand the inter-relationship between reason and unsolvable mystery. Part-and-parcel of this would be encouraging pupils to engage with the questions and issues that lie behind Kant’s *Critique of pure reason*. There are limits surrounding what can be known and this is because of the inherent self-destructive tendencies within the workings of reason. The problems that crop up in the Kantian antinomies are ones which will remain unsolvable as a matter of principle. These are not peripheral logical puzzles but issues that go to the heart of the critique of pure reason. There is, as Kant’s analysis demonstrated, something deeply puzzling or mysterious about the workings of reason. So these philosophy lessons would give, as Siegel (2008) recommended due regard to the teaching of epistemology as a distinct but fundamental sub-discipline in order to understand the way reason works.

A third aim of philosophy lessons would be to ensure that pupils developed an appreciation or awareness of why the presence of unsolvable mysteries matter. In practice this would be a more reflective part of the subject. It would be about encouraging pupils to think through and reflect on the possible significance of unsolvable mysteries and to raise questions about what this might imply or suggest about human existence. Part of this would be about recognising where the limits of philosophy lie and that other disciplines, such as theology, may well play a pivotal role in helping us to make sense of and respond to the presence of unsolvable mystery. In effect this is about fostering the disposition of humility when it comes to our knowledge claims. One practical consequence of introducing philosophy into Catholic
schools would be to foster a sense of humility amongst pupils regarding the extent of what we can know and hope to know. Challenging pupils about the need for some humility vis-à-vis our knowledge claims would be a striking counter-balance to the way that some other parts of the curriculum emphasise the human ability to know and make sense of everything we experience. Within the curriculum there is, understandably, an emphasis on inducting pupils into what is known. Hence these philosophy lessons would draw attention to where our reason and knowledge will inevitably break down. This is to foster humility amongst pupils through helping them to recognise both what is not known and what is in principle unknowable.

An important part of this would be introducing pupils to the salient aspects of Kant’s *Critique*, which would involve taking pupils through the limitations of both empiricism and rationalism. In effect philosophy in the Catholic school would be loosely built around the central themes in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 2003). This would be achieved through a problem-based approach in which discussion and reflection would figure prominently. For fairly obvious pedagogic reasons, it would not be a text that pupils read but its central themes would inform and guide the content of the philosophy lessons. This would be in order to equip pupils with a range of philosophical skills connected with logic and the construction and analysis of arguments. Kant drew attention to the importance of inferences in the exercise of reason and thinking. Philosophy in a Catholic school would involve making pupils aware of the kinds of inferences and cosmological ideas that are constructed in the lessons they experience on a day-to-day basis and the unsolvable mysteries they lead to.

Alongside this content this kind of philosophy would have a number of practical goals. The first would be about learning how to work out what would count as an unsolvable mystery. This would involve being able to classify and analyse different kinds of mysteries. The second would be about providing pupils with some curriculum time to be able to step back from what is learnt in the rest of the curriculum. One way of promoting this would be to mirror some of the pedagogic practices employed by P4C, such as getting pupils to work away from their desks and to focus on careful dialogue within a community of enquiry.

It is being argued that a broadly Kantian understanding of philosophy ought to be introduced as a compulsory part of the curriculum in Catholic schools. Obviously other philosophical approaches could be used. However, Kant is particularly helpful in drawing attention to the
mysterious nature of the workings of reason. As such it is an apt philosophical approach for drawing attention to the place of mystery. These philosophy lessons would be geared to helping pupils be attentive to unsolvable mysteries that are largely latently present within the rest of the curriculum. An intriguing feature of human existence is that there are some unsolvable mysteries. This can be used to trigger questions about what this means and what ought to be our response to the unknowable. The ability of philosophy to help in this regard is usefully drawn out by Pring’s observation that to

..teach young people to think philosophically is to nurture a sense of puzzlement, to encourage the search for clarification of meaning, to get them to realise the systematic nature of the confusion in the usage of key concepts, and to enable them to recognise the foundations of these misunderstandings in the traditional areas of philosophical enquiry. (Pring, 2008, p. 19)

These comments are a helpful indicator that philosophy is a highly apt subject for making pupils aware of not just puzzles but also of the profound unsolvable mysteries of human existence. The point of homing in on unsolvable mysteries is precisely because they can be overlooked or missed. According to Kant reason needs to be critiqued in order to recognise the self-destructive tendency within it. This is something which is often missed. Moreover, it is worth recalling that Kant deliberately set his discussion of the antinomies within his broader discussion of the dialectic or illusion. Just as theologians like Rahner explain it is all too easy not to notice the horizon of mystery that permeates human existence. Thus the introduction of compulsory philosophy lessons would play a practical role in ensuring that the Catholic school curriculum as a whole brings pupils to the point threshold, where the responses and answers of theology could be engaged with.

**Concluding comments**

When it comes to the debate surrounding whether or not philosophy ought to be a compulsory part of the school curriculum it is possible to identify a distinctive Catholic school perspective. It has been argued that a non-confessional Catholic school would want to introduce compulsory philosophy lessons in order to ensure that all pupils are given opportunities to think philosophically about their beliefs and values, both secular and religious. To safeguard against this tendency to catechise pupils compulsory philosophy lessons would provide pupils with the ongoing opportunity to engage with many of the mysteries that permeate human existence. In addition, introducing philosophy lessons into
the curriculum of Catholic schools could readily appeal to theological insights about the
significance of mystery in human existence. Catholic theology repeatedly seeks to draw
attention to the place of mystery in human existence. Recognising the mystery in human
existence is something that educators often fail to appreciate and philosophy lessons would be
an effective way of making sure that this did not happen in Catholic schools. Being attentive
to the place of mystery in human existence is not something that is exclusive to Catholicism.
It is something that all religions attempt to grapple with because it is a ubiquitous feature of
life. As such the arguments used in favour of implementing philosophy in Catholic schools
could be extended to include other kinds of faith schools and perhaps even all kinds of school.
If philosophy is to become a compulsory part of the curriculum it might well be that Catholic
schools ought to be leading the way.

References:
AQA examination board (2009). AS and A2 Philosophy specification, accessed on 20 July
Volume 36, Issue 4, pp. 545-557.
Education 1 (89), pp. 89-99.
Research in Education 2 (3), pp.343-353.
546-559.


Maritain, J 1940 Science and Wisdom, Scribner and Sons, London


*Acknowledgement: The author thanks the three anonymous referees and the advice from Doret de Ruyter, associate editor of the Journal of Philosophy of Education, for their comments on this article. This very helpful advice and practical help made it possible for me to improve on the earlier drafts of this article.

---

i SAPARE stands for the Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education, see www.sapere.org.uk.

ii Further information on The philosophy foundation is available online at http://www.philosophy-foundation.org/what-we-do/overview

iii The papal encyclical Divini Illius Magistri (1929) and the Vatican II declaration Gravissimum educationis (1965) justify the primary aims of Catholic education in terms of assisting parental rights to bring up their children as committed Catholic Christians.

iv I have argued elsewhere (Whittle 2014) in support of a non-confessional theory of Catholic education. Hand (2012) has also argued in support of the idea of non-confessional faith schools.

v Here it will be assumed that there is no significant difference between ‘Christian education’ and ‘Catholic education’. It could of course be argued that ‘Catholic education’ raises even more issues because it is concerned with not just fostering general Christian belief but also striving to make pupils committed to the Roman Catholic denomination of Christianity.

vi For more details on the Charis Project see www.johnshortt.org/Pages/Charis

vii For more details see www.whatiflearning.co.uk

viii For a helpful summary of further examples see Shortt (1999)

ix A standard defence of Catholic education is that parent’s have a right to bring up their children within their chosen faith and that the Catholic Church provides schooling to support them in this. It is spelt out in the Pius XI papal encyclical Divinis Ilius Magistri (1929) and more recently defended by McLaughlin (1990).

x It is interesting to note that even amongst leading neo-Thomists such as Jacques Maritain there is an apparent reticence about the notion of Christian philosophy. For instance he observes ‘How can I do otherwise than use the expression Christian philosophy? To tell the truth, I am scarcely enchanted by it’ and went on to add, If philosophy is considered in its
formal sense it is an activity of natural reason properly speaking and so no more Christian than pagan; by its own nature philosophy depends only on the evidence and criteria of natural reason. (1940 138)


xii For a fuller discussion of the definition of the concept of mystery see Chapter 7 of Whittle (2014), *A theory of Catholic education*, Bloomsbury, London.