An Analysis and Theological Critique of Education

Who Are We?

By

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Preface

Narratives of self, although often hidden, are embedded in any school assessment and testing regime's documentation, in day-to-day teaching practice, and in all educational dialogue and policy. Furthermore, these (hidden) ontological hegemonies – that can never be neutral - affect the wellbeing of those on the frontline of education. It will be argued, however, that it is possible for staff, policy makers and academics to uncover these hegemonies, explore counter-narratives and transform school curriculum in the light of these reformed narratives of self.

This book will also seek to demonstrate the extent to which the faculty of theology can read and respond to contemporary educational ontological axioms with conviction and honesty as a rational and relevant body. This will be exercised via the genealogical analysis of Radical Orthodoxy (RO) - an academic, persuasive and polemical sensibility - and through the prayerful and relational aspiration of the contemplative tradition. It will be argued that both theological bodies offer something unique and profound to educational awareness and reform. Both also assume a particular narrative of self (labelled here as the *complex relational* self) that will challenge the contemporary hidden ontological hegemony that was uncovered in the research (referred to here as the *atomistic economic* self).

The test is therefore whether a non-violent, reasoned and fertile theology can successfully challenge normative ontological suppositions in education, encourage further action research and improve the wellbeing of those on the frontline.

Glossary of terms and abbreviations

Atomistic economic self – The self is said to be *atomistic* because the person is a self-created, self-regulated, individualised agent who possesses independent will and volition. The self is *economic* because the person's telos is bound to finance, competition, data, employability, measurable results and production.

Complex relational self - The self is said to be *complex* because ultimately the person is not fully knowable; the self is formed through a myriad of different convoluted causes including the social, psychological and experiential. The self is *relational* because for the people of the Christian contemplative tradition, persons are bound by relationship, held within relationship and born for relationship; with God, self and other.

Contemplative tradition - The Christian contemplative tradition that has its heart in silence, prayer and the peaceful transfiguration of person and community.

CPD – Continual Development Programme.

Framework (2014/15) – Ofsted's Framework of School Inspection.

IR – Ofsted's Inspection Report. In this instance the Inspection Report of the participant's school in 2013. For reasons of anonymity, the published report cannot be openly referenced. I would add, however, that my citations from the report are consistent with the overarching ethos of the aforementioned Frameworks.

Narratives of Self - Refers to how we identify ourselves to others and/or how others identify themselves to us. Put differently, the phrase 'narrative of self' will be used to explain how being is represented in policy and practice by different bodies.

Neutrality – Within this book, the word neutrality refers mainly to any mistaken notion that a narrative of self requires no explanation, is self-evident or is universally agreed upon.

Ofsted – Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills in the UK. Ofsted inspect services providing education and skills for learners of all ages. They also inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people. It is a non-ministerial department.

Ontos - Within this book, the words Ontos, Ontological or Ontology refer here to our substantive beliefs about who we are; the deep or primordial account of being - the level of being.

RO – Radical Orthodoxy: A Christian theological school of thought who posit a genealogical thesis of modernity. RO write an innovative, broad and controversial genealogy as a means for understanding contemporary thought and practice including current narratives of self and theologies decline in public secular society.

SIH – Ofsted's School Inspection Handbook.

SSP – The Study of Self and Purpose. This is a proposal for further action research.

Telos - Within this book, the words telos, teleological or teleology mainly refer to the ends or purpose of state education.

Wellbeing – Wellbeing is broadly defined as comfortable, healthy and happy. Within this book, the lack of wellbeing refers to the 'disconnection', 'dissatisfaction', and 'unfulfillment', felt by staff, students and parents in the school environment. These three classifications have been lifted from Cavanaugh's book on the economic life (2008, pp. vii – x) and will be explained more fully in chapter five as a means of developing the notion of the *atomistic economic* self.

Introduction

An initial premise: narratives of self and educational purpose

Whenever we ask the question, "what is the purpose of education?" we are asking, "what is the purpose of educating human beings?" and any sincere answer to this question can only be advanced following our reflections upon the interrelated question, "what do we mean by being human?"

Contrary to an apparent assumption, our narratives of self (the level of representing being) cannot be divorced from the purpose of education. The notion of curriculum telos[1] is intrinsically and unavoidably assimilated with our ontological imagination (the primordial level of being). Our telos rests upon our ontological mind and the suppositions of *who we are* underpin everything else within education. Put another way, the answer to the question 'who are we?' will be evident in every policy, practice and dialogue because each particular thought, decision, desire or idea and every relationship forged is essentially wed to a supposition of self. There is as such an inextricable marriage between our visions of self and the purpose of pedagogy.

To be clear: the words Ontos, Ontological or Ontology refer here to our substantive beliefs about who we are; the deep or primordial account of being. A narrative of self will refer to how we identify ourselves to others and/or how others identify themselves to us. Put differently, the phrase 'narrative of self' will be used to explain how being is represented in policy and practice by different bodies. In short, we both recognise ourselves to be something (a level of being: ontos) and express this something to others (the level of representation: the narrative of self). The identification and the representation of self can occur both implicitly and explicitly. A more

[1] Within this book the words telos, teleological or teleology mainly refer to the ends or purpose of state education. A more comprehensive account will be developed through the chapters.

developed meaning for both these interconnected concepts will become clearer as this book unfolds.

To illustrate the link between and the importance of (hidden) narratives of self and educational purpose consider the following examples. If we think of pupils as created beings, gifts one to another whose existence is enriched and sustained only in relationship with one another and the world they inhabit, then any final vision of educational purpose and thus what it might mean, say, to 'achieve' will be very different from thinking of pupils as individuals whose final aim is directed towards economic advantage. Alternatively, if we adopted an Ultra-Darwinian perspective in which the self is imagined as a selfish self-perpetuating gene machine then the concept of 'achievement' will change again. Or should we see ourselves through the ideals of a Neo-Marxist or through Durkheim's sociologically informed perspective or the lens of a psychological behaviourist then the meaning of 'achievement' (school vision and telos) will be distinctly different in each case. Who we are is clearly allied to what our purpose is.

These simple examples illustrate not only this link and why the question of self matters but also for the need for transparency of ontological language and conceptual clarity; a need, in other words to be precise when we answer the question "who are we"? For if there is no default position or neutral[2] standpoint from which to postulate or interpret the meaning of language of self in education - a claim that is fundamental to this book - then words such as *pupil, progress, achievement, respect and vision* (all taken from Ofsted's Framework for School Inspection, 2015) will remain vacuous and open therefore to spurious construal. It will be shown in chapter one that this is the unfortunate situation as it stands. Consequently, the fundamentals of educational purpose and of teaching practice are grounded quite ominously upon the (hidden) ontological hegemonies[3] that are rarely addressed but that determine quite radically the wellbeing of

[2] By 'neutral' I mean any mistaken notion that a narrative of self requires no explanation, is self-evident or is universally agreed upon.

[3] Broadly speaking 'hegemony' refers to a power that lies behind a particular instance. That they are often considered 'hidden' in this book is the suggestion that the power is not explicit or obvious. A 'hidden ontological hegemony' therefore indicates a narrative of self that can be discovered in school often only through the uncovering of what is normally only implicit, assumed or falsely deemed neutral.

those on the frontline. Wellbeing is broadly defined as comfortable, healthy and happy. Within this book, the lack of wellbeing refers to the 'disconnection', 'dissatisfaction', and 'unfulfillment', felt by staff, students and parents in the school environment. These three classifications have been lifted from Cavanaugh's book on the economic life (2008, pp. vii – x) and will be explained more fully in chapter five as a means of developing the notion of the *atomistic economic* self; a narrative of self to be introduced shortly.

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills in the UK. Ofsted inspect services providing education and skills for learners of all ages. They also inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people. It is a non-ministerial department. Within this book I will refer to three key documents which are written by this body. The first is the Inspection Report. This is a report written by Ofsted for a particular educational provider following an inspection. This is a judgement based report which assesses the performance of the providers. I will also refer to Ofsted's Frameworks of School Inspection. These are public documents that provide the rationale and ethos behind school inspections. The School Inspection Handbook is the third publication and is particularly helpful for leaders in education. This document is a detailed account of what it is that Ofsted will inspect when they visit a school. Ofsted will determine when to inspect and how often they inspect any particular institution. This is a decision that is discretionary and based upon the performance of the school during the last inspection, the amount of time that has passed without an inspection and other possible causes for concern.

I am aware that there will be equivalent bodies to Ofsted in different countries and states and encourage the reader to draw upon these equivalents wherever necessary. The argument that I make does not depend upon a reader being familiar with Ofsted or living in the UK. Ofsted can be substituted for any institution that is charged with the development of educational policy and/or inspection. Indeed, wherever there is policy language there will be a narrative of self that underscores it.

The unbreakable marriage between self and purpose and the need therefore for ontological transparency is a premise that is central to this book. If this premise can be substantiated then it should be of both surprise and deep concern that whilst policy makers such as Ofsted, pedagogical experts and staff ask questions about the purpose of education (at least sometimes) that they/we also appear to have become a body incapable of examining or questioning 'who we are' with any measure of candour or urgency.

This correlation between ontos and telos is succinctly implied in different academic writings – brilliantly captured for instance in Taylor's seminal work, Sources of the Self in which the link between theoretical frameworks (such as the *ontological* naturalist reduction) and the place of these frameworks in our lives (particularly the moral space of our lives: *wellbeing*) is introduced (1989, pp. 25-27). It is these 'frameworks' for Taylor that 'provide the background, explicit or implicit, for our moral judgements, intuitions, or reactions' (1989, p. 26). However, such connections are seemingly copious by their absence in education if my experience of teaching is representative and my investigation into policy document in chapter one reliable. This study seeks to address this absence by calling for a collective shift in what Taylor calls our horizons of significance; the way in which we see and value certain things (1989, pp. 27-28). This suggests a need to be aware of and question our perceptions of identity and to be potentially changed because of such deepening awareness and questioning. Taylor suggests that such study will involve historical investigation (p. 28) – thus in chapter two of this book a genealogical account of the modern self will be introduced – and an exploration 'of fundamental orientation … a society of interlocutors' (p. 29) – thus in chapter eight, a programme designed to encourage teachers to explore the question of self in education is presented.

To be clear – because upon this premise rests the entire book – there is an indissoluble link between ontos and telos. This claim is made upon an obvious and self-evident truth; that where we find the aims of a human institution, there also we will find the human. There simply cannot be human purpose without also a human narrative. Yet often a narrative of self (the representation of being in policy and practice) is hidden or inferred

and frequently the interrelated ontological assumption (the primordial belief of who we are) is not considered or questioned at all by policy makers and practitioners. It is here that lies the problem, or at very least the potential for a very different object of focus. This book seeks to situate this different object of focus in three ways.

Firstly, by uncovering certain (hidden) ontological hegemonies in education, introducing a theological counter-ontological account and hypothetically applying this different narrative to policy, practice and dialogue.

Secondly, by encouraging staff to research and reflect upon narratives of self and explore how the application of counter-narratives might improve the wellbeing of the students and staff at school.

Thirdly, by stirring policy makers and researchers to seek the possibilities of reform by beginning with the question of who we are.

An initial teaching experience: or lack thereof

I have been a teacher in the state sector since 2003. Throughout these years, I cannot recall any strategic conversation, CPD session (continual professional development), meeting or directed time in which the question of self has been at the forefront. Albeit only an anecdotal observation it has also been my experience that this question is not one that is discussed much within the teaching profession in less formal settings either. This can partly be explained by a complete lack of clarification, definition or instruction to explore the question of self in Ofsted's directives, by a general lack of desire or time to explore the notion in school and also perhaps by the false assumption of ontological neutrality. This silence and reticence is peculiar and concerning, however, because the goal and purpose of education will always be underscored by a narrative that with closer inspection will betray certain ontological prejudices; an assumed and often unchallenged predilection about what it means to be human (quite possibly without any awareness of this oversight). Whilst in education generally there is quite clearly a continual drive to 'improve' and 'achieve', and presumably this entails a conceived purpose, at the same time we have become completely

mute on the ontological question and that should strike us as alarming (Radcliffe, 2005, p. 140).

The hypotheses, research questions and intended audiences

This book can best be understood as the testing of hypotheses. These hypotheses are motivated by a combination of experience and academic persuasion; my teaching experience and engagement with theology. Through testing these hypotheses, a critical response is invited to both a broad conviction – that we need to ask "who are we?" – and to a narrow instance – a theological analysis of the experiences of participants at a particular school and Ofsted documentation. The reason and method for this testing will be explained more fully in chapter four. It is necessary now, however, to clarify these hypotheses, the proceeding research questions and the intended audiences.

The hypotheses

The question of 'who we are' should not and cannot be ignored in education. Narratives of self unavoidably permeate school culture whether they are hidden or transparent. These ontological hegemonies are embedded in policy making documents such as Ofsted's Framework for School Inspection 2014 and 2015 (Framework) and the School Inspection Handbook (SIH), are lived out daily in the curriculum and subsequently affect the wellbeing of those in the frontline (staff, students and parents). These notions of self are not neutral or default but are always contingent[4].

It is possible, however, for staff, policy makers and academics to engage in ontological research; that is to say an exploration into and recognition of the substantive primordial level of being that is assumed in education (often only implicitly). Through discussion and re-imagination, radically different educational hinterlands could be developed as predicated upon the centrality of the question of self. Such a venture would depend upon a

[4] Having a beginning and an end and dependent/conditional upon a myriad of historical factors.

shared commitment to explore narratives of self, to uncover current (hidden) narratives and to apply opposing counter-narratives to pedagogy.

The Christian theologies of the contemplative tradition and Radical Orthodoxy have the potential to enrich this conversation if presented in a rational, peaceful and dialogical spirit. The contemplative tradition has its heart in silence, prayer and the peaceful transfiguration of person and community, RO is a rigorous and intellectually stimulating school of thought whose genealogical thesis of modernity is innovative, broad and controversial. A fuller account of both is provided in chapter two but in short they provide an explanation for current normative ontological values discovered through research and offer a distinctive counter-narrative of self. Such theological wisdom has the potential to offer unique transformative ideas germane to policy, practice and dialogue and thus to improve the wellbeing of those in the frontline[5]. That RO and the contemplative tradition are distinct, should not be read to mean that they are incompatible. On the contrary, for both RO and the contemplatives, theology proper begins and ends in prayerful silence and transforms praxis.

The research questions

The four research questions below were written as means to test these hypotheses in a more precise and methodical practice; a way of realising the aims and values of this book.

1. Is there any evidence of a (hidden) narrative of self within Ofsted documentation and within a particular school and what are the effects of this narrative upon the wellbeing of those in the frontline?
2. Can the Christian contemplative tradition and/or Radical Orthodoxy help to explain any (hidden) narratives of self in Ofsted documentation and within a particular school?

[5] Such a re-evaluation of culture as grounded upon reformed narratives of self are considered to be relevant not only to education, but to many areas of public life including perhaps health care, the prison system and business.

3. Can the Christian contemplative tradition and/or Radical Orthodoxy justify its public relevance as interlocutor in educational dialogue and in what spirit should it participate in any such educational dialogue?
4. What might further action research look like and can the Christian contemplative tradition and/or Radical Orthodoxy offer any insights stemming from a counter-narrative of self that might enrich this study?

The testing of the hypotheses through the research questions founded the basis of the research.

The intended audiences

In its completion, this book is submitted so that it might be tested/judged by different interested and relevant parties. This includes three intended audiences who will be referred to explicitly in my writing due to their obvious contributions to this book. A fourth group of miscellaneous audiences will also be named here as an example of those who might also potentially find something of worth to evaluate.

The first intended audience is the school of the participants. I am very grateful to the school for allowing me to interview a selection of participants and hope that their words will be the inspiration for further reflection and analysis. Chapter eight is an outline for further action research that might be adopted as a means to positively transforms policy, classroom practice and dialogue should the school wish to pursue this line of thinking.

The second intended audience is Ofsted as policy maker. The language of selective terminology taken from Ofsted documentation has been carefully interpreted and narratives of self extracted from this reading. This interpretative account has been analysed together with the words of the participants. An intention of this book is to situate this specific case study as a part of a more universal concern and it is imagined therefore that Ofsted would deem this wholly relevant to their own reflections. The reader should note that the term ‘case’ refers here to the obtaining and

analysis of participant data at a specific time and place to test a phenomenon/hypothesis; namely, that ontological hegemonies are embedded in policy making documents, are lived out daily in the curriculum and subsequently affect the wellbeing of those in the frontline (staff, students and parents).

The third intended audience is the pedagogical expert. If the expert is convinced by the hypotheses then the ramifications for research, policy and practice are marked. If the expert is not convinced that narratives of self are unavoidable or that my writing allows them too much prominence, then this too would make for a welcome critique. The pedagogical expert, as inclined towards evaluation and transformation within education, might thereby measure this book within their own academic endeavours. That this research is placed in the context of Performativity, Lesson Study, the thinking of Lawrence Stenhouse and the wisdom of selective theology should substantiate its academic rationale and interest. It is also situated in the company of those studies that have designed to uncover (hidden) hegemonies of one kind or another in education (see below) and this too might be of interest to the pedagogical expert.

That three audiences have been identified should not negate the fundamental claim that narratives of self are essentially impossible to bypass in public service more widely. These may include for example health care providers, prison services, political institutions and businesses. The broad stroke of this book therefore widens the scope of appeal to any expert, policy maker or researcher interested in the deep and profound marriage between our notions of ontos and telos and the effect of these narratives upon people's wellbeing. Other potentially interested readers might also include the religious, non-academics, parents, other school leaders and perhaps most especially the participants who took the time to be interviewed.

Acknowledging the decline of the status of theology

Three of the research questions listed above encompass theological reasoning. They include an attempt to explain current narratives of self in education, the offering of a counter-narrative and an investigation into a

favourable spirit for theological analysis. Significantly, theology is also charged in this book with justifying its public relevance as interlocutor. There is a sound reason for taking the time to include this justification because evidently there has been a huge change over the past few hundred years in regards to the credibility and perceived relevance of theology in the public and academic domain. David Bentley-Hart writing with idiosyncratic verve expresses the matter in this necessarily extended quote taken from an article written for the online site 'FirstThings' in 2006:

'The long, inglorious, forced retreat of religious reasoning from the commanding heights of civic and legal culture has certainly been hastened by the displacement of theology from the centre of the modern university's curriculum. Once, in an age now rapidly receding into legend, theology enjoyed the status not merely of a science but of the "queen of the sciences,"… Now, though, her estate is much diminished. In most private institutions of higher learning, she may be tolerated, but she is rarely invited to dine at the high table, and is not encouraged to show herself when company comes to call'.

Bentley-Hart goes on to describe in ironic voice the common contemporary perception of religion as 'personal conviction, irrational, saccharine sentiment, childish, vague, vacuous, zealous, private, tribal and arbitrary' (2006). None of this will come as any surprise to those who have encountered the popular literature of the 'New Atheists' (Dennett, Hitchens, Dawkins et al). Dawkins for instance stated bluntly that faith is, 'evil precisely because it requires no justification, and brooks no argument' (2006, p. 308) and Dennett seemingly relegates religion to a basic belief comparable to belief in fairies in his book 'Breaking the Spell' (2006).

Writing for a different reason, Rowan Williams, who was then Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote about the inescapable failure of any archbishop who might commentate on public matters. If the work were too biblical, he wrote, then the comment would be seen as irrelevant. If it were too secular then the complaint would be that he lack expertise. Should the work be too academic and the language deemed esoteric then it would be incomprehensible and if it were considered too exclusive (sex, family) then the writing would be thought of as lacking moral depth. Should the topic

be thought too broad (education?) then an exploration might be thought of as extraneous. Either way, warns Williams cautiously, the commentary would be doomed to failure in the eyes of most (2012, p. 1).

There are two very clear examples relevant to my own experience as a student and as a teacher that illustrate the ever-declining weight of theological thought. Firstly, the University that awarded my doctorate did not have a theology department. Secondly, Religious Education or Religious Philosophy and Ethics is not considered by the contemporary government to be a relevant enough faculty to be included in the GCSE English Baccalaureate (EBacc) – the government wishing 90% of pupils to be completing this EBacc by 2025. It is not a surprise therefore that numbers taking the GCSE are falling.

Perhaps therefore a word of caution is afforded the writer whose research into contemporary education involves a theological analysis. This is exactly why the inclusion of theology must first be vindicated and in testing the hypotheses to proffer theology as a highly demanding and rational discipline. It is also with Williams to hope that the writing here is interesting enough for someone to evidence the faults and work out a better response (2012, p. 1).

My intention is not to enter the debate about to what degree the University should accommodate theology or theology the University. Nor is it to evaluate the claims of Hart or Williams. Nor is it now to explore the legitimacy of a 'rational' theological voice in the public square - although this analysis will be advanced in chapters two and three. It is really only to state what appears to be obvious. There has been a consistent waning in the influence of theology in Universities and a rebuttal of theology as rational academic faculty. Furthermore, there has also been a change in influence of theology in the public square so much so that an Archbishop of Canterbury felt it necessary to write a book on justifying theological integrity (Williams, 2012).

The salient point to be made here in the simplest way possible is that theology, for good or for ill, is not considered as vital or relevant as it once was in public matters or academia. I accept fully here the extremely vague

nature of this comment, deliberately recoil from assessing the often subtle relationship between religion and state and recognise the historical complexity behind these fundamental changes that are not even mentioned here in passing. The scope of this book is necessarily less ambitious, however, to conclude that theological reasoning 'is rarely invited to dine at the high table' is not one that is overly controversial but it is a premise central to this book. The aim is that my writing might map a fecund path for potential educational reform founded upon a theologically inspired ontological reading having simultaneously made the case for the relevance of theology as rational interlocutor in the public square.

The broader academic context: hidden hegemonies in education[6]

It will be clear from the hypotheses that this book is interested in narratives of self and in part the uncovering of (hidden) ontological hegemonies in documentation and experience. As such, it is contextualised within a far wider academic desire to unearth what is not always obvious in education. The intention now is to introduce a number of academic studies that have sought to uncover a variety of (hidden) hegemonies in education. These studies span different decades, are deliberately introduced in a fleeting manner and are not always subject to the UK. The point is not to detail them, engage with them directly or to critique them but to bring to the fore these historical investigations as examples of educational research that seek to expose hidden prejudice. In so doing, it is to justify this book. In other words, the case for investigating a (hidden) ontological hegemony in education is one that is inspired by other academics who have aimed to uncover the unobvious or veiled realities of educational policy, practice and dialogue. These studies have the further advantage of demonstrating the myth of linguistic neutrality - a theme that is extremely relevant to this book.

There have been a number of papers on the hidden curriculum in education. For instance Jackson (1968) wrote on the particulars of virtue

[6] By hidden hegemony, I am suggesting a particular power or dominating philosophy that is not made explicit.

and character buried within the curriculum, Dreeben (1967) on the disaffirmation of personal identity and acceptance of ruling principles, Vallance (1973) on the more social and cultural consequences of school life and Martin (1976) exposed amongst other findings the teacher's embedded and prejudiced vernacular.

More specifically the ethnocentric curriculum has also been investigated. Tryona and Williams (1986) wished to expose a priority to white culture in UK schools. This claim was buoyed by papers such as that written by David (1993) on the national curriculum's negation of non-European language and literature, Ball's (1994) study of History text books that appeared to situate England as a powerful empire and Coard's (2005) book on how the curriculum might explain the underachievement of minorities.

The hidden issue of ethnicity was highlighted in American schools by Bereiter and Engelmann (1968) who argued that the language used by low-income black students hindered their academic performance and by Lawrence (1982) who argued that black pupils fail because of racism. Eighteen years later Gillborn and Youdell (2000) contended that teachers were quicker to discipline black pupils than white pupils that led to a spiral of poor performance and Wright (1992) stressed that the ethno-centric views of teachers who upheld British culture also isolated Asian students and particularly Asian girls.

Further evidence of hidden attitude was unearthed in the field of gender. Francis (2001) posited the thesis that teachers have lower expectations of boys than girls that built upon the findings of Swann and Graddol (1994) who expressed concern that teachers interact with girls more positively than with boys. It was not only teachers' attitudes towards gender that eventuated in differentiated performance, however, but also on social class according to Cicourel and Kituse (1963), Hyman (1967) Feinstein (1998) and Reay (2017). Similarly, cultural deprivation accounted for lower performance in school for Douglas (1964) and material deprivation had the same result for Howard (2001) and Tanner (2003).

The research into hidden hegemonies and attitudes in education is evidently vast and the importance of these historical investigations is

obvious. These particular papers have been identified because the question of self lies often implicitly and sometimes explicitly in these studies regardless of whether they are concerned with gender, ethnicity, class or economic advantage. Such (hidden) ontological hegemonies of course are not always obvious and thus require a directed process to uncover them.

My own concern is with Ofsted's (hidden) ontological parlance and narrative of self and the school experiences of the participants included in this research (four students, five teachers and one parent). This research is therefore vindicated in the shadow and breadth of historic academic theses that have sought to explore hidden hegemonies in education. This book differs in its specific venture: ontological reasoning and the narrative of self. This is because whether acknowledged or not, whether by design or neglect, a story of self will always be active within educational reform and our reluctance to discuss the question of self will transpire in confusion, indifference or apathy. Arguably, it is this indifference or confusion that has allowed the strongest principalities[7] of contemporary thought to imbed questionable ontological values in educational pedagogy – narratives of self that necessarily affect the wellbeing of staff and students - and this is exactly why a study such as this is necessary.

An outline of chapters

Within chapter one, a selection of papers that challenge the culture of 'performativity'[8] in education is introduced. The purpose is to situate this book in the context of the action research already published in regards to performativity and to indicate how a study centred upon narratives of self might develop the valuable insights that these authors make. During the second part, a small selection of key terminology used by Ofsted is extracted and interpreted. The purpose is to identify a (hidden) narrative of self.

[7] Or (hidden) hegemonies.

[8] The culture of performativity was coined by Stephen Ball to describe the obsession in schools with data, measures of performance, testing, grades etc.

In the final analysis, what was unearthed was both a perceived *neutrality* of self and what was termed the *atomistic economic* self. Broadly speaking, *atomistic* suggests a self-created, self-regulated, individualised agent who possesses independent will and volition. The word *economic* suggests a self whose telos is bound to employability, competition, data, measurable results and production. The notion of the *atomistic economic* self is clearly complex, however, and its meaning will be developed throughout this book through reference to educational and theological insights. Significantly, the reader should note that the identification of this narrative in Ofsted's vernacular occurred concurrently with an analysis of the words of the participants. Marking the *atomistic economic* self was thus the process of two distinct methods; interpreting documentation and analysing participant transcripts.

Within chapter two, a review of the ontological parlance of RO and the contemplative tradition is made. From this reading, a counter-ontological narrative labelled the *complex relational* self is advanced. The self is said to be *complex* because ultimately the person is not fully knowable; the self is formed through a myriad of different convoluted causes including the social, psychological and experiential. The self is *relational* because for the people of the Christian contemplative tradition, persons are bound by relationship, held within relationship and born for relationship; with the Divine, self and other. In future chapters, this theological narrative of self is developed and positioned as a competing notion to the *atomistic economic* self. Secondly, a selected reading of RO's genealogical thesis[9] is introduced to account for the advent of Ofsted's perceived *neutrality* and *atomistic economic* self. Finally, the decline and privatisation[10] of theological ontological integrity in the public square is examined and challenged via the RO lens.

[9] 'Genealogical thesis refers to the arguments brokered by RO as founded upon their reading of historical events. Put differently, RO are concerned with reading modern axioms and values as determined by the past.

[10] 'Privatisation' in this context means that religious thought and theology is considered to be a private lifestyle choice. As such, it should hold no influence and should be granted no time within public dialogue.

Chapter three is concerned with the public place and spirit of theological ontological reason and more exactly as interlocutor in educational reform. Selected philosophical and theological critiques of RO are first outlined. The purpose is to highlight both the depth and profundity of the RO thesis particularly and theology more broadly, whilst also pointing towards certain shortcomings. The spirit of theology is then re-considered through a reading of the contemplative tradition and four modern theologians. It is argued that these thinkers successfully endorse theology as rational, non-violent[11], dialogical and worthy in this spirit of a public voice.

The aim of chapter four is two-fold. Firstly, it is to justify the use of case study research in action research and to vindicate the case study as a method that strategically addresses several hypotheses introduced above[12]. Secondly, it is to outline the specific processes of the research and to explain briefly how the case study instance led to three primary themes being extracted from the participant data[13].

Chapters five and six are based upon the participant interviews.

Within chapter five, the participants will be shown to share the narrative of the *complex* self and the conviction that further ontological investigations are worth pursuing in school. These interviews also pertain to further evidence of Ofsted's (hidden) narrative of self – the *economic* self. Key themes drawn from the participant interviews are then analysed via RO's

[11] By 'non-violent' I mean to suggest that theology is not written in an attempt to win the argument at all costs but is written in a spirit of friendship in difference and dialogical offering.

[12] More specifically 'Narratives of self unavoidably permeate school culture whether they are hidden or transparent. These ontological hegemonies are embedded in policy making documents (Ofsted's Frameworks and School Inspection Handbook), are lived out daily in the curriculum and subsequently affect the wellbeing of those in the frontline (staff, students and parents). It is possible, however, for staff, policy makers and academics to engage in ontological research. The Christian theologies of the contemplative tradition and Radical Orthodoxy have the potential to enrich this conversation if presented in a rational, peaceful and dialogical spirit'.

[13] i) There was a common participant desire to explore the complex self.

ii) There was a common participant awareness of a dominant atomistic economic narrative.

iii) There was a shared participant concern that the atomistic economic narrative was detrimental to wellbeing.

critique of economic life. The aim of this analysis is to substantiate and develop a more nuanced notion of the *economic* self and to allow the participants to speak their concerns and anxieties in the light of an academic theological analysis.

Within chapter six, the marriage between narratives of self and wellbeing is made clear. Here the connection between Ofsted's ontological assumptions and the negative effects upon teacher and student wellbeing is disclosed. Next, the *complex relational* self of the contemplatives challenges the contemporary adoption of the *atomistic economic* self. This is cemented through a speculative application of this narrative to pedagogy and suggests that theologically inspired designs can deepen the possibility for long-term educational reform.

Moving from the participants to Ofsted, chapter seven begins by drawing upon RO's genealogical thesis with the principle purpose of examining the lack of ontological transparency in Ofsted's documents. The second goal is to imagine further possible transformations to elements of school culture by applying the theological *complex relational* counter-narrative of self over and against Ofsted's *atomistic economic* preference. During the final part of this chapter, a contemplative insight is identified as a means to encourage the risks of radical pedagogical changes so far proposed. It is to entertain the idea that a particular wisdom unique to the contemplatives might embolden others to consider and partake in action school research.

Chapter eight outlines this suggestion for further action research. It is a proposition for a programme called "The Study of Self and Purpose" (SSP). It is a proposal through which a school might choose to explore and transform the ontological dynamics that infuse its culture. It is recommended that these transformations can best be achieved by reflecting first upon the language of Ofsted and the words of the participants before exploring and applying counter-narratives of self to policy, practice and dialogue. The conviction that a theological vision might help to deepen this conversation is also addressed. That SSP is supported by referring to