

Religion, Philosophy and Values Education.....

# Dialogue

## Australasia

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## Contents

### The Bedales Assessed Course in Philosophy, Religion and Ethics

Clare Jarmy – Petersfield

### Teaching Evolution whilst Acknowledging Creationism

Michael Reiss – London

### Beyond Stewardship? Biblical Texts and Environmental Ethics

David Horrell and Anna Davis – Exeter

### How do we know right from wrong?

Jane Caro, Antony Loewenstein, Simon Smart and Rachel Woodlock

### Utilitarianism: An Overview for Secondary Students

Stephen Law – London

### Teaching the Holocaust: 'Safely in and safely out'

Terry McDevitt – Adelaide

### Learning Optimism – Faith and Positive Psychology in an Educational Setting

Eleanor O'Donnell – Geelong

### The Chaplain as Teacher

Ronald Noone – Melbourne

### Review of Saving Jesus Redux:

### A Jesus for the 21st Century

Nikolai Blaskow – Canberra

### Cover Image:

*Jerusalem above, the temple within* – Michael Strum

Digital Print on Canvas, 2013 Blake Prize Art Finalist

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### Editorial Policy:

*Dialogue Australasia Journal* is a twice yearly publication committed to improving the academic standards of Religious, Philosophy and Values Education in Australasia. It is intended that the articles for the journal should:

- Be broadly representative of the 'Five Strands'
- Contain material that is compatible with the Purposes and Aims of DAN
- Be non-confessional and non-denominational
- Target secondary teachers
- Nourish the target audience and equip with practical teaching resources

## From The Editor:

'...we are an educational institution before all things.'

So concludes the article *Learning Optimism*, the Reverend Eleanor O'Donnell's excellent appraisal of the role of Positive Psychology at Geelong Grammar School and its compatibility with the educational aims of the school, Religious Studies and Chaplaincy programs. This usefully serves to again remind us that what we teach in the classroom – in all disciplines - must advance the larger goals of *education*. And whatever we understand this to be, it is certainly *not* indoctrination, nor the transmission of lovely warm fuzzy feelings. And yet regrettably, instances of this narrow vision still undermine not only teaching theory and practice, but the very nature of the vocation of Chaplaincy itself. Thus Ron Noone has reason to write an article for this 31<sup>st</sup> Issue of *Dialogue Australasia* journal addressing why and how the teaching of RaVE is perfectly compatible with the Chaplaincy role.

For teachers of RaVE wanting to escape the stifling constriction of a formulaic approach to the subject, Clare Jarmy's article is a must read. Under the unassuming title *The Bedales Assessed Course in Philosophy, Religion and Ethics*, she describes an approach to teaching that enlarges, rather than narrows horizons, while maintaining an uncompromising commitment to intellectual rigour. Dr Christopher Hamilton, Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion, King's College London, rates the Bedales PRE course as combining 'the best in traditional teaching with exciting and imaginative work to help develop students' own creative thinking. The course is rigorous but open-minded, and opens up to students the value of reflecting for themselves on some of the perennial problems of the human condition.'

An open and expansive approach to teaching and learning works two ways. Pluralism does more than enshrine progressive views; it also takes seriously the views of others, even if they are worldviews completely out of sync with established scientific and historical thinking. Michael Reiss' *Teaching Evolution whilst Acknowledging Creationism*, and David Horrell and Anna Davis' *Beyond Stewardship? Biblical Texts and Environmental Ethics* illustrate that balanced approach which the Review of *Saving Jesus Redux: A Jesus for the 21st Century* reinforces.

Teachers thinking about how to make their Ethics courses more challenging and accessible will appreciate the article *How do we know right from wrong?* - extracts from *For God's Sake: An Atheist, a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim Debate Religion* (Pan MacMillan, 2003) with Jane Caro, Antony Loewenstein, Simon Smart and Rachel Woodlock. And then the inimitable clarity and playfulness of Stephen Law's approach to *Utilitarianism* as an ethical system (check out his Blog full of other great resources).

Finally, *Teaching the Holocaust* by Terry McDevitt is a reminder that teaching is not a dry conduit connecting the teacher's mind with that of their students. Even whilst some of our young consider 'Grand Theft Auto' a 'game' – they may not be as desensitised to violence as we sometimes imagine. Hence why we need to guide students knowledgeably, and 'safely in and safely out' from the insanity of the racial laws and atrocities of Kristalnacht and horrors thereafter.

As we continually refine our understanding of what a healthy learning environment embodies, Parker J Palmer identifies the following in *The Courage To Teach*:

- a community that invites *diversity* – not because it is politically correct to do so, but because only diverse viewpoints (subject to critical testing) can do justice to the mysteries of the great things that surround us,
- a community that welcomes *ambiguity* – not because it is confused or indecisive, but because it acknowledges the inadequacy, or limits of its own concepts to embrace the vastness of great things,
- a community that is unafraid of *creative conflict* - not because it is angry or hostile, but because conflict (and criticism) is necessary to correct biases and prejudices about the nature of great things.

**Nikolai Blaskow**

**Editor**

# **The Bedales Assessed Course in Philosophy, Religion and Ethics**

Clare Jarmy

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Clare Jarmy is Head of Religious Studies and Philosophy at Bedales School in Hampshire, UK. Bedales offers its own innovative course in Philosophy, Religion and Ethics (PRE). In this article, Clare will explain how this came about, and give an overview of the course.

## **Where we are: the place of RE today**

Internationally, this is a challenging time for Religious Education. In the UK, RE has the somewhat dubious privilege of having statutory status, something that gives it perhaps an unhelpfully special place in the curriculum.

The status of RE as a rigorous academic subject in the UK is fast being undermined. The most recent threat is that RE has no place in the new English Baccalaureate<sup>1</sup>, the collection of GCSE<sup>2</sup> courses examined at age 16 on which state schools' performance is measured. The net result is that whilst RE must be taught in state schools, it has a lower status to other subjects.

This problem is echoed in the Australasian context, where RE is a mandatory subject in many Independent and Catholic Schools, and yet is allocated minimal curriculum time and is frequently non-reportable. With no place in the new Australian National Curriculum, RE struggles to be recognised as an academic discipline in the way that English Literature and History are.

The tragedy with the low profile often accorded Philosophy, Religion and Ethics is that the subject can be thrilling, challenging and intellectually demanding. The biggest, most important questions of life are grappled with. Trying to argue your way out of Cartesian doubt, conceive of the beginning of time and its creation, or establish what precisely makes something wrong, is incredibly difficult.

RE might be facing challenges - perennial and new - but this presents us with opportunities as well. If schools have a provision for RE, but no national framework to adhere to, there is considerable scope for thinking creatively

about the subject, and developing courses that we really believe in. This is exactly what we have done at Bedales, and have never looked back.

## **Our context: Bedales and the Bedales Assessed Courses**

Bedales School in Hampshire, UK is well-known as a progressive, liberal school. Bedales was founded towards the end of the nineteenth century to provide an alternative to the traditional Public School model,<sup>3</sup> which was seen as brutal, patriarchal, not sufficiently child-centred and overly competitive. Bedales' founder, John Haden Badley, famously said that these kinds of school 'simply wouldn't do.' Thus Bedales was established and went coeducational more than seventy years before most UK boarding schools<sup>4</sup>, banned corporal punishment at the request of the prefects<sup>5</sup> and has a strong ethos of 'The Work of Each for The Weal of All'.<sup>6</sup>

Ten years ago Bedales had another 'simply won't do' moment. The Headmaster and key members of staff<sup>7</sup> came to the conclusion that GCSE qualifications were, in a number of subjects, not fit for purpose. The Bedales way is to nurture independent thought and creativity; to allow students to flourish, rather than forcing them under glass. It was recognised that many mainstream GCSE courses were neither challenging nor inspiring; to continue to offer them would have been anathema to our aims.<sup>8</sup>

The solution was to teach our own programmes, Bedales Assessed Courses (BACs), devised by the departments that would deliver them. These courses are internally assessed and externally moderated to have rough equivalence with GCSE.

The school consulted parents, universities and students before any BACs were trialled. Universities welcomed the idea (a criticism often made by UK universities is that standard qualifications are not sufficiently challenging to tell good students apart) and the University

Admissions System also supported the idea. BACs are now one of the qualifications students can select when filling in university applications.

The Bedales Assessed Course in Philosophy, Religion and Ethics, now in its 8<sup>th</sup> year, was a flagship BAC qualification<sup>9</sup>. Bedales currently offers International GCSEs<sup>10</sup> in core subjects (English Language, Maths, Science and Modern Languages), and other subjects are BACs.

## **An overview: the BAC in Philosophy, Religion and Ethics**

The BAC in PRE aims to promote independent, critical and reflective thinking. It is designed as a wide-ranging introduction to the key questions of philosophy, the major religious and intellectual traditions of the world in their historical contexts, and the ethical issues of the day. A good PRE student is one who develops a spirit of enquiry, abstract and critical thinking skills, and who can argue a case logically and persuasively.

Dr Christopher Hamilton, Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion, King's College London, is the external moderator for the course. In talking about the BAC, he commented that:

The Bedales PRE course combines the best in traditional teaching with exciting and imaginative work to help develop students' own creative thinking. The course is rigorous but open-minded, and opens up to students the value of reflecting for themselves on some of the perennial problems of the human condition.

BAC courses are five terms long – this clears the way for revision in core IGCSE subjects in the summer of Year 11. The BAC is delivered in two double periods a week (2.5 hours total), by two teachers each presenting a different theme (ie: a student might get a double period of Hinduism and a double period of Islam a week in Term 2). One theme is assessable each term.

**Fig 1: An overview of subjects covered in the BAC 2013-2014**

<b>Term 1:</b>  <b>Assessment:</b> What makes murder wrong? Coursework essay	Theme 1: The idea of God – a study of the development of theology in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and key philosophical ideas relating to the attributes of God.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attributes of God</li> <li>- Judaism and God 1: God amongst gods</li> <li>- Judaism and God 2: Noah, Abraham, Moses and the Covenant</li> <li>- Christianity and God: The Trinity</li> <li>- Black/Feminist ideas of God</li> <li>- Problems with the idea of God: Problem of Evil</li> <li>- Theodicy</li> <li>- Problems with the idea of God 2: Is God beyond experience?</li> </ul>	<b>Term 3:</b>  <b>Assessment:</b> Jesus in Art – essay under controlled conditions Unseen element – comprehension and analysis of unseen material	Art in Religion and Philosophy: Theme 1: Philosophical questions concerning the nature and importance of beauty ('aesthetics').  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is art?</li> <li>- What makes music sad?</li> <li>- Aesthetic experience</li> <li>- Human beauty</li> <li>- Is beauty objective or subjective?</li> </ul>	
	Theme 2: Human value and human action – a study of key views on the meaning of life and key ethical theories.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the meaning of my life?</li> <li>- Consumerism – a new sense of meaning?</li> <li>- Religion and the meaning of life</li> <li>- Existentialism and the meaning of life</li> <li>- Introduction to Ethics – what are my ethical principles?</li> <li>- The Golden Rule</li> <li>- The Harm Principle</li> <li>- Cultural Relativism</li> </ul>		Theme 2: Jesus in Art – a study of how events in the life of Christ are depicted in artworks  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction to the History of Art</li> <li>- Key events in the life of Jesus</li> <li>- Annunciation in art</li> <li>- Nativity in art</li> <li>- Baptism of Christ in art</li> <li>- Crucifixion in art</li> <li>- Resurrection in art</li> </ul>	
	<b>Term 2:</b>  <b>Assessment:</b> What is jihad? Why is it important to understand it? Coursework essay		Philosophy: Theme 1: Key ideas in philosophy – a study of themes from metaphysics and philosophy of mind, including scepticism and the external world, whether machines could think and whether a human being persists through time  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction to the course and overview of topics covered by metaphysics and mind</li> <li>- The purpose of philosophy</li> <li>- The nature of reality</li> <li>- Scepticism</li> <li>- Knowledge</li> <li>- Truth</li> <li>- Solipsism</li> <li>- Personal Identity</li> <li>- Materialism vs Dualism</li> <li>- Machine Minds</li> </ul>	
			Theme 2: Key themes in philosophy – a study of philosophical thought over time  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presocratics</li> <li>- Socrates, Plato and Aristotle</li> <li>- Christian Philosophy</li> <li>- Reformation</li> <li>- The Beginnings of Modern Science</li> <li>- Rationalism - Descartes</li> <li>- Empiricism</li> <li>- German Philosophy - Kant</li> <li>- 20th Century themes</li> </ul>	

<b>Term 5:</b> <b>Assessment:</b> The Utopia project is assessed both through written work and oral presentation	Independent Learning Project: Students create their own vision for a perfect society. Referring to key texts, concepts and examples from the world and from history, they consider principles and laws, government and politics, education, economics, resources, community, culture, employment and industry – all aspects of a society. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lecture on Plato's Republic</li> <li>- Lecture on The Sermon on the Mount</li> <li>- Lecture on More's Utopia</li> <li>- Lecture on Huxley's Brave New World and Orwell's 1984</li> </ul>
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There is a lot of material in the PRE BAC, so I will focus on a couple of the elements to give readers a more detailed insight in to what we do.

### The BAC in Focus: The Thinking Journal

One of the most distinctive elements of the BAC in Philosophy, Religion and Ethics is that we do not prescribe the independent work that students undertake. Rather than setting homework, students complete 'Thinking Journals.' These are beautiful Moleskin journals in which they write reflectively about any topic of their choice within PRE. Some entries will pick up on ideas we have covered in class or be inspired by talks held in school. Others will be based wholly on the student's own interests. Each 'Thinking Journal' will be completely different, as different from each other as the student completing them.

Over the years we have found that students become very attached to their Thinking Journals. Not only are they an impressive piece of independent work, but they also house a record of a student's thinking in a key formative period of their life. Students explore meaning, truth, goodness, God, life and death and more: the journal reflects topics they think are most important, and their responses.

The Thinking Journal is assessed in a 'Dialogue Book,' which is kept with the journal. In the Dialogue Book, a teacher responds to

student's work with formative feedback, as well as suggestions for future reading or other topics to consider. The Thinking Journal therefore becomes a dynamic conversation between student and teacher and enables students to develop clear areas of interest .

### The BAC in Focus: The Utopia Project

Students work on their Thinking Journal throughout the entire BAC. The Utopia Project is their crowning achievement at the end of the course. It is the largest piece of coursework that students complete (with a guideline of 3000-4000 words), and worth 25% of their overall mark in the BAC.

The Utopia Project is an independent learning project. Lesson time is not spent teaching the material beyond an introductory series of lectures on five key texts: Plato's *Republic*, Jesus' 'The Sermon on the Mount,' Thomas More's *Utopia*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *1984*. After this, students spend lessons in our glorious Arts-and-Crafts period library, finding sources, reflecting on lectures and talking through their ideas with their peers and teachers. For some students, this is the first time they have really considered the nature of a society, or evaluated the system in which they have been raised.

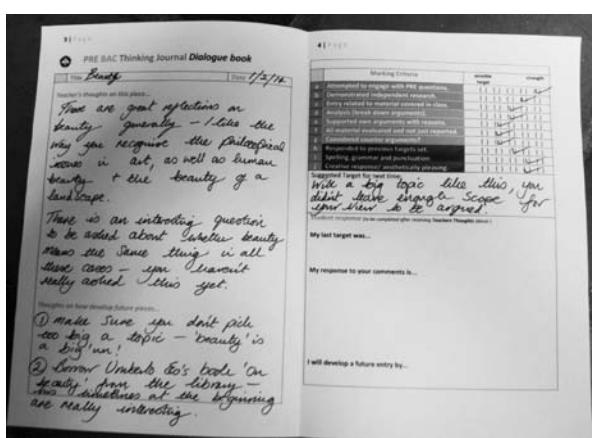
The brief for the Utopia Project is for students to formulate their own vision for a perfect society. They are given free rein to make decisions about location, population size, the back story to how the utopia was formed, the form the government takes, economic policy, attitude towards technology, education policy, law and order, rites and rituals, religion and everything else.

Much of the reasoning that happens in this project could broadly be described as

Socratic. A student might come to me and say she wants a society that places as few constraints on citizens as possible. By asking questions together, we find out precisely what kinds of constraints she thinks she needs, and we evaluate whether there are any additional limits needed on the actions of the citizens in her society. She reaches a libertarian position, and I suggest she looks at JS Mill again (she studied his work a little the year before for her first piece of BAC coursework).

Another student is less than optimistic about human nature. He thinks that the only way to make people behave is through the use of surveillance technology. He is familiar with the story of *The Ring of Gyges*; it was an 'unseen' task for the Year 10 summer exam and he came across it as a past paper question. We discuss this in relation to *1984* – how is this different from the idea that Big Brother is watching you? Of course, the perpetual feeling of being watched is central to Orwell's vision of a *dystopia*. We discuss whether government actions should be judged by intentions or consequences. We consider recent stories in the press about the amount of surveillance taking place on the average citizen all the time – would my student say this is a vision of utopian government?

Three boys are having a heated discussion in the corner of the room. One is a socialist, one is a conservative. They are both trying to convince their friend that his plan to have no money in his utopia will not work. Both are passionately convinced that it is impracticable, idealistic and will result in the material poverty of all citizens. Their friend argues that the root of all evil is greed; that the practical difficulties of living without money should not preclude this from being an utopian aim. Perhaps it is not quite the Agora in Athens; perhaps they are not Glaucon and Thrasymachus, but it has the spirit of Socratic discussion: young people asking important questions and thrashing out possible solutions together.



The Dialogue Book

## The BAC in Focus: An Approach to Teaching World Religions

As in many PRE courses, an understanding of world religions forms a large part of the Bedales Assessed Course, especially in Year 10. Our aim is to understand the concepts behind these worldviews, rather than the phenomena.

In teaching Islam, for example, we use the Five Pillars as a starting point, as many schools do. However, rather than learning the Five Pillars, then the key features of a Mosque, then key rites and rituals etc, we focus in on the concepts *within* the Five Pillars. Having started with an overview of the Five Pillars, our next lesson looks at the concept of 'no God but Allah.' This gives us a way in to talking about all sorts of things. It underpins the importance of the Ka'aba, both in the history of Islam and in contemporary practice. It explains why Islam might see the Christian concept of the Trinity as polytheist. We can explore how the same figure, Jesus, can be revered in different ways in different faiths. This allows us to teach diversity whilst recognising difference.<sup>11</sup>

The next lesson focuses on 'Muhammed (pbuh), the messenger of Allah.' This opens a discussion of prophesy, the role of the Qur'an in Islam and the idea of revelation. It also leads naturally into talking about concerns about idolatry, from which comes work on Islamic art and architecture. A few weeks ago, my Year 10 class used their understanding of

concepts in Islam – the importance of Arabic; the beautiful order of the universe evident in geometry; the colours of paradise; the concern about idolatry; the oneness of God; to create an arabesque design. As such, we used both concepts and practices from the faith as a means of educating students.

We take this conceptual approach in our teaching of all world religions. It engages students, and is intellectually challenging. It requires them to see the world through new perspectives, rather than simply passively observe and learn *about* the phenomena of religion .

### Conclusion

The Bedales Assessed Course in Philosophy, Religion and Ethics has resulted in three really positive outcomes. It has established PRE as an important and relevant academic subject. It provides an opportunity to identify what our students really care about exploring, and scope for teachers to develop their own areas of interest and expertise and present in a way that is fresh and engaging. Most of all, it has opened up the possibility for our students to develop intellectually; to grapple with abstract concepts, to debate ethical dilemmas and to entertain new perspectives. The BAC grows minds and hearts, and after all, is this not the point of education?

### Clare Jarmy

Head of Religious Studies and Philosophy  
Bedales School, Hampshire, UK



The Bedales Memorial Library

**The conceptual approach in our teaching of all world religions... requires students to see the world through new perspectives, rather than simply passively observe and learn about the phenomena of religion.**

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### Endnotes

- 1 Sometimes known as the EBacc
- 2 General Certificate of Secondary Education, the qualification taught between the ages of 14-16 in the UK. There is a GCSE in Religious Education, but the new English Baccalaureate, on which schools' performance is measured, does not count RE as a humanities subject, effectively giving it less status than Geography and History. Mr Gove, the Education Secretary, has defended his decision by saying that RE, having statutory status, does not need to be given additional status by being part of the English Baccalaureate. It is fair to say that many RE teachers have not been satisfied with this response, especially as the EBacc has coincided with the cutting of funding to train new RE teachers.
- 3 Public Schools in the UK are the longest established independent schools. Government-funded schools are known as State Schools.
- 4 Bedales went coeducational in 1897. In many UK boarding schools, this did not really happen until the 1970s.
- 5 Student voice has always been taken seriously at Bedales. Indeed, it is certainly the only school I have come across that encourages the student body to ask both the Headmaster and the Governors questions about the running of the school.
- 6 *Weal* meaning well-being; a deliberate archaism on Badley's part.
- 7 Keith Budge (Headmaster of Bedales) with Philip Young (then Director of Studies), and Graham Banks (then Head of English).
- 8 The first aim of Bedales is *to develop inquisitive thinkers with a love of learning who cherish independent thought*.
- 9 English Literature BAC was devised at roughly the same time, though this replaced an existing GCSE qualification. PRE BAC was an entirely new venture for Bedales.
- 10 International GCSEs which are more challenging than GCSEs, and are offered by a number of UK independent schools, as well as international schools.
- 11 L. Philip Barnes in *Education, Religion and Diversity: Developing a new model of Religious Education*, Routledge, 2014, has argued that multi-faith RE often fails to account for true diversity, and misrepresents faiths in an attempt to avoid presenting conflict.

# **Teaching Evolution whilst Acknowledging Creationism**

Professor Michael J Reiss

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To some people's surprise and consternation, and others' delight, creationism has been growing in extent and influence, in Australia, in the UK and elsewhere. Definitions of creationism vary, but for a creationist whilst it is possible that, for example, the various species of zebra had a common ancestor, this is not the case for zebras, bears and antelopes – still less for monkeys and humans, for birds and molluscs or for palm trees and flesh-eating bacteria. Creationists believe that the world came into existence as described in the early parts of the Bible or the *Qur'an*, and that the most evolution has done is to change species into closely related species.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, of course, the overwhelming majority of biologists consider evolution to be the central concept in biological sciences, providing a conceptual framework that unifies every disparate aspect of the life sciences into a single coherent discipline.<sup>2</sup> Equally, the overwhelming majority of scientists believe that the universe is of the order of about 13-14 billion years old, whereas Christian creationists believe it is far younger.

## **The Importance of Creationism**

Evolution and cosmology are understood by many to be a religious issue because they can be seen to contradict the accounts of origins (inorganic, organic and human) described in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim Scriptures. The issue seems like an ongoing dispute that has science and religion actively battling to support the credibility of their explanations for origins. The public presentation of the

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**Evolution...provides a conceptual framework that unifies every disparate aspect of the life sciences into a single coherent discipline.**



controversy often gives the impression that biblical creationism and biological evolution refer to two mutually exclusive explanatory systems. The lower visibility of presentations of moderate views creates the impression in many people's minds that a clear delineation exists between those who support scientific theories, and those who adhere to scriptural teachings.

This highly publicised schism between a number of religious worldviews - particularly Judaeo-Christian views based on Genesis and mainstream Islamic readings of the *Qur'an* - and modern scientific explanations derived from the theory of evolution, is exacerbated by the way people are often asked in surveys or interviews about their views on human origin. There is a tendency to polarise religion and science in questionnaires that focus on the notion either that God created everything, or that God had nothing at all to do with it. The choices used in many public polls erroneously imply that scientific evolution

is necessarily atheistic, coupling complete acceptance of evolution with explicit exclusion of any religious faith. Most surveys contain only a small number of options so as to make analysis easy, 'clean' and strictly numeric. The limited number of categories forces people to codify their views to fit into, at best, three or four predetermined categories, and misses more nuanced information about what they are actually thinking.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, people have personal beliefs about religion and science that cover a wide range of possibilities. Eugenie Scott<sup>4</sup> has proposed

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**The public presentation... often gives the impression that biblical creationism and biological evolution refer to two mutually exclusive explanatory systems.**

## The central argument of this article is that creationism is best seen by a science teacher not as a misconception, but as a worldview.

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that individuals hold a spectrum of views, ranging from young-Earth creationists to those for whom the scientific and religious worldviews are integrated into one. I therefore, briefly examine the possible relationships between science and religion, before going on to consider how science teachers might deal with creationism in their classrooms when teaching evolution. The central argument of this article is that creationism is best seen by a science teacher not as a misconception, but as a worldview. As such, the most a science teacher can normally aspire to, is to ensure that students with creationist beliefs understand the scientific position. In the short term, this scientific worldview is unlikely to supplant a creationist one.

### The Relationship between Science and Religion

There is now a very large literature on the relationship between science and religion, and the journal *Zygon* specialises in this area. In *Science and Religion: Some historical perspectives*, John Hedley Brooke provides a thorough historical study of the relationship.<sup>5</sup> Brooke's particular aim is 'to reveal something of the complexity of the relationship between science and religion as they have interacted in the past,' and it is worth quoting from his postscript at some length:

Popular generalizations about that relationship, whether couched in terms of war or peace, simply do not stand up to serious investigation. There is no such thing as *the* relationship between science and religion. It is what different individuals and communities have made of it in a plethora of different contexts. Not only has the problematic interface between them shifted over time, but there is also a high degree of artificiality in abstracting the science and the religion of earlier centuries to see how they were related (p. 321).

Brooke's work sits alongside Ian Barbour's *Religion in an Age of Science*,<sup>6</sup> a classic text in the science-religion field. Barbour, in a

classification that continues to prove fruitful, identified four ways in which science and religion could be seen to relate: conflict, independence, dialogue and integration.

The *conflict* model of the relationship between science and religion exists most straightforwardly when science is seen as swallowing religion. As Barbour puts it 'In a fight between a boa constrictor and a warthog, the victor, whichever it is, swallows the vanquished' (p. 4). In a number of countries, the conflict model is particularly associated with some of the writings of Richard Dawkins. A rather large literature<sup>7</sup> has developed around Dawkins' writings on religion, but Dawkins' argument, and the responses to it can be summarised fairly straightforwardly. Dawkins holds that arguments in favor of religious faith (which he equates to a belief in God) are invalid. In particular, the argument from biological design fails, because Darwinian evolution can explain even the most apparently convincing cases of design.<sup>8</sup> Dawkins also considers that religious faith is itself best seen as a sort of viral infection. The more informed theological responses to Dawkins have claimed that he either misunderstands theology or intentionally chooses not to attempt to understand it; in other words, that Dawkins is attacking a straw man.

The *independence* understanding of the relationship between science and religion sees each enterprise as having its particular worth and existing distinct from the other. This is comparable to the relationship between engineering and aesthetics. Both might examine a building, but the questions each might answer about it – 'Is it constructed safely?' and 'Is it beautiful?' – do not overlap (much). In Barbour's view, independence might occur because science and religion use contrasting methods or employ different languages.

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### With regard to the issue of origins and which of these four understandings of the relationship between science and religion is best, it depends on the precise questions being asked.

When science and religion are seen in *dialogue*, there may be questions about the boundaries between them, or the methods of the two fields. For example, there is considerable literature available about the extent to which certain religions facilitate or hinder the rise of science. One line of argument within the Judaeo-Christian tradition has been that the orderliness of the universe is contingent, rather than necessary. In other words, God could have made the universe unintelligible, thus precluding science. The fact that the universe is ordered has encouraged many scientists to feel that in studying 'the book of nature' they are attempting to understand something of the mind (or at least the workings) of God.

Finally, science and religion may be seen to be capable of *integration*. There are a number of models of integration, one of which sees science and religion contributing as partners to a comprehensive metaphysical worldview. There is, for example, a huge academic literature on process theology, an intellectual discipline that attempts to do just this. More mundanely, and somewhat closer to home for most people, many devout religious believers also accept the teachings of science and attempt, for example, to see their physical health, their feelings, and the success (or otherwise) of their personal relationships as being inextricably the result both of the laws of science and of God's laws.

### The Significance of Origins

With regard to the issue of origins and which of these four understandings of the relationship between science and religion is best, it depends on the precise questions being asked. If one is asking about whether dinosaurs and humans coexisted, that is manifestly a scientific question (to which the correct and scientific answer is 'no'), and any religious attempt to answer the question differently is bound to lead to conflict. If however, one is asking about why the universe has precisely the values of the various physical constants that it does (values which, if only minutely different, would preclude the evolution of any life, let alone life sufficiently intelligent to be asking this question), this is perhaps less of a scientific question, and conflict thus less inevitable.

Most of the literature on creationism (and/or intelligent design, which doesn't make explicit reference to scriptures or even a deity, but argues that the complexity we see

## **There are two key issues fueling the evolution/creationism controversy: one is to do with understandings of reality, the other to do with evidence and authority.**

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in nature is too great to simply be the result of material causes) and evolutionary theory puts them in stark opposition.<sup>9</sup> Evolution is consistently presented in creationist books and articles as illogical (e.g. natural selection cannot, on account of the second law of thermodynamics, create order out of disorder; mutations are always deleterious and so cannot lead to improvements), contradicted by the scientific evidence (e.g. the fossil record shows human footprints alongside animals supposed by evolutionists to be long extinct; the fossil record does not provide evidence for transitional forms), the product of non-scientific reasoning (e.g. the early history of life would require life to arise from inorganic matter – a form of spontaneous generation rejected by science in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century; radioactive dating makes assumptions about the constancy of natural processes over aeons of time whereas we increasingly know of natural processes that affect the rate of radioactive decay), the product of those who ridicule the word of God, and a cause of a whole range of social evils (from eugenics, Marxism, Nazism and racism to juvenile delinquency).

By and large, creationism has received similarly short shrift from those who accept the theory of evolution. In a fairly early study, the philosopher of science Philip Kitcher<sup>10</sup> argued that ‘in attacking the methods of evolutionary biology, Creationists are actually criticizing methods that are used throughout science’ (pp. 4-5). Kitcher concluded that the flat-earth theory, the chemistry of the four elements, and mediaeval astrology ‘have just as much claim to rival current scientific views as Creationism does to challenge evolutionary biology’ (p. 5). Many scientists have defended evolutionary biology from creationism. The main points that are frequently made are that evolutionary biology is good science, since not all science consists of controlled experiments where the results can be collected within a short period of time; that creationism

(including ‘scientific creationism’) isn’t really a science, in that its ultimate authority is scriptural and theological rather than the evidence obtained from the natural world; and that an acceptance of evolution is fully compatible with a religious faith.<sup>11</sup>

The relationship between science and religion has changed over the years. Nevertheless, there are two key issues fueling the evolution/creationism controversy: one is to do with understandings of reality, the other to do with evidence and authority. Although it is always desperately difficult to generalise, most religions hold that reality consists of more than the observable world, and many religions give weight to institutional authority in a way that science generally strives not to. For example, there is a very large religious and theological literature on the world to come. However, to labour the point, science, strictly speaking, has little or nothing to say about this question, while religious believers within a particular religion are likely to find the pronouncements on the question of even the most intelligent and spiritual of their present leaders to be of less significance than the few recorded words of their religion’s founder(s).

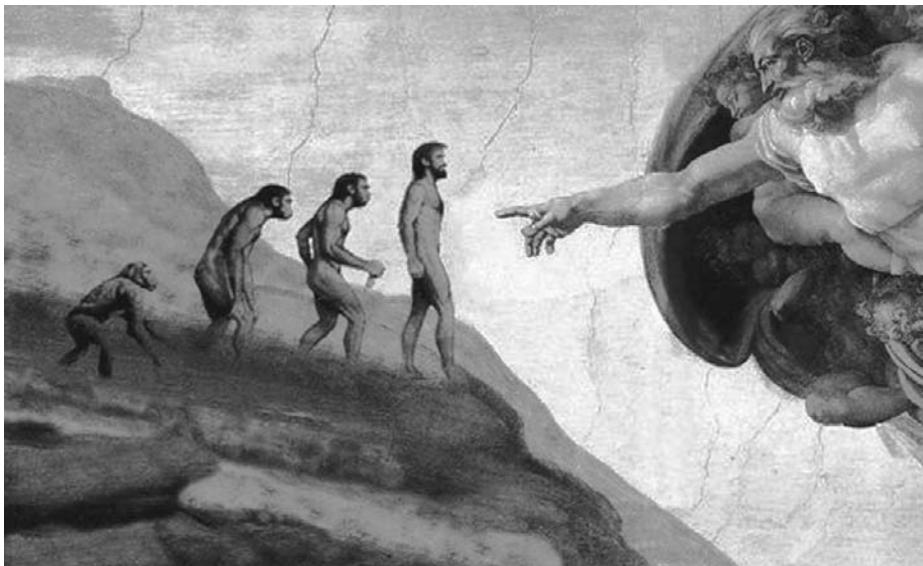
Given the unsuccessful history of scientists’ participation in educational battles over evolution, it seems hopeful that a pluralistic position - promoting cultural tolerance and individual autonomy - has a better chance of ensuring that at the very least, students learn what evolution is. In the past, science has all too often exacerbated this evolution/creation conflict by appearing to dismiss the legitimacy of religious ideas and the validity of personal beliefs.<sup>12</sup>

### **Classroom Specifics**

So how might one teach evolution in science lessons, say to 14-16 year-olds? The first thing to note is that evolution is an excellent topic for helping students understand more about how science is undertaken. While the different areas of science use similar methods, not all areas of science use identical methods. One cannot investigate the structures of stars in precisely the same way that one can investigate the structures of motor cars, and one cannot investigate the history of life on Earth in precisely the same way that one can investigate the development of individuals from birth to death.

Should a science teacher allow discussion of creationism in a science lesson? Many scientists, and some science educators, fear that consideration of creationism or intelligent design in a science classroom legitimises them. For example, the excellent book *Science, Evolution, and Creationism* published by the US National Academy of Sciences and Institute of Medicine<sup>13</sup> asserts ‘The ideas offered by intelligent design creationists are not the products of scientific reasoning. Discussing these ideas in science classes would not be appropriate given their lack of scientific support’ (p. 52).

However, just because something lacks scientific support doesn’t seem to me a sufficient reason to omit it from a science lesson. When I was taught physics at school, and taught it extremely well in my view, what I remember finding so exciting was that we could discuss almost anything providing we were prepared to defend our thinking in a way that admitted objective evidence and logical argument.



So when teaching evolution, there is much to be said for allowing students to raise any doubts they have (hardly a revolutionary idea in science teaching) and doing one's best to have a genuine discussion. The word 'genuine' doesn't mean that creationism or intelligent design deserve equal time. However, in certain classes, depending on the confidence of the teacher in dealing with such issues and the make up of the student body, it can be appropriate to deal with the issue. If questions or issues about creationism and intelligent design arise during science lessons, they can be used to illustrate a number of aspects of how science works, such as: how interpretation of data and using creative thought provides evidence to test ideas and develop theories; that there are some questions that science cannot currently answer, and some that science cannot address; and how uncertainties in scientific knowledge and scientific ideas change over time and about the role of the scientific community in validating these changes.

Having said that, such teaching is not always easy. Some students get very heated; others remain silent even if they disagree profoundly with what is said. In England, government guidance states:

Some students do hold creationist beliefs or believe in the arguments of the intelligent design movement and/or have parents/carers who accept such views. If either is brought up in a science lesson it should be handled in a way that is respectful of students' views, religious and otherwise, whilst clearly giving the message that the theory of evolution and the notion of an old Earth / universe are supported by a mass of evidence and fully accepted by the scientific community.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to take seriously and respectfully the concerns of students who do not accept the theory of evolution while still introducing them to it. While it is unlikely that this will help students who have a conflict between science and their religious beliefs to resolve the conflict, good science teaching can help students to manage it – and to learn more science. Creationism can profitably be seen not as a simple misconception that careful science teaching can correct, as careful science teaching might hope to persuade a student that an object continues at uniform velocity unless acted on by a net force, or that

most of the mass of a plant comes from air. Rather, a student who believes in creationism can be seen as inhabiting a non-scientific worldview that is a very different way of seeing the world. One very rarely changes one's worldview as a result of a couple of lessons, however well taught.

My hope, rather, is simply to enable students to understand the scientific worldview with respect to evolution, not necessarily to accept it. We can help students to find their science lessons interesting and intellectually challenging without these lessons being threatening to students' personal beliefs. Effective teaching in this area can help students learn about the theory of evolution as well as appreciate the way science is done, the procedures by which scientific knowledge accumulates, the limitations of science and the ways in which scientific knowledge differs from other forms of knowledge.

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- ## For discussion
1. **Does creationism have any scientific validity?**
  2. **Is it wise to allow students who are creationists to voice their objections to the theory of evolution in science lessons?**
  3. **Should the aim of teaching about evolution be to get students to understand it or to accept it?**
  4. **Can a good science teacher be a creationist?**



# **Beyond Stewardship? Biblical Texts and Environmental Ethics**

Professor David Horrell and Dr Anna Davis

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When it comes to thinking about Christian responses to the questions raised by environmental ethics, the idea put forward most often is that of 'stewardship'.

Stewardship, in this context, is the notion that human beings have been given a special responsibility to cultivate and care for the rest of creation – to be 'good stewards' of the earth. In many cases, stewardship is presented as the Christian attitude towards the environment: uncontested, uncontroversial, and shared by all.

But such statements leave us with many unanswered questions: Where does the idea of stewardship come from? What are the different ways in which the relevant biblical texts have been understood throughout history? Is stewardship adopted by all Christian groups today? And does it really promote a responsible attitude towards the environment?

This article aims to go 'beyond stewardship' to examine precisely these questions, and to look in particular at how biblical texts shape Christian attitudes towards environmental ethics.

## **Lynn White: Christianity's problematic environmental legacy**

Environmental issues such as climate change are now pressing subjects of global concern. Although some people remain sceptical, it is increasingly difficult to deny that such problems exist, or that human action is largely to blame. There are a number of factors that combine to cause environmental degradation, including technological development, our increasing consumption of natural resources, and the growth of the human population. However, the influence of religion is also important. Religions, of whatever kind, help to form the 'worldviews' of those who follow them, shaping the ways in which people understand themselves and their role and purpose in relation to the world.

For some, the influence of Christian beliefs on the environment has not always been a positive one. In 1967, medieval historian



Lynn White Jr. published a provocative article entitled 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis'.<sup>1</sup> In it, he argued that the Christian worldview, rooted in the creation stories and the belief that humanity is made in God's image, represented the most anthropocentric, or human-centred religion the world has ever seen. Christianity, he maintained, introduced a dualism between humanity and nature, and established the notion that it was God's will that humanity should exploit nature to serve its own interests. As a result, White believes Christianity bears 'a huge burden of guilt' for introducing this Western worldview that has permitted and promoted the aggressive conquest of nature.

Despite this, however, White does not think that we should reject religion. Rather, he argues that we need to rethink our religious attitudes towards the environment. 'Human ecology,' he writes, 'is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny - that is, by religion... More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one.'<sup>2</sup>

## **'Made in the image of God': domination and control**

White's criticism of Christianity highlights

the problems raised by Genesis 1:26-28. This text contains the idea that humans are made 'in the image of God,' and also the command that humans should 'subdue' and 'have dominion' over all other living things. It appears to mark humans out from the rest of creation, and has been enormously influential in shaping Christian views about the status and role of humanity in relation to the rest of the world. But what does it mean to 'subdue' the earth and 'have dominion'?

The Renaissance and Enlightenment eras of the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries saw the rise of modern science, together with advances in philosophy and technology. This was a time of great optimism, and many people firmly believed in humanity's potential to change the world for the better. As a result, 'dominion' was viewed in relation to humanity's ability to understand and control nature for the benefit of humans.

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**'More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one.'**

Francis Bacon (1561-1626), for example, one of the founders of modern science, understood science as a human vocation or calling, and looked to Genesis 1:28 to support his claim. He writes: 'I am come in very truth leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave... [Scientific discoveries] have the power to conquer and subdue her, to shake her to her foundations.'<sup>5</sup>

Discussing Bacon's views, biblical scholar Richard Bauckham comments: 'Central to Bacon's vision of scientific progress is his understanding of the goal of science as the implementation of the God-given human dominion over nature, which Bacon himself presents as the meaning of Genesis 1:28.'

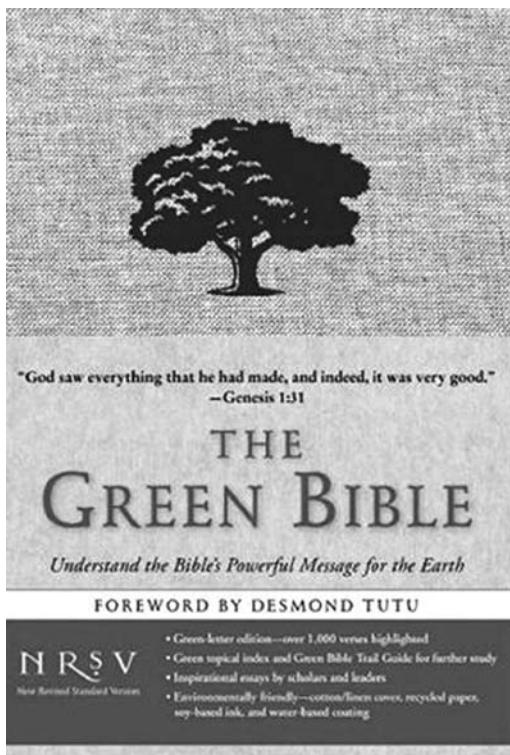
So at this time, the Genesis text was not understood as promoting environmental stewardship. This, of course, is unsurprising, as the discussions of environmental ethics with which we are familiar today were not a feature of this era. However, what these views demonstrate is the extent to which our understanding of the Bible is influenced by the context in which it is being read, and the way in which we interpret biblical texts in light of our experiences of, and attitudes towards the world.

### 'To till and to keep': responsible environmental care

In the early twentieth century, the optimism of the Enlightenment was shattered. The immense carnage of the First World War, the horrors of the Holocaust and the threat of nuclear war all made people painfully aware that humans were capable of terrible evil as well as good. More recently, humanity's devastating impact on the natural world has also become increasingly apparent.

Within this context, interpretations of the Genesis texts as encouraging care for the environment have become prominent, and the idea of stewardship is now a central theme in Christian environmental ethics. Having dominion is now widely understood as exercising responsible stewardship.

For example, the recently published *Green Bible* – in which texts relating to the earth are printed in green – reflects a conviction that the Bible offers a positive message about



caring for the earth. In its introduction, it states that:

Our role in creation's care may be a new question unique to our place in history, but the Bible turns out to be amazingly relevant... With over a thousand references to the earth and caring for creation in the Bible, the message is clear: all in God's creation – nature, animals, humanity – are inextricably linked to one another. As God cares for all of creation, so we cannot love one dimension without caring for the others. We are called to care for all God has made.<sup>4</sup>

It is also now assumed that the Bible, and in particular Genesis 1-2, directly instructs us to be stewards of the earth. One of the 'Trail Guide' Bible studies in the *Green Bible*, for example, states that '[the] stewardship role is important enough that it is mentioned several times in the creation narrative,'<sup>5</sup> and the command in Genesis 2:15 to 'till and keep' the Garden of Eden is often understood as supporting such ideas.

As with the earlier understandings of the Genesis text as instructing human control and domination of the earth, the stewardship reading presents us with a particular interpretation of the passage that is once again

shaped by the unique historical context in which it is being read. However, stewardship is frequently presented as a rediscovery of the true message of the Bible, which corrects earlier misunderstandings. Brennan R. Hill writes: 'Humans were created to act nobly in the place of the Creator... this leaves no room for "lording over" or "mastering" humans or any other living things. Tragically, the passage [in Genesis 1] has all too often been distorted and used to justify the domination of both human beings and nature.'<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Calvin DeWitt, in the introduction to the *Green Bible*, argues that 'Dominion means responsible stewardship'.<sup>7</sup>

### Stewardship: a biblical idea?

Despite the prominence of stewardship language today, it is difficult to find much evidence that directly supports this perspective in the biblical texts themselves. If we read the text of Genesis 1-2, we can see that the word 'stewardship' does not actually appear. In fact, the related terms are used only infrequently throughout the whole Bible, and not to explicitly define what the human relationship with creation ought to be. For example, some of the parables in Luke's Gospel depict a 'steward' or manager being left in charge of an owner's property (for example, Luke 16). Even Genesis 2:15 (the command 'to till and to keep' the Garden of Eden), does not directly imply environmental stewardship, for its primary message is about the importance of agriculture or tending a temple garden and, in any case, the first humans are soon expelled from that Garden!

Some biblical scholars also insist that the commands to subdue the earth and have dominion cannot convincingly be seen as a call for environmental stewardship. Norman Habel, for example, founder of the Earth Bible Project, insists that to translate the original Hebrew of the phrase in a way that promotes stewardship is to twist its meaning.<sup>8</sup> He writes: 'The verb *kabash* ('to subdue') not only confirms the status of humans as having power over Earth; it also points to harsh control. Subduing the land meant crushing opposing forces. There is nothing gentle about *kabash*...'<sup>9</sup>

Others, such as Clare Palmer, an ecotheologian, argue that regardless of whether stewardship is a biblical idea, it remains a problematic basis for environmental ethics. For Palmer, stewardship implies that

**Dominion means responsible stewardship.**

humanity is separate from the rest of the world, and promotes the belief that 'the natural world is a human resource, that humans are really in control of nature, that nature is dependent on humanity for its management'.<sup>10</sup> In reality, she argues, it is the reverse that is true. Not only are the world's ecosystems able to flourish perfectly well without human management, but humans are themselves completely dependent on those ecosystems that support our life.

### The end of the world: evangelism or environmentalism?

So the biblical basis for environmental stewardship is less obvious or secure than many would have us believe. However, the influential Genesis texts are not the only part of the Bible to shape Christian attitudes towards the environment. Also important are biblical visions of the future of the earth.

From the earliest times, Christians have awaited the return of Jesus on a final day of judgment and salvation, and the events that will take place are predicted in a number of biblical texts. 2 Peter 3:10, for example, tells us that 'the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed...' The author of this text encourages his readers to 'hasten' this end, and to look forward to the time afterwards when a 'new heaven and a new earth' will appear (2 Peter 3:12-13). For some Christians, the end of the world will also be preceded by a 'rapture,' when Christians will be taken from the earth and saved.

So why care for the earth if it is to be destroyed, and if God is to rescue a small number of faithful humans and grant them eternal life in heaven? Just as Lynn White argued that the creation stories encouraged damaging attitudes toward the environment, so some suggest that biblical ideas about

the end times have led Christians to be unconcerned about preserving and caring for the earth, and instead to prioritise evangelising in order to convert people to Christianity and save them from damnation. The Cornwall Alliance's 'Resisting the Green Dragon' project, for example, see environmentalism as a threat to true Christian faith, and warns believers against it. Such beliefs are particularly prominent among Fundamentalist and conservative Evangelical Christian groups in the USA, and have likely influenced anti-environment policies and decisions. It is not surprising, then, that conservation biologist David Orr suggests that 'belief in the imminence of the end times tends to make evangelicals careless stewards of our forests, soils, wildlife, air, water, seas and climate'.<sup>11</sup>

However, just as Genesis 1-2 has been re-read as a text teaching environmental stewardship, so Christian environmentalists have sought to reclaim those texts that teach about the end of the world. They propose that what is envisaged is not the destruction of the earth but rather its *transformation*. It is not a case of discarding the old earth and producing a brand new one, like a magician bringing a white rabbit out of a top hat, but rather that God is in the process of 'making all things new' (Revelation 21:5). Human care for creation is then seen as a joining in with God's purpose and activity to transform the earth into a place of righteousness, justice and peace. As Evangelical writer Thomas Finger puts it: '[i]f the present creation will not be destroyed but renewed, it would seem important to care for it today'.<sup>12</sup>

### The future of Christian environmental ethics

Contemporary environmental concerns have also led Christians to appeal to a variety of additional biblical texts, which seem to offer greater potential for the construction of a positive Christian engagement with the environment than is the case with the Genesis texts, or those that predict the end of the world. Such texts highlight God's plans for the redemption of all creation, and see humans as just one part of a greater whole.

In Romans 8:19-23, for example, Paul writes of how all of creation is longing for liberation, and Job 38-41 shows God's concern for all the diverse wonders of the world, with humans seen as rather less significant and 'special' than we like to imagine. Psalm 148

depicts the whole of creation as joining in the praise of God, while Genesis 9: 8-17 speaks of God's covenant with the whole earth, not just with humans.

None of these texts gives a blueprint for environmental ethics. They were all written in an ancient world, and by people with different presumptions and priorities from our own. They do not simply set out what Christians living in an age of climate change should believe and do. However, they do help to generate a positive vision of the value, beauty, and ultimate worth of the whole earth, and so can perhaps inspire a positive ecological stance and committed environmental action.

So the Bible, it would seem, has an ambivalent impact upon Christian attitudes to environmental ethics. It is important to remember the arguments of writers such as Lynn White, who see the Bible and Christian tradition as a source of problematic attitudes that need to change. Important, too, is a recognition that ideas such as environmental stewardship cannot be found directly in the pages of the Bible, but rather result from a particular interpretation of certain texts, and therefore that these interpretations must remain open to critical scrutiny. At the same time, however, the Bible continues to offer much material that can contribute to the development of Christian environmental ethics, albeit material that requires skills of creative interpretation to uncover its relevance to the challenges and changes of the twenty-first century. Realising this makes it all the more important to consider carefully whether ideas like stewardship are a good or bad basis for environmental ethics, and to consider how far biblical texts give rise to such convictions.

**Prof David Horrel**, Professor of New Testament Studies and **Dr Anna Davis**, Associate Research Fellow, Department of Theology and Religion, University of Exeter

### Further reading

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Additional material on this topic is also available at:

<http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/theology/research/projects/beyondstewardship/>

Human care for creation is seen as a joining in with God's purpose and activity to transform the earth into a place of righteousness, justice and peace.

## For discussion

- 1 *To what extent, if at all, do you think Christianity is to blame for our environmental crisis?*
- 2 *Does the idea of humans being 'in the image of God' set them apart from the rest of nature? Is this a valuable idea, a damaging one, or both?*
- 3 *How far are interpretations of the Bible influenced by the concerns of the age in which the interpreter lives?*
- 4 *What are your reactions to the biblical texts concerning the end of the world? Do you think they encourage Christians to be good or bad at preserving the earth for future generations?*
- 5 *In what ways, if any, does the natural world require human management? To what extent are views on such questions determined by religious convictions or scientific insights?*

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# **How do we know right from wrong?**

Jane Caro, Antony Loewenstein, Simon Smart and Rachel Woodlock

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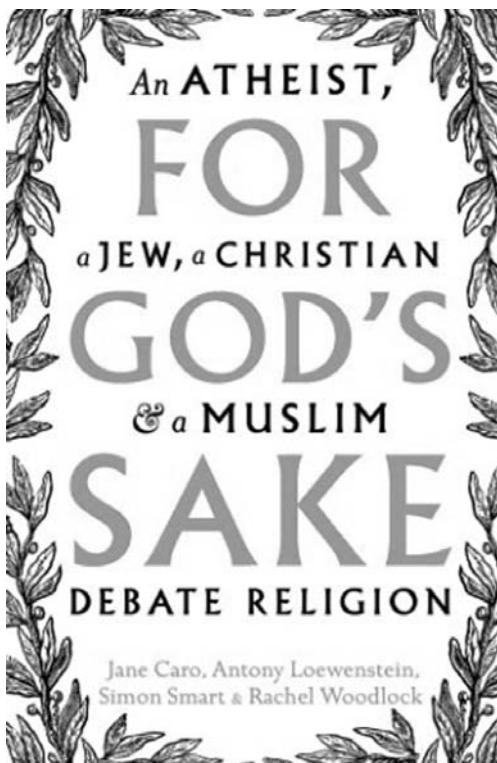
In *For God's Sake: An Atheist, a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim Debate Religion* (Pan MacMillan, 2003), Jane Caro, Antony Loewenstein, Simon Smart and Rachel Woodlock wrestle with their own traditions and each other over the question of how to determine what is morally right and how we, in turn, should live. This is an extract from their book.

## **Rachel Woodlock**

She stared at me with big brown eyes. Both her and the small child on her hip looked wispy, their clothes threadbare, both living on the margins of existence. That's how I'll always remember them, be haunted by them. Maria, a fellow language student, and I were wandering through local Yemeni markets searching for gifts for friends back in Australia.

She followed us waiting for an opportunity to ask if we might bestow some generosity on her. Finally, she came close and gingerly put out her hand. Maria shook her head firmly, and steered me away commenting, "You should never give to beggars. It just encourages them." I was too embarrassed to challenge Maria, feeling foolish to seem so gullible. I'll never forget the look on her face - a mixture of sadness, disgust, hopelessness and curiosity that with all our money to fritter away, we had no heart to give her even a few token riyals. From time to time I remember to pray for her.

These situations seem designed to test a person's flaws, like water to a clay pot, revealing where each otherwise unobservable crack is hidden. Often it's not intellectual consistency with a moral philosophy that's revealed, but some startlingly base behaviour: submission to authority, self-interest and weakness to peer pressure. This is what Yale psychologist Stanley Milgram found in his now infamous experiment where people were ordered to administer (fake) electric shocks to a person in distress. Milgram and his team set up a scenario where unwitting subjects were asked to "teach" a simple language task to a learner who was really an actor in a different room. Whenever the learner apparently made a mistake, the subject was instructed to shock the learner. The experimenters were actually playing pre-recorded distress noises, and the



levels were increased to the point where the subjects were made to believe something dire had happened to the learner in the other room. Milgram wished to observe how bad things would have to get before ordinary people would buck against orders and do the right thing.

It turns out most of us will obey authority even when it so obviously conflicts basic ethics. This is why, taught Prophet Muhammad, the *jihad* (struggle) to live a moral life is greater than fighting in any military war. Battling to choose the good over self-interest takes a lifetime of training, according to the spiritual adepts.

While to the vast majority of us, acts of great evil - Nazis committing genocide against the Jews, Soviets starving political prisoners in communist gulags, pedophile

priests assaulting children, Al-Qaeda suicide bombers targeting innocents - are clearly wrong, more ambiguous moral conundrums require some introspection. Is it wrong to tell your friend she looks fabulous when she proudly shows off her mullet dress?

Historically, Muslim theologians and philosophers debated morality, questioning whether acts are intrinsically good or bad, or whether they are arbitrarily named so by God. Some argued that good and bad exist objectively - for instance, that killing and lying are inherently and under every circumstance wrong. Others pointed out, no, in some extremely rare cases it is right to kill and to lie.

Take the case of the Muslims during the 1994 Rwandan genocide who saved many Tutsi lives based on a lie. In 2009, Jason Klocek interviewed the head mufti of Rwanda, Sheikh Saleh Habimana, asking him how Muslims were able to shelter Tutsis, given the danger to their own lives, to which the Sheikh replied:

"[W]e Muslims had an advantage. You see, for many years Hutus had been taught to fear Muslims. They were scared of our mosques, so we could hide Tutsis there without fear of Hutus entering. Hutus had been taught that our mosques were houses of the devil. They were taught that the devil lived in Muslim homes, too."

From one perspective, the lie that mosques are full of devils was harmful, yet the same lie proved so useful in saving many innocent lives.

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**Battling to choose the good over self-interest takes a lifetime of training.**

There's a postscript to my opening story. When an old Yemeni friend reached out and asked for help, I knew immediately what the right thing to do was. The 2012 food crisis had hit him and his family hard, with the lack of work due to political turmoil affecting soaring food prices. With some generous and compassionate friends, including a number of Twitter mates, I got together enough funds to help his family repay some food debts and buy enough stocks for several months. I hope it makes up for my shame just a little.

#### **Antony Loewenstein**

I was standing in a refugee camp in Port au Prince, the capital of Haiti. It was September 2012, more than two and a half years after the devastating earthquake that ravaged the impoverished country and killed up to 250,000 people. It was a steamy hot day and a sea of human beings - men, women and children - were living in squalor. Many had been there for years, failed by the UN, NGOs, the United States government and other foreign powers. The smell of faeces filled the air as the day came to a close. The sun shone on the men playing dominos while many women stood around chastising their dirty children.

Words failed me. I asked questions of men who were keen to express their frustration to a Western journalist, but I felt impotent, an imposter, useless. All my questions seemed trivial. "Why has the world forgotten us?" was a constant refrain. Giving a response seemed worse than saying nothing at all, so I simply expressed sympathy and solidarity with their plight, promising to report fairly what I saw. I'd rarely felt more aware of the inadequacy of journalism as a tool for positive change.

What I witnessed was wrong and cruel. It's hard to imagine anybody challenging that assessment. I didn't need God, spirituality, my Judaism or faith to understand that claiming to assist a place such as Haiti, and pledging billions of dollars to do so, is radically different from ensuring the money actually reaches the people who most desperately need it.

Talking about doing good is irrelevant when people are still suffering . It's a Western

indulgence to think we're helping to bring any sense of true dignity to the Haitian people just by donating money to a favoured charity or believing our governments when they say they're doing all they can. We make a moral call, as I did when seeing the reality up close in all its grimness, that it's right to do more than simply express hurt and impotence. It's called being human.

Like every conscious human being, I have lied and cheated. I have wished ill on people. I have done wrong many times and will inevitably do so again for as long as I live. The older I become the less sure I am about the certainties of my youth. I don't believe my values have fundamentally shifted, but I've become sometimes more tolerant of intolerance. Or maybe a better way to put it is that I'm far more interested in understanding where somebody who's acting correctly has come from, what in their past has made them do right.

I'm very much in the "nurture not nature" school of thought. You aren't born good nor are you born a Nazi. The values we inherit from family, friends, media, religion, travelling or partners develop over a lifetime. But these values aren't universally shared. Sadly, in some Muslim communities, rape is defended and even encouraged. In some Jewish circles, the killing of Palestinians is classed as an unavoidable reality. In many Catholic communities, abortions are denied even in cases of incest.

Faith can be distorted. Faith can bring renewal. Faith can be life-affirming. Faith can make people do good and give a moral framework within which to build a life. I don't think I'm being equivocal by arguing against the demonisation of religious faith in an age of reason. There are untold millions of people globally who give their time and money to various causes principally because they believe they're doing good in the eyes of Muhammad or Jesus. None of this means it's necessarily unthinking charity or pressure from an imam.

When there's no one definition of goodness and evil in the world - things that were seen as an abomination by the vast majority of citizens in the West a few decades ago, such as gay sex, are now popularised through mainstream Hollywood, situated in one of the most conservative Christian nations on earth - it's inevitable that most of us will be able to

**We learn what's right and wrong from experience, and these can, and should change throughout our lives.**

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agree only on the bare minimum of what's wrong in our society.

We exaggerate allegedly noble Judaeo-Christian "values" when many of them are inherently racist, homophobic and intolerant. Building a just society requires progressing beyond the tired arguments of past decades, when believers would instruct non-believers they would go to hell because they didn't feel the love of an omnipotent being. We learn what's right and wrong from experience, and these can, and should change throughout our lives .

It's incumbent on us all to remember that nobody has a monopoly on goodness or evil, right or wrong. We're all capable, no matter our background, of being a bit of both, and liking it.

#### **Jane Caro**

I do not believe that children are born in sin, or born sinners. I do not believe that people can only be good if they're bribed with promises of heavenly reward or threatened with eternal damnation. I believe that people are likely to do the right thing unless they've been warped and damaged - particularly in childhood - and so have lost that innate capacity to treat others as they'd like to be treated.

My own moral compass is fundamentally based on the Golden Rule. If I wouldn't like something done to me, then I assume other people wouldn't like it done to them. Such a simple ethical framework, and yet it covers murder, torture, stealing, cheating, lying, hitting, hurting, kidnapping, threatening, bullying, intimidation, slavery and a thousand and one other crimes both great and small. It also means I cannot countenance racism, sexism or homophobia.

I use another moral philosophy to help me decide right and wrong, and that's the right of everyone to live as they wish, as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else. My greatest desire is for the liberty and freedom to do what I freely choose to do without answering to others. To be granted the respect that I am capable of

**Talking about doing good is irrelevant when people are still suffering.**

making my own decisions and strong enough to live with the consequences, be they good or bad, is how I wish to be "done by." And I try to grant that same respect to others.

I'm simply not interested in other people's sex lives. As long as all the activities involved are between consenting adults, I have no moral problem with multiple sex partners, use of any or all orifices, positions, combinations or even fetish behaviour, including freely consented-to sadomasochism. How other people give and receive physical pleasure is not for me to judge, and I actively object to attempts to restrict them. I have many more moral qualms about old-fashioned marriage - particularly when it included conjugal rights - than I have about the honest, transparent, economic transactions involved in legal, well-regulated prostitution.

Which brings me to moral dilemmas such as the right to safe, legal abortion. I am a firm believer in a woman's right to choose and have had an abortion myself. I don't intend to go into my personal decision here, but my own morality demands that I also do not act the hypocrite. In cases like abortion, I'm guided by a pragmatic belief in choosing what I regard as the lesser of two evils. Because I don't believe in a soul, I have no hesitation in putting the rights, hopes and liberty of the sentient human being (the woman), ahead of the potential human being (her foetus). As a mother, I'm very much aware of the commitment and effort required to bring up children well. I believe that such a demanding relationship should always be entered into voluntarily. I would also argue that this is an entirely moral decision. I'm perfectly willing to respect that others make a different moral decision about abortion based on their own deeply held beliefs.

However, my moral beliefs about the world are also the reason I fiercely oppose attempts to restrict access to safe, legal terminations. It's also why I believe in the right of the terminally ill to access voluntary euthanasia, and yet am opposed to capital punishment. To me, there's nothing contradictory about these beliefs because they are about fundamentally respecting each individual's right to decide the circumstances of their own life and death. To kill another sentient being - whatever they



may have done - is against my moral code. To choose to die or to end a potential life because you don't believe you can adequately parent the child it will become, may be regrettable - even tragic (just as the suffering person would prefer not to be ill, the woman would have preferred not to fall pregnant) - but not immoral.

I find the use of shame by religions to prevent adults enjoying the full delight of human sexuality morally repugnant. To me, it's simply wrong to have made so many people feel so miserable and guilty about what is not only entirely natural behaviour, but also the source of so much joy.

I am also suspicious of the sanctimony of much religion. Always putting the other ahead of oneself smacks of masochism and manipulation. The unrealistic expectation of selflessness becomes another stick to beat people with. I don't understand why seeking pleasure, as long as it doesn't prevent others from doing the same, is a bad thing. I prefer the brisk, upfront honesty of the negotiation between what I want and what someone else wants, expressed candidly, to the sickly-sweet self-effacement of selflessness. Sometimes it's generous to take and allow others to give. For me, true morality lies in being self-responsible.

#### **Simon Smart**

Very often the difference between right and wrong is complex and far from obvious. There are times when the answers to ethical puzzles involve choosing between the lesser of two evils. But from where do we source our wisdom for such choices? In attempting an answer, the West once relied on a worldview that was thoroughly soaked in the Bible and its depiction of what is true and real.

Even as modernity took shape and a strong current of thought came to regard ethics as based on human reason, a massive system of moral values and practices based on Christ's teaching continued to exert influence in terms of what was considered good and right. Since then, large and relatively sudden cultural shifts

have delivered us to the point where the ultimate reference point for establishing right practice in the social realm appears to run no deeper than human desire and will. Simply to desire something is seen as a good enough reason for doing it.

But without an outside influence, ethics becomes about whatever we can construct for ourselves, or whatever stories our society tells itself. That could mean a society that chooses solidarity, kindness and compassion just as easily as one that chooses fascism and the building of death camps. Those who object have no higher authority to appeal to, and so, as atheist philosopher Richard Rorty admits, the "good" under such circumstances becomes whatever those in power decide it to be.

Of course, you don't necessarily need faith to lead a good life. It's obvious that plenty of people who have rejected the idea of God or religion can and do make heroic contributions to society and lead thoroughly ethical lives. But having lost the transcendent, the ground on which ethics rests becomes decidedly unsteady. Take human rights. On what basis can we say, along with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, that all men and women are equally valuable, possessing an inherent dignity such that we should act towards them in a spirit of brotherhood?

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**Having lost the transcendent, the ground on which ethics rests becomes decidedly unsteady.**

Nicholas Wolterstorff, professor of philosophical theology at Yale University, wrote about this in his book *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*. According to him, the attempt to find a basis for human rights apart from a theistic framework is bound to fail, whereas the notion of intrinsic worth bestowed by the creator establishes a firm foundation for rights in a way nothing else can. Human rights established on the basis of being merely a social fact of a civilised society are feeble at best and defenceless before powerful opposition. Wolterstorff argues that the "image of God" status of each individual that emerges from the Judaeo-Christian framework provides the only stable basis for the notion of inalienable human rights.

**For me, true morality lies in being self-responsible.**

What also emerges from such a framework is Christianity's key ethic: love for God and neighbour, which includes care for the weak and oppressed.

I suspect that Jane's resistance to the idea of living self-sacrificially might stem from her fear that women especially are likely to be disadvantaged by such thinking, and fair enough. But in Christianity, what Jane calls "sickly-sweet self-effacement" is in fact not about being a willing subject of manipulation and other people's selfishness, but being drawn into a vision of reality that offers the mutual cultivation of human life and love. Putting ethical questions before the "test of love" as the measure of how to act is a crucial part of this. It's the sort of motivation for action that leads so many of the aid and charitable agencies to care for those on the scrapheap of urban poverty and homelessness; to pour resources into the developing world to ease crises and contribute to long-term change for those unlucky enough to have been born in the wrong place; to provide protection and dignity to the aged and people with dementia. It's what has for centuries impelled people to sacrifice comfort, time and wealth to alleviate suffering and work ceaselessly on behalf of powerless and vulnerable people. Can you get that from "enlightened self-interest"?

Jesus talked about "losing your life in order to find it," which, interestingly, is a paradox that all the current "happiness" researchers say we need to understand - the centrality and priority of relationships, the benefit of "other-person-centredness" and the personal satisfaction and benefit that comes from putting your interests aside to serve others.

My point is not that people of faith are the only ones doing this, but that they have a powerful reason for doing it that is grounded in and consistent with their view of the world and all of reality.

Our culture has been so shaped by the Christian story that even in cases where we have rejected or forgotten the story itself, its influence forms much of the ground on which we stand, shaping our view of each other and ourselves. That influence is undoubtedly waning, but what will replace it is hard to see. Perhaps we'll find ways to live well together and foster a culture of fairness, justice and love, but I suspect it will take something a heck of a lot more profound than polite civility, faith in human goodness and collecting your neighbour's mail when they're away on holidays.

This extract from *For God's Sake: An Atheist, a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim Debate Religion* is reprinted with the generous permission of the authors and publisher Pan MacMillan.

Jane Caro is an author, novelist, columnist, speaker, broadcaster, enthusiastic tweeter and award winning advertising writer. Antony Loewenstein is an independent Australian journalist, photographer and blogger. He is the author of two bestselling books, *My Israel Question* and *Profits of Doom – How Vulture Capitalism is Swallowing the World*. Simon Smart is a Director of the Centre for Public Christianity www.publicchristianity.org. His writing has appeared in The Sydney Morning Herald, The Australian, ABC the Drum, The Punch and ABC Religion and Ethics. Rachel Woodlock, M.Islam.Std. (Melb), is an academic and writer specialising in Islam and Muslims in the West.

## For discussion

1. For each of the four writers, identify the basis for their decision making regarding right and wrong.
2. Write a slogan to summarise Jane Caro's approach to right and wrong. Can you identify any limitations in her argument?
3. Simon Smart talks about the 'test of love' as a measure for how to act. How effective do you think that would be as an ethical framework?
4. Write down 2 questions you would have for each writer regarding their approach to right and wrong.



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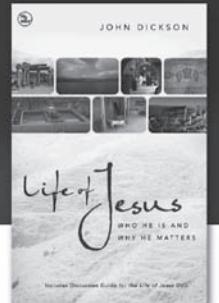
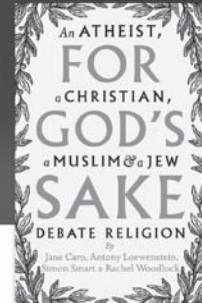
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- \* **God Science:** leading scientists talk about life, the universe and everything!
- \* **For God's Sake** An Atheist, a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim Debate Religion: a new book about the place of faith in the modern world.
- \* **Life of Jesus:** Historian John Dickson explores the evidence for Jesus' life and teachings.



Go beyond religion at [www.publicchristianity.org](http://www.publicchristianity.org)

# **Utilitarianism: An Overview for Secondary Students**

Stephen Law

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## **Jeremy Bentham**

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), the father of utilitarianism, famously declared that

... actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.

Utilitarianism is a form of *consequentialism* – it says that only the consequences of an act are morally relevant.

Bentham says that the right thing to do in any given situation is to act to produce *the happiest outcome*. The happiest outcome according to Bentham, is that which produces *the most pleasure and the least pain*.

Bentham himself developed 'felicific calculus' factors, such as intensity and duration of pains and pleasures that could be fed into an algorithm to calculate the right course of action.

A simple example of such a utilitarian calculation: should I steal that child's sweets? Doing so might give me the pleasure of eating them. But it would deprive the child of the same pleasure and cause her considerable unhappiness to boot. On balance, stealing the sweets will cause less happiness than not stealing them. So the right thing to do, on this simple utilitarian calculation, is not to steal the sweets.

## **The happy-drug counter-example**

One glaring problem with the simpler forms of utilitarianism is that they seem prone to an obvious sort of counterexample. What if we could make everyone feel wonderfully happy by constantly injecting them with a happy-drug? Would that be the right thing to do, morally speaking?

No. Turning everyone into blissed-out drug zombies would be wrong. Making people 'feel

good' may be of some moral importance. But it's not of overriding importance.

## **John Stuart Mill**

### **Higher and lower pleasures**

One way in which a utilitarian might respond to this sort of counterexample is to distinguish between *higher and lower pleasures*. J.S. Mill does precisely this. An intense, drug-induced reverie may be agreeable. But it produces a pleasure of a very shallow sort compared to, say, the pleasures of the intellect - which, according to Mill, include the appreciation of poetry and philosophical debate. Doping people up to their eyeballs may induce an intense sort of pleasure, but it deprives them of the opportunity to enjoy higher, more important pleasures. Which is why it would be the wrong thing to do.

So unlike Bentham – pleasures differ not just *quantitatively* but *qualitatively* as well.

This distinction between higher and lower pleasures may get the utilitarian off the hook so far as the 'happy-drug' objection goes, but it strikes many as objectionably elitist and paternalistic. Is the pleasure of engaging in philosophical debate or listening to Mozart really superior to that of filling ones belly with chocolate ice-cream? Aren't such distinctions mere snobbery?

Mill thought not. He argues that only those who have experienced both the higher and lower pleasures are in any position to judge which are best, and those who have had the luxury of experiencing both tend to prefer the higher.

But is this true? Actually, many of those in a position to enjoy both kinds of pleasure like to be seen to enjoy the higher, while secretly over-indulging their taste for the lower.

## **Transplant case**

Another classic counterexample to utilitarianism is the *transplant case*. Suppose you're the doctor in charge of six patients.

The first has a minor medical condition easily cured. The others have failing organs and will soon die without transplants. No replacement organs are available. But then you discover that the first patient can provide perfect donor organs. So you can murder the first patient to save the rest. Or you can cure the first and watch five die. What is the right thing to do?

A simple utilitarian calculation suggests you should kill one patient to save the rest. After all, that will result in five happy patients and only one set of grieving relatives, rather than one happy patient and five sets of grieving relatives. Yet the killing of one patient to save the rest strikes most of us as very wrong indeed.

## **Act and Rule Utilitarianism**

Some utilitarians attempt to deal with this kind of case by distinguishing between act and rule utilitarianism.

Act utilitarianism: each action should be judged solely on its ability to produce the greatest happiness.

Rule utilitarianism: we should follow those rules that will produce the greatest happiness.

A rule utilitarian might say that 'Do not kill the innocent' and 'Do not punish the innocent' are rules which increase happiness overall. So we should always follow these rules, even on those rare occasions (such as the transplant case) when following them does reduce happiness.

## **Mill's Rule Utilitarianism**

J.S. Mill suggests that we should be rule utilitarians except where we face a dilemma generated by two rules. Then we should appeal directly to the principle of utility itself.

For example: 'do not steal' and 'do not allow people to starve' are rules that will generally produce greater happiness. But where I can feed a starving person only by stealing food for them, I must break one or other of these two rules. Under these circumstances,

I must then revert to act utilitarianism and judge which action will produce the happiest outcome.

So Mill and Bentham differ in that:

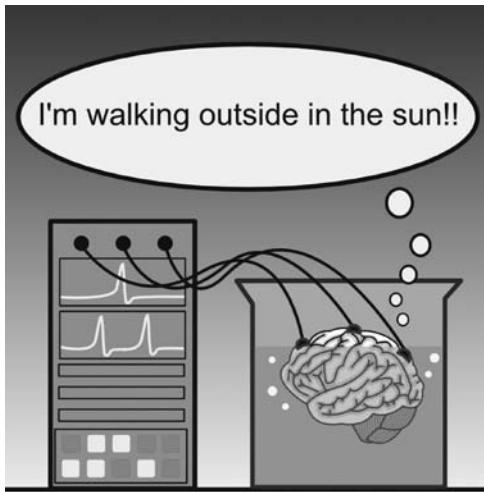
1. Bentham is an act utilitarian whereas Mill favours a form of rule utilitarianism
2. Bentham does not distinguish between higher and lower pleasures, Mill does.

#### A criticism of rule utilitarianism

Why I should follow the rule even in a situation where the result is less happiness? It seems ridiculous to insist that I should tell

the truth to the serial killer who demands to know where my children are hiding, even if telling the truth does *in general* lead to increased happiness. Indeed, it would surely be wrong for me to tell the truth under such circumstances. But it seems that is not something the rule-utilitarian can allow (or can Mill deal with it?)

including *The Philosophy Files* and *The War for Children's Minds* and maintains a regular Blog: <http://stephenlaw.blogspot.com.au> where this article first appeared (reprinted with generous permission).



#### Nozick's Experience Machine

Here's one last apparent counterexample to utilitarianism from the contemporary philosopher Robert Nozick. Suppose a machine is built that can replicate any experience. Plug yourself in and it will stimulate your brain in just the way it would be stimulated if you were, say, climbing Mount Everest or walking on the Moon. The experiences this machine generates are indistinguishable from those you would get if you were experiencing the real thing.

For those of us that want to experience exotic and intense pleasures, this machine offers a fantastic opportunity. Notice it can even induce *higher* pleasures - the pleasure gained from engaging in a philosophical debate or listening to a Beethoven symphony need be no less intense for being experienced within a virtual world.

Many of us would be keen to try out this machine. But what of the offer to *permanently* immerse yourself in such a pleasure-inducing world?

Most of us would refuse. Someone who has climbed Everest in virtual reality has not really climbed Everest. And someone who has enjoyed a month-long affair with the computer-generated Lara Croft has not really made any sort of meaningful connection with another human being.

The truth is we don't just want to 'feel happy.' Most of us also want to lead lives that are *authentic*. Someone who (like Truman in *The Truman Show*) had unwittingly lived out their whole life within a carefully controlled environment might subjectively feel content and fulfilled. But were they to be told on their deathbed that it had all been a carefully staged illusion - that there had been no *real* relationships, that their 'achievements' had all been carefully managed - then they might well feel that theirs was, after all, a life sadly wasted.

Again, it seems that 'feeling good' is not, ultimately, what's most important to most of us. Nor, it seems, is arranging things to maximize the feeling of happiness always morally the right thing to do. Secretly plugging everyone into a deceptive, Matrix-like pleasure-inducing virtual world would surely be very wrong indeed.

**Stephen Law** is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Heythrop College, University of London and Editor of the Royal Institute of Philosophy Journal *Think*. He has written many books

## The Intuitionists

Nicky Hansell



The three Intuitionists,  
Moore, Prichard and  
Ross  
Were sitting in a  
pub one day  
Prior to getting  
sloshed.

Moore said "Good is  
simple,

It cannot be defined.  
Just like the colour yellow  
You see it in the mind."



Prichard said "Use  
reason  
To help you to  
decide between  
The dark conundrums  
that  
Clutter up the mind"

Ross said "No....duty  
Will tell you what to do  
You have a pile of seven  
Which one is up to you."

The three Intuitionists  
Moore, Prichard and Ross

Were sitting in a pub one  
day  
Now almost fully  
sloshed.

They all thought its  
INTUITION  
That makes the world  
go round  
But why some have  
more, and some have  
less,  
Well, now, *that is*  
profound.

# ***Teaching the Holocaust: 'Safely in and safely out'***

Terry McDevitt

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How do we prepare our students to sensitively and critically approach the horrors of the 1930s and 1940s, and indeed, the many atrocities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Do we regularly audit our history, religion and ethics courses for rigor, duration and appropriate resources? Do we grapple with the complex, and deeply profound philosophical questions raised by the Problem of Evil and all its manifestations?<sup>1</sup> What mindset are students left with after such a lesson or course of study?

No world citizen or curriculum can neglect the genocidal intent, and tragic consequences of German 'National Socialism,' nor indeed the circumstances of the end of the Pacific War in August 1945.<sup>2</sup> And even were the most fundamentalist among us to refer solely to the Christian Scriptures as a reference point in the modern world, the complexity of Christianity's relationship with the Torah,<sup>3</sup> and Jewish people past and present, surely raises immediate questions and dilemmas relevant to our shared, interdependent futures.

The philosophy at The Centre for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem (where I attended the Gandel Program for Australian Educators in January 2014),<sup>4</sup> is to respect the sensibilities of young people. Even in a world where some consider 'Grand Theft Auto' a

'game,' our young may not be as desensitised to violence as we sometimes imagine. Hence the need to guide students knowledgably, but as far as possible 'safely in,' to the insanity of racial laws and atrocities of Kristalnacht and horrors thereafter, when millions upon millions died for no good reason.

What happened in Europe for centuries, culminating in the 1940s, can neither be denied nor ignored. One's specific focus and detail will depend on subject, year level and particular course of study. As in any discipline, we seek to engage students with age appropriate examples. But at the end of our lesson, the school day, the assignment or unit of work, young people must return home 'safely out' of these events. Safe but changed, inspired and strengthened. We of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century may look forward with hope, if we are able to learn the lessons of the past.

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**In a world where some consider 'Grand Theft Auto' a 'game,' our young may not be as desensitised to violence as we sometimes imagine.**

## **Pedagogical considerations**

Whatever a school's faith tradition or heritage, professional educators need clear aims when teaching about genocide, and in this instance, the Holocaust. One must be familiar with the reach, extent and sources of antisemitism. Sensitivity is required in the classroom and worship to claims and language of supersession by academics and belief systems (some still struggle with the use of C.E. for example). The full implications of the Shoah continue to be felt and recognised by the global community. Many among us shudder hearing politicians use the language of 'Crusades.'

Multi faith and ecumenical statements in the past clearly pointed to the need for individuals to resist being bystanders<sup>5</sup>, and the need for reconciliation, ownership and a change of direction.<sup>6</sup> Historians and educators have long acknowledged Zionism being among the claims adding to complexities in the Middle East before and after 1948. It is critical our students come to some understanding of the Arab and Jewish experiences that continue to shape the modern world.

It is said that if the historian teaches about the past, the educator gives the past a meaning. Poor teaching reduces atrocities to facts and figures. It overlooks polemic in the Gospels of Matthew and John, and knows nothing of centuries of pogroms. It speaks little of Jewish life and community before the Wars. It shows executions, piles of bodies, or the mechanics of Ghettos or death camps, without telling of people and family. We risk reducing Jewish people to victims or objects.

In limited teaching, there is little mention of resistance, nor righteous action. What of survival and the return to life after 1945? Such deficiencies in content are clearly inadequate, especially given the demographics of major cities in Australia and the region with significant Jewish and culturally diverse

# Poor teaching... shows executions, piles of bodies, or the mechanics of Ghettos or death camps, without telling of people and family.

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populations. As peace makers we also need to convey some sense of Palestine before and since the Balfour Declaration,<sup>7</sup> explore the reasons for, and impact of immigration since the 1930s and challenges in the modern Middle East.<sup>8</sup> As the sources indicate, truth claims are very much contested here.

## Curricular considerations

Aspects of the Holocaust can be taught at various stages throughout school. The key questions are what to teach, at what year level, and which pedagogy and resources will best engage and inform. The art of the educator is to know our students (as AITSL Standards remind us), to develop our own knowledge to an extent that we bring alive the human dimensions, and to build a culture that connects recent events with our own present and future stories. Knowing curricular entry points is essential.

### National Curriculum: History

The National Curriculum specifies content at **Yr 9** level up to 1918. Whilst neatly taking us to the end of WWI, teachers and students will be better informed and better prepared for study in future years if they learn even a little about the Jewish experience in Europe prior to this. Topics might include persecution and pogroms in preceding centuries, Jewish life after 1789 in Germany and Poland and examples of anti-Semitism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Theodore Herzl and the Dreyfuss Affair.

The **Yr 10 Curriculum** covers material from 1918 to the present. The Content Description Overview includes Versailles, while in the WWII study, 'significant events,' 'including the Holocaust and the use of the atomic bomb' are to be included. There is also scope for study in Unit 2 on 'Rights and Freedoms,' and within Unit 3 'The Globalising World,' a possible elective on 'Migration experiences.' Several possible lessons or topics are listed below:

**Senior Modern History** in the National Curriculum offers the following:

Unit 1: Understanding the Modern World

Unit 2: Movements for Change in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: An alternative significant movement (possibly Zionism)

Unit 4: The Modern World since 1945: The Struggle for Peace in The Middle East

## State Based and Independent History Curricula

Currently, schools offering the IBO, or transitioning from State based Senior Curricula (VCE, HSC, SACE etc) to the National Curriculum, allow Depth Studies on a range of aspects. For example:

Unit 1 VCE History: Twentieth Century History 1900-1945.

Outcome 2: Social Life: Analyse and discuss patterns of social life and the factors which influenced changes to social life in the first half of the twentieth century.

Context: Jewish life in Nazi Germany.

There are numerous examples and possibilities.

## The following are possible lessons or topics for History, Religion or Philosophy courses, several of which (\*) are further developed below:

- Anti-Semitism in Europe

*Blood libel, expulsion Germany, France, England, Spain, Balkans, Jewish as managers, Marx 1844, Wagner 1850, 'Jewish War' of 1859, Warsaw Gazette, Kraushar, Dmowski's 'Endecja', Pogroms (1881, 1903, 1905), Marr 1879, von Trietschke 1879*

- Herzl and the Zionist movement
- The Jewish community in Pre WW1 Poland

*Boleslaw of Kalish, Casimir III, Augustus' 'Council of Four Lands', Moshe Isserles, Chmielnicki 1648, Baal Shem Tov & Hassidism, Kosciuszko, Joselewicz, 'Haskalah', Aleichem & the Ashkenazi 'Shtetl'*

- The Jewish community in pre WW1 Germany

*1789, Edict of Hardenberg 1812, 'Ostjuden', Moses Mendelssohn, Walter Rathenau, Rosa Luxemburg, in WWI of the 100,000 who fought, 12,000 Jews die*

- Eugenics, pseudo science and Nazi race theory

- The 1936 Olympics, German athletes, Jesse Owens, etc
- 'Degenerate Art', Nazi Aesthetics & the campaign against Modernism\*
- Activists not victims, Jewish Resistance in Ghettos, Underground
- Examples of Righteous actions by Nazi opponents: Trocme, Karski, Firenze Network, Schindler\*
- Should we teach Genocide, or Holocaust? \*
- Some considerations on selecting and using visual texts \*
- Survivor Oral History & Testimony\*
- Beersheba and the Light Horse, War of Independence, Palestinian aspirations
- '67, '73, Lebanon, Gaza, the 'Arab Spring', Syrian Civil War

### 1. 'We'll tell you what art is.'

'Degenerate' Art, Propaganda & Architecture in the Third Reich

For more information see 'Germany's Sculptor' by Rachel Perry, a Lesson Plan on the Yad Vashem website. This lesson explores the presumptuous, but deliberate and concerted attempt by Nazism to dictate aesthetics based on Aryan 'volk' mythos. Perry gives an excellent background and detailed commentary on the famous 1937 and subsequent Exhibitions, and the totalitarian attempt to prescribe beauty and national ideals based on religious, racial and eugenic stereotyping. The chilling text of Hitler's address at the Opening of the House of German Art, 'I am going to make a clean sweep of the artistic life of Germany,' on July 18, 1937 is available online.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of visitor numbers, the 'Great German Art Exhibition' was nowhere near as 'successful' as the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition: during its four-month run, it drew an average of 3,200 visitors a day, whereas the 'negative' show drew an average of more than 20,000 visitors a day during its time in Munich. A recent BBC documentary detailing these disturbing examples of State aesthetics, 'Art of Germany,' is now available online at ABC view<sup>10</sup>, and complements Perry's research brilliantly.

## The Righteous

Despite the sad fact that in many cases Nazi perpetrators relied upon collaborators or bystanders to enact heinous crimes, there are inspiring examples of great courage and resistance from which to learn of the nobler side of human nature. Yad Vashem refers to these as 'Righteous Among The Nations.'

The incredible network set up between 1940-44 at Le Chambon Sur Lignon on the plateau above Lyon by Protestant Pastor Andre Trocme and his Italian/ Russian wife Magda, is worthy of investigation and recount. The story of his nephew Daniel is equally moving and inspiring. He is quoted as saying, 'I think it may be time for me to take responsibility for others,' and 'what do I do so as not to be ashamed of myself.' Ultimately 3500 of the approximately 5000 saved were Jewish. When accused of harbouring Jewish people, Trocme retorted, 'I only know human beings.' The 'Righteous' link on the Yad Vashem website opens up this lesson and story and others that follow.

The extraordinary career of Polish counter-intelligence agent Jan Karski (see 'The Envoy' lesson from 'The Righteous' link), is another fine example. Holding dual degrees in Government and Law, an extraordinary intellect and athlete, Karski died only in 2000. His bravery in the 1940s - being personally smuggled into ghettos and camps - and subsequent journeys through occupied territory in an attempt to attract international support, is authentic espionage thriller material. His life, commitment and writings are also moving and impressive.

Whilst the role and actions of Pius XII are often debated and, as some argue, misunderstood, networks and safe houses in the 'Florence Network' of monasteries and convents led many people to safety. The story of Fr. Cipriano Ricotti and others are well worth exploring, and are available on the Yad Vashem website.

Oskar Schindler's story is well known since being popularised in Thomas Keneally's book and Spielberg's 1993 film, but the Yad Vashem site allows this to be explored in greater depth. Gandel 2014 scholarship recipients were privileged to visit Schindler's grave in the Catholic Cemetery in Jerusalem, and meet Schindler survivors Nachum and Genya Manor, who now reside in Beersheva.

## 'Genocide, or Holocaust?'

Extermination camp liberator Hermann Gillman said in April 1945, 'This has to be known. People have to know. To dispel myths and lies.' The Shoah was unprecedented in scope, a watershed event in the middle of Europe that became tragically defining, fostered an entire field of studies and became an historical turning point. Yehuda Bauer argues that in order to teach about genocide, 'Holocaust Education is a pre requisite.'<sup>11</sup> It is important that even if we accept this, it in no way entails a comparison of suffering from one community to another.

Since 1945, the awful human tale has been that 'Never Again' has become 'Again & Again' in numerous places (think of Cambodia, Rwanda and the Balkans). Hence the urgency to educate, and to do what we can in our spheres to alert people, and to teach against the conditions that allow such events to occur. Greg Stanton's (1998) *Stages and Elements of Genocide* identifies the following as typical: classification, symbolisation, dehumanisation, organisation, polarisation, identification, extermination and denial. Researchers also refer to Barbara Harff's work in social mapping and likely predictors of genocide. Some educators use these frameworks and predictors to analyse current conflicts.

The uncomfortable truth for Christians is that the very existence of our belief system has too often provided fertile ground for antisemitism to flourish for over two millennia. Hence the recent attempts to prevent this, and other instances of hatred. The use of language by journalists and politicians in relation to those seeking asylum, and indeed proposed changes to Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, must certainly lead us to be concerned and cautious as historians, philosophers and citizens.

## Issues in Film Studies

Visual text is often the student's first encounter with Holocaust issues, thus its use and critique in the learning program requires careful consideration. Determining the extent of historical accuracy and discussing the portrayal of various viewpoints can at times be contentious. The selection of resources and learning outcomes in a teaching program may require a revision of previous choices. For example, there has been recent criticism of the film *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas* (2008) due to concluding scenes which – for

**'This has to be known. People have to know. To dispel myths and lies.' Hermann Gillman**

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some – emphasise Bruno and his family at the expense of Shmuel. Others regard this particular text as demonstrating that there were victims on all sides.

The following visual texts for use with students were suggestions by Orit Margoliot from Yad Vashem:

## Documentaries and Testimonies

*Shoah, Claude Lanzman; The Last Days; Into the Arms of Strangers; Inheritance*

## Feature Films with Historical bases

**Middle School** - *The Island on Birds Street; Monsieur Batignole; Korczak; The Swing Kids*

**Senior School** - *Europa-Europa; The Pianist; Sara's Key; The Escape from Sobibor; The Triumph of the Spirit; Band of Brothers (Episode 9); Beyond the Forest; Because of that War; Defiance; Amen; Out of the Ashes; Jacob the Liar; Fateless; The Music Box; Everything is Illuminated; Rossenstrasse; Conspiracy; Schindler's List*

## Feature or Short Films

*Train of Life; Ambulance; Pigeon, Fiddler on The Roof*<sup>12</sup>, *Au Revoir Les Enfants*, and the recent *The Book Thief*

## Survivor Testimony

As in other areas of history or cultural studies, learning from and interacting with participants is invaluable. Whilst this poses some difficulties, and requires planning and sensitivity, the rewards for students are immense. Child Holocaust survivors reside in most States, and local Jewish community groups or museums are a useful point of contact and will sometimes host visits. Where this is not possible, many stories and testimonies are now available online in the sites referred to at the end of this article.

## Cultural Immersion

An immersion in contemporary Eretz Israel offers to reconnect a person of any ethical persuasion or confession with a deep spiritual wellspring. As the Zohar inspired art work (*Jerusalem above, the temple within*, Michael Strum) on the cover of this issue

## It seems every generation needs to hear the message: 'put away your sword.'

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of *Dialogue Australasia* Journal suggests, perhaps for all humanity our journey is one towards a mystical sacred indwelling. One might well struggle with how a theocracy or modern state, be it Israel, Saudi Arabia, North Korea or anywhere else lives out the ideals in the U.N Declaration of Human Rights. Even so, listening to survivors' testimony and experiencing the ancient, familial mitzvah of table fellowship at Sabbath are deeply affirming and reassuring. They also challenge us in a world, where beyond the false security of borders or walls, many are in need.

Praying at Capernaum, in the Garden of Gethsemane or in Synagogue or Mosque in Israel, are liminal experiences. One cannot help but be sensitised and in solidarity praying in Synagogue with Jewish sisters and brothers on Shabbat, after earlier in the day recalling and reliving the shocking Night of Shattered Glass in 1938. Sadly, we continue to see the equivalent of Kristalnacht enacted in our own day in Coptic Churches or numerous other sacred spaces throughout the region and elsewhere in our world. Cross-cultural incursions are part of the programming in many schools now, and for largely homogenous communities, are important ways of demystifying and resacralising the 'other.'

After the Holocaust, the lived reality of Judaism's engagement with the region and the world poses numerous challenges in truth and reconciliation for future generations. With

all its tears and challenges, Israel has the potential to be a beacon beyond a milieu of chaos and intolerance. Yet in looking back to the Holocaust of the 1940s, we find ourselves repeatedly asking, 'how was it humanly possible?' – particularly in Central and Western Europe with such a high, nominally Christian population. To this there are no easy answers. In fact there are many painful truths. It seems every generation needs to hear the message: 'put away your sword.'<sup>13</sup> Moreso than ever in this nuclear age, it must also surely be time to 'beat our spears into ploughshares.'<sup>14</sup>

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For more information see  
[www.yadvashem.org/gandelprogram](http://www.yadvashem.org/gandelprogram) or  
email Terry: [tmcdevitt@westminster.sa.edu.au](mailto:tmcdevitt@westminster.sa.edu.au)

### Jewish Museum Resources

Sydney [www.sydneyjewishmuseum.com.au](http://www.sydneyjewishmuseum.com.au)

Melbourne [www.jhc.org.au](http://www.jhc.org.au)

Brisbane & Perth [www.annefrankguide.net](http://www.annefrankguide.net) for  
information on Memorials

Adelaide [www.history.sa.au/migration/edu](http://www.history.sa.au/migration/edu)

NZ [www.jewishonlinemuseum.org](http://www.jewishonlinemuseum.org)

Hong Kong [www.hkhtc.org](http://www.hkhtc.org)  
Hong Kong Holocaust and Tolerance Center

USA [www.sfi.usc.edu](http://www.sfi.usc.edu) USC Shoah Foundation  
[www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org) US Holocaust Memorial  
Museum

### Other Resources

'Stone Cold Justice,' *Four Corners*, ABC iview Feb 2014 -  
Incarceration of Palestinian youths

'The Story of The Jews,' *SBS On Demand*, Mar/ April 2014  
- antisemitism, Zionism, Jewish Life

'The Teacher who defied Hitler,' *SBS On Demand*, April  
2014 - Race based education 1930s

Ryan, Maurice (Ed), *Jewish-Christian Relations*. David Lovell  
Publishing, Melbourne, 2004.

### Endnotes

1 Joe Jenkins illuminates in his article 'Fear and Trembling:  
Teaching the Problem of Evil,' *Dialogue Australasia*  
Journal, Issue 28, November 2012, pp 104. See also  
*The Problem of Evil* 2010, DVD & Word documents,  
[www.ethicsonline.net](http://www.ethicsonline.net)

2 [www.australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au), Australian National  
Curriculum, Yr 10 History.

3 Matt 5: 17, 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the  
Law or the Prophets.'

4 [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org), Philosophy of Holocaust Ed ,  
Shulamit Imber.

5 1947 Multi Faith Statement, Seelisberg, Switzerland,  
'it would have been impossible if...' A joint meeting of  
Jewish and Christian leaders that acknowledged that too  
little was done between 1939-45 to prevent deaths.

6 *Nostra Aetate*, Paulus VI, 1965, Vatican II, which closely  
re examined Catholic relations with Jewish people.

7 Balfour Declaration, cited on NSW Jewish Board of  
Deputies resource, DAN Conf 2009.

8 Ilan Pappé, *The Modern Middle East*, London and New  
York: Routledge, 2005 – a somewhat controversial 'New  
History' proponent.

9 Hitler A., <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub>  
Munich speech, July 18, 1937.

10 Art of Germany (BBC 2010), Series One, Episode 3 (1st  
30 mins) [www.abc.net.au/iview](http://www.abc.net.au/iview)

11 Prof. Yehuda Bauer, quoted on Yad Vashem website  
'Holocaust and Genocide Today.'

12 *Exploring Religion and Ethics*, 2012, p. 251 Goldberg, P.  
Cambridge Uni. Press, Pt. Melbourne.

13 John 18: 11

14 Isaiah 2: 4



SHOAH: The new permanent exhibition in Block 27 at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

# **Learning Optimism – Faith and Positive Psychology in an Educational Setting**

The Rev. Eleanor O'Donnell

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Way back in 1990, before Geelong Grammar School had adopted 'Positive Education' at all, let alone launched its own Positive Education Institute<sup>1</sup>, Martin Seligman's book *Learned Optimism* was published. In it he asserted that the explanatory style employed by students is a key factor in classroom performance.

Optimists recover from their momentary helplessness immediately. Very soon after failing, they pick themselves up, shrug, and start trying again. For them, defeat is a challenge, a mere setback on the road to inevitable victory. They see defeat as temporary and specific, not pervasive. Pessimists wallow in defeat, which they see as permanent and pervasive. They become depressed and stay helpless for very long periods. A setback is a defeat. And a defeat in one battle is the loss of the war. They don't begin to try again for weeks and weeks, and if they try, the slightest new setback throws them back into a helpless state.<sup>2</sup>

Seligman was able to show that, over and above talent scores on various tests, pessimists repeatedly drop below their potential, and optimists repeatedly exceed their potential.<sup>3</sup> The notion of learning to be optimistic and so changing for the better was further developed in *Authentic Happiness* in 2002,<sup>4</sup> and the Positive Psychology movement began to take off – particularly in schools like Geelong Grammar. Since that time, Seligman, through research and self-critique, along with the critique of others, has further refined his thinking to focus on

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well-being more than happiness, and the goal of increasing the human potential to flourish rather than simply seeking to increase life satisfaction.<sup>5</sup> If Maureen Gaffney is correct, and flourishing is finding ones best self,<sup>6</sup> then lessons in well-being at school can be a useful component in an all-round and positive education.

Part of the story of Geelong Grammar Schools' embracing and shaping of 'Positive Education' is explained on the school website. It points out that 'there is substantial evidence from empirical studies that skills to increase resilience, positive emotion, engagement and meaning can be successfully taught to schoolchildren and achieve meaningful outcomes'.<sup>7</sup> The Geelong Grammar School Project is also presented in overview in Chapter 5 of *Flourish*. In it, Seligman rightly notes that 'Positive education at Geelong Grammar School is a work in progress and is not a controlled experiment';<sup>8</sup> it is a work in progress that has not escaped uncriticised, especially by some Chaplains and religious educators who insist that it has the potential to dilute the principals and narratives of the

Christian Gospel in schools like Geelong Grammar which have faith links with the Anglican Church.

It is an interesting, if somewhat slippery, critique. Positive Education/Psychology has been suggested by some to be merely a marketing device, and one which takes over 'Anglican' (in the case of Geelong Grammar) as a descriptor of the ethos that shapes the school. The implication is that the Christian identity of the school is subsumed by the secular human sciences in a slick but eminently marketable public relations coup. Further, critics have maintained that Chaplains in schools such as Geelong Grammar are forced to become social workers rather than Christian ministers, and that Positive Education/Psychology has become a substitute for religious and values education in the classroom and the Gospel of Christ in the chapel. Whether or not this criticism has any foundation in some schools, it has absolutely no basis in the day to day reality of life at Geelong Grammar School which continues to celebrate its shared life through the Anglican Christian tradition, at the same time using the

**If...flourishing is finding ones best self, then lessons in well-being at school can be a useful component in an all-round positive education.**

## The purpose of learning optimism is to increase well-being and enable people to flourish individually and collectively.

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insights of Positive Psychology to develop our wellbeing and education programmes within and beyond the school.

The foundation of Positive Education at Geelong Grammar School, and the Positive Psychology movement in general, is arguably expressed in the simplest terms as the notion of learned optimism that was explained in Seligman's 1990 book of the same name.<sup>9</sup> Far from being a substitute for the Christian Gospel, Positive Education at heart is the attempt to overlay optimism as a life skill in every situation. In the most recent language employed in the developing human science, the purpose of learning optimism is to increase well-being and enable people to flourish individually and collectively. Understanding the ubiquitous benefits of optimism can and does impact the faith identity of a school – but for the good. If Positive Education has brought about a more optimistic presentation of the Christian faith at Geelong Grammar in recent times, for example, then that can only be viewed as an enhancement of the collective identity of the school. For something to have a universal application does not mean that the heart of that to which it is applied is made less or diminished in any way; for Positive Education ideals to be applied to the faith basis of the school in no way minimises nor secularises the Anglican Christianity of Geelong Grammar School.

At the main Corio campus of Geelong Grammar School, which this year celebrates its centenary, the Chapel of All Saints is physically and spiritually at the heart of the school. No student or staff member is unfamiliar with it as, during term time, there are at least five mid-week services and three weekend services. Day students attend weekly chapel; boarders attend twice weekly as Sunday services are compulsory for the boarders – who make up three quarters of the on-campus student body at Corio. Services are Anglican and Eucharistic and follow the pattern of the Church Year; readings for Sunday are according to *An Australian Lectionary*.<sup>10</sup>

and two full-time ordained Chaplains live on campus. Religious Studies is taught from entry at Year 5 until Year 10 as an academic subject in its own right, based on the Five Strand Approach to Religious and Values Education.<sup>11</sup> Religious Studies at Geelong Grammar is not considered the same subject as Positive Education, although, as with all other subjects, it has some cross curricula links. For example, in the current Year 10 Religious Studies' Introduction to Ethics, students make the connection between the Virtue Ethics of Aristotle and the development of Character Strengths as a way of pursuing The Good Life. Other examples that relate to Religious Studies and Chapel are given in Seligman's *Flourish*.

Religion teachers ask students about the relationship between ethics and pleasure. Students consider the philosophers Aristotle, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill in light of the most current research on pleasure and altruism, which suggests that altruism and compassion have underlying brain circuitry that has been favoured by natural selection. Students examine perspectives (including their own) about what gives life purpose... Chapel is another locus of positive education. Scriptural passages on courage, forgiveness, persistence, and nearly every other strength are referenced during the daily services, reinforcing current classroom discussions.<sup>12</sup>

In his recent book *The Good Life*, Hugh Mackay<sup>13</sup> rightly criticises what he calls the 'Utopia complex'. He points out that contemporary Westerners are preoccupied with perfection – from coffee, to holidays, to relationships. Seeking the best always, he says we have been conned into believing that we can create perfection. He claims that a major manifestation of this complex is the pursuit of happiness in and of itself, and ironically, that the chase to be happy most likely leads to misery.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the Positive Education movement can and has been linked with this kind of happiness seeking as a shallow 'feel good' programme that offers nothing in terms of character development and morality. This is a misunderstanding of its basic intention of fostering optimism in each aspect and circumstance of life, and a pursuit of 'the best self'<sup>15</sup> or community. We all know that an individual or community

## The first step in positive psychology is to dissolve the monism of "happiness" into more workable terms.

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at its best is not one and the same as an individual or community just being happy. It is more than a little mischievous for critics of the Positive Education movement to refuse to notice or acknowledge how the descriptors and trajectory of Positive Psychology are developing beyond the original happiness claims articulated in *Authentic Happiness*.<sup>16</sup>

My original view was closest to Aristotle's – that everything we do is done in order to make us happy – but I actually detest the word *happiness*, which is so overused it has become meaningless. It is an unworkable term for science, or for any practical goal such as education, therapy, public policy, or just changing your personal life. The first step in positive psychology is to dissolve the monism of "happiness" into more workable terms.<sup>17</sup>

It is, therefore, disappointing that Mackay should choose to leverage off a misunderstanding of the aims of Positive Psychology<sup>18</sup> to make a point – one that has already been made by the front runners in Positive Psychology anyway. Namely that the good life can be best defined in terms of a flourishing life, and measured by a capacity for selflessness, the quality of relationships, and a desire to connect with others in a useful way.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, a focus on the good life in these terms is eminently compatible with religion and spirituality at its broadest level, and in the specific practise of a faith.

Critics of Positive Education, whether their starting point is the fear of losing the unique wisdom of the Christian faith tradition to an emerging human science, or concerns about the ethics of a genuinely good and generous life being subsumed by the short-sighted pursuit of success and happiness, need to look closely to see if their concerns have any real foundation in the lived experience of specific schools. Geelong Grammar School is a front runner in the development of Positive Education; it is also an actively Anglican School with a clear Christian identity, and one which seeks to engender a life of commitment

and service to others as a way of living the good life individually and collectively. These things are not mutually exclusive. Positive Psychology, the Christian faith, altruism and The Golden Rule<sup>20</sup> are all taught explicitly and implicitly in each of our campuses – we are an educational institution before all things.

#### **Rev Eleanor O'Donnell**

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Geelong Grammar School, Corio.

#### **Endnotes**

1 <http://www.ggs.vic.edu.au/School/Positive-Education/Conferences>

2 Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism*, Random House Australia, 1990, p.13.

3 Seligman, 1990, p.154.

4 Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*, Free Press New York, 2002.

5 Martin Seligman, *Flourish*, William Heinemann Australia, 2011, p.12.

6 Maureen Gaffney, *Flourishing*, Penguin Books, 2011.

## **For discussion**

1. *In his first apostolic exhortation Joy of the Gospel (2013), Pope Francis said: 'The gospel way of life ought to be characterised by that which is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary.' How might his words explain a relationship between the faith tradition of a school and the insights of Positive Psychology?*
2. *Can optimism really be taught or learned, and how does it relate to hope?*
3. *What could flourishing 'look like' in your classroom?*
  - Consider how you might recognise it if you see it.
  - Identify a specific strategy for seeking to create it.

7 <http://www.ggs.vic.edu.au/School/Positive-Education/About-Positive-Education/About-Positive-Education>

14 Mackay, 2013, pp.41-68.

15 Gaffney, 2011.

8 Seligman, 2011, p.93.

16 Seligman, 2002.

9 Seligman, 1990.

17 Seligman, 2011, p.9.

10 *An Australian Lectionary* 2014, Broughton Publishing.

18 Mackay, 2013, pp.50&55.

11 [http://www.dialogueaustralasia.org/?page\\_id=23](http://www.dialogueaustralasia.org/?page_id=23)

19 Mackay, 2013.

12 Seligman, 2011, pp.90-92.

20 Mackay, 2013.

13 Hugh Mackay, *The Good Life*, Pan Macmillan Australia, 2013.

# **BLAKE EDUCATION**

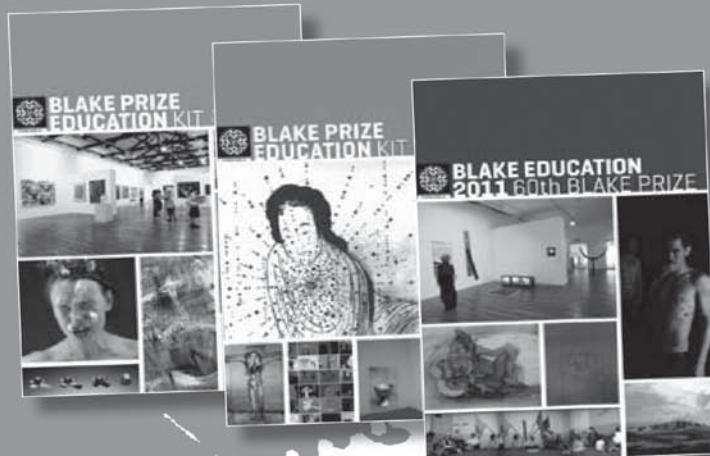
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- What do artists believe?
- What does social justice look like?

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# **The Chaplain as Teacher**

The Rev. Dr Ronald Noone

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In a conversation with the Founding Father of Dialogue Australia Network, Dr Peter Vardy, he expressed the view that qualified lay people were best suited for teaching religion as a rigorous academic subject. He had reservations about clergy as classroom teachers, because of concerns that the evangelistic demands of their vocation might compete with a critical study of religion. I would argue it is possible to teach religion in a dispassionate, non-confessional, rigorous and academic manner, while at the same time honoring clerical vows.

For this to be true, school chaplains need to have a philosophy of education grounded in a particular understanding of both religion and education. Before entering the classroom, chaplains must be clear about their goals for teaching, and what educational philosophy and theology underpins the methodology they will use. Not all approaches will be consistent with the academically rigorous and existentially relevant approach promoted by DAN.

## **Approaches to Religious Education**

It is apparent that not everyone knows, or agrees what Religious Education is. Not only difficult to define, it can also be difficult for religious educators to communicate with each other when common principles and methodologies have not been agreed upon. In the academic arena much progress has been made in this regard, and at least there is a tacit agreement on the name of the field of study. Religious Education is the term used in most tertiary academic settings, but it is not without its challengers,

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and there are still many permutations for the subject within schools – Religious Studies, Christian Education, Catechesis, Religious and Philosophical Studies (RAPS), Religious and Values Education (RaVE) and so on. I once taught in a secondary school where the subject was called and timetabled as 'Chaplaincy.' When I asked the Headmaster why it was so called, he replied, 'because as chaplain you may do whatever you wish in that time slot.' This was a church school whose Head had no idea that an academic discipline existed for the teaching of religion. In the United States and the United Kingdom, the term 'Religious Education' is more or less accepted as describing the name of a field of study. Within the field there are a variety of approaches and they are given various names by different authors. I will make some comments about three of the main categories.<sup>1</sup>

### **Traditional Theological Approach**

As many readers will be aware, DAN promotes a Five Strand Approach to form the base for an RE curriculum covering the following areas:

- A Textual Strand (the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures)
- World Religions Strand
- Philosophy of Religion Strand
- Values and Ethics Strand

- Affective Strand – Stillness and Silence

These five essential areas should inform planning, and be integrated into every year level, rather than addressed sequentially as discrete units. Each school is encouraged to develop the Strands according to its curriculum, traditions, ethos and strengths.<sup>2</sup>

The Five Strands Approach is not conducive for chaplains who engage in the Traditional Theological approach, one primarily concerned with the communication of a divine message. The traditional approach to RE is concerned with the transmission of a unique, divinely authoritative and salvific message derived from revelation. Following this approach, the teacher must first have received this message, and in some sense been commissioned to teach this message faithfully to their students. The teacher is a herald bringing good news. The students, following the reception of this message, will attempt to live out the implications of the message with respect to this life and their eternal destiny. The conflict for the Chaplain arises because the ordained are called and commissioned to be bringers of Good News, and yet the DAN model charges them to teach in a non-confessional manner. How to balance a non-confessional methodology with ordination vows is the concern of this article .

**It is possible to teach religion in a dispassionate, non-confessional, rigorous and academic manner, while at the same time honoring clerical vows.**



## **Social-Cultural Approach**

A more aligned model for teaching the Five Strands is the Social-Cultural approach. This approach rejects the idea that the content of RE is essentially a divinely inspired message that must be transmitted, unchanged from generation to generation. Rather, the content 'contains all of life's possible experiences as they are enriched, interpreted and controlled in terms of purposes in harmony with the Christian ideal.' RE becomes the actual guided experience of living the Christian life.<sup>3</sup> Using this approach the subject matter can be drawn from anywhere and everywhere – scripture, history, church life and the world of present experience. The teacher's role is to promote individual person growth through skillfully guided participation in a group, thus liberating each and every student into full and active membership of the kingdom of God. Students are educated to grow into an adulthood characterised by high ideals and effective social skills.

Holiness is not a goal of classroom teaching. Rather, it seems to be an observable qualitative change in the student's lived life as a result of his/her religious education. It is not a matter of being able to recite religious facts or texts. True RE must be evaluated in terms of the changed lives of the participants. This approach retains the evangelistic goal of 'full and active membership of the kingdom of God,' albeit couched in much broader concepts than the traditional model.

## **Contemporary Theological Approach**

The Contemporary Theological Approach would resonate with many Chaplains. This approach uses the theological category of revelation - whether past or present - which is perceived as having an experiential quality. The Bible is understood to be a record of revelation, but not necessarily revelatory in and of itself. RE thus has the dual aim of establishing individuals in a right relationship with God within the revelatory fellowship of the church, and to educate them for responsible, intelligent, adult Christian/religious living.

Since theology is the main source for this approach, information gained from the Bible, church life, culture and the human situation are all used for theological interpretation and reflection. In contrast to other approaches, the aims of contemporary theological RE are focused on the church and its corporate

life. The Church came into being as a consequence of God breaking into our world in Jesus Christ, and the purposes of RE are to be understood from this perspective. With this aim in mind, contemporary theorists focus RE on personal growth; intellectual growth; interpretation of scripture and training for effective participation in the life of the church. The Five Strands Approach may not meet this aim, but it may equip towards the second aim, 'to educate them for responsible, intelligent, adult Christian/religious living.' RE could still lead individuals to a living encounter with God, and provide spiritual support for them as they grow towards wholeness through living out the meaning of this encounter.

My Doctoral supervisor, Gabriel Moran, said that RE's major focus should not be 'saving' students, but is rather 'the human task of freeing men (sic) for life in the Spirit by awakening intelligence and freedom.' RE should not be used as a tool to press virtue into young sinners, but instead be pressing towards the objective of educating students in Christian or religious perspectives. RE's role is to introduce students to the Bible (and according to the Five Strands Approach, the Scriptures of the other World Religions), which goes beyond mere transmission of information about the Bible or rote memorization of passages. It must promote an understanding of the Bible in terms of its continuing relevant message. The Bible is seen as the primary written witness to God's revelation; a basic source of Christian theology; and its principles provide potential solutions to many of humankind's problems.

The RE teacher is thus seen as a promoter and participant in a process through which God is revealing himself to humankind today. The characteristics of such a teacher would include valuing the student's freedom to be themselves, while offering the gift of relationship to students as they search for the realities of the Christian faith; trusting the Holy Spirit and the student in the educational process; creatively using many methods to explore different perspectives; commitment to the belief that revelation occurs in person to person relationships, and that revelation will call forth a response.

For Moran, the method begins with people, precisely because it is amongst people that revelation occurs. Students and teachers are to open themselves to the wider community and discover possibilities about themselves,

rather than attempt to conform to a predetermined pattern. The teacher can only hope to be a catalyst for transformation to the extent that he or she has been transformed. Moran writes, "What the religion teacher does, in the final analysis, is to show what a Christian life is by living one".<sup>4</sup>

## **Principles in the classroom context**

Chaplains need to acknowledge the primacy of context if they wish to embrace a non-confessional approach. Teaching models can, and should vary according to the context. The traditional evangelical approach appropriate for the chapel or church is not the model for teaching in the classroom. My ordination vows mean that I am a priest all of the time, and yet I don't have to be evangelizing all the time. In fact, I've never been much of an evangelist, and I take comfort in St. Paul's description of Christ's gifts - that some are evangelists and some are teachers. I am not a theologian, and while I know something of these skills, I major in being a religious educator. I acknowledge that having a background in teaching before studying theology is a distinct advantage for the classroom work of a chaplain.

I last taught in a school that treated RE like any other subject in the school curriculum. RE was a serious, rigorous, academic discipline that included homework, assignments, tests and semester examinations. Once the students understand what was required in the RE classroom (outlined and explained in the first lesson), it carried the same expectations and implications as all other subjects.

## **Teaching for a more modest end**

Every teacher of religion should have an 'end' in mind, a goal for the students. The 'end' can, and should change with the teaching setting or context. The 'end' for discipleship programs run by churches is more disciples. Such an 'end' is not appropriate in school classrooms, even, I would argue, in Church schools, and certainly not in secular state school classrooms. The more modest 'end' for teachers of religion may be to ensure that students understand that living religiously is a genuine, authentic and deeply satisfying way to live. My task as teacher was not to make the students all 'good little Christians,' but rather to equip them to question, understand, consider and embrace the possibilities of the religious dimensions in life now, and when they leave school. Failure consists in students dismissing religion out of hand. Given this

approach to the classroom teaching of religion, the following principles were adopted:

### The subject is not about personal beliefs

Students could make an argument for a position they did not personally hold, so long as the argument was logical (in much the same way one participates in a debate for the affirmative when one actually holds the negative position.) That said, it was made very clear that students should form their own personal beliefs. They were encouraged to carefully consider the arguments presented in class, and come to an informed opinion regarding their own stance. The selection of challenging, interesting and relevant curriculum resources assists in the task of making religious concepts and beliefs accessible and meaningful to students, and encourages rational and philosophical questioning.

Sometimes the Socratic questioning approach frustrates young teenagers who often say, 'Yes, but what do you believe?' In the classroom the answer is, 'It's not important what I believe. It's what you think, and why that matters.' Of course in a different context or setting like a church or youth group, the teacher's beliefs can be shared very clearly.

### Logical arguments will be honored in the classroom

Students may give voice to their opinions, within reason and with respect, so long as they can support their position with sound arguments. This gives them a genuine sense of intellectual freedom, and reckless statements soon disappear from the discussion. Students will ask really interesting, sensitive and thought-provoking questions when they know they will be respected and taken seriously. I found this especially true when I stated very uncompromisingly that 'no one can force you to believe anything.' Students are ultimately responsible for their own beliefs. They are encouraged to take a stance given the truth of the old chaplaincy line that, 'if you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything.' Regrettably however, if you asked senior students, 'What is your philosophy of life?' many would struggle to come up with an answer. What is more worrying is that many Gen Y students don't seem to understand, or even be interested in the question, and certainly not in the answers offered by the religious traditions. One of the roles of the RE teacher is to continue to

ask the big questions, and to show that these questions and ways of answering them do matter.

### Teaching to remove obstacles

There are many reasons why people are suspicious of religion and wish to dismiss it, or attack its premises without a rational basis for doing so. Students may come from a home environment where parents and siblings ridicule beliefs and religious institutions, particularly following the extremely damaging publicity about clerical abuse. They often enter the classroom with preconceived ideas and opinions that need to be challenged before any openness to new understandings can occur. Some of my time was spent explaining what Christianity is not. The process requires an honest engagement with acute listening skills, and openness on the part of the chaplain to accept the student's opinion without agreeing with it.

An important step in removing obstacles to learning is establishing the atmosphere of the classroom environment. Students need to understand how criticism works in an academic setting, and the dynamics of academic dialogue. No one wants to have his or her views exposed to withering attack, and whilst not shying away from critiquing an argument, the teacher must treat the student's words with respect. Criticism should not be personal. When the beliefs of a student or a chaplain are attacked it can be very hurtful, and it helps to remember that much of what students say is often uninformed opinion. Rather than responding in a manner that shuts down the discussion, a wise teacher can use difficult situations to begin a fruitful discussion.

According to Gabriel Moran, 'classrooms are one of the few places in the world where people might listen carefully to what someone says and change their minds.'<sup>5</sup> It was said of the philosopher Wittgenstein that 'he thought aloud in front of his class.' When the dynamics of the classroom are carefully established, the student can become a participant in this speaking.

I was often amazed at the capacity for sophisticated thinking in many of the brighter students in my last school. If your responses weren't up to the mark they would call you on it, and make it difficult for teachers they considered intellectually weak. In such an environment, the teacher should be aware of the pitfalls of trying to 'defend God.' I

worship a God who is big enough to offer stout defence, and the job of the teacher is not to be defensive, but ensure questions are explored in sufficient depth.

### Definitions of truth

It is crucial to have a lesson exploring different kinds of truth, so that students appreciate there is not one truth. This discussion should take place very early in a course of study (Yr 9 is a good class to have it with), as it will be helpful in avoiding arguments about competing truth claims later on, especially when studying scriptural sources. Likewise, students should be able to distinguish the different kinds of literary genres found in the Bible. More specifically, an understanding of how 'myth' functions is necessary if the first 11 chapters of the book of Genesis are to be become meaningful to students otherwise grounded in a scientific world-view (and this is particularly topical with the recent release of the film *Noah*).

### Conclusion

Chaplains in church schools have a variety of roles – pastoral, liturgical and teaching. While each of these functions is important, I would argue that classroom teaching is the most challenging. The Five Strands Approach encouraged by DAN allows much freedom in the teaching of religion, and if chaplains can embrace this methodology, they may find teaching to be the most rewarding part of their job.

**Ronald Noone** is an Anglican priest who was appointed Head of RE at Melbourne Grammar School in 1998 and subsequently became the Senior Chaplain from 2005-2012. He is currently doing locum work.

### Endnotes

1 I refer to approaches used in an out of print book by Harold Burgess, *An Invitation to Religious Education*, REP: Birmingham, USA, 1975. He outlines four major approaches, but I refer only to three of them. A more recent discussion can be found in L. Philip Barnes (ed.) *Debates in Religious Education*, Routledge, 2012.

2 For more information on The Five Strand Approach to RE promoted by DAN see: [www.dialogueaustralasia.org](http://www.dialogueaustralasia.org)

3 Harold Burgess, Op cit, p. 74.

4 Gabriel Moran, *Catechesis of Revelation*, New York: Seabury Press, 1973, p.67.

5 Ernest Boyer, *High School: A Report of Secondary Education in America*. Quoted in Moran, *Showing How: The Act of Teaching*, Bloomsbury, 1997, p. 180.

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Brian reflects on this quote from Annie Dillard:

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## P R E S E N T E R



**Brian Poxon** is the Head of Philosophical, Religious and Ethical Perspectives and also leads the Social and Emotional Learning Program at Wesley College, Perth.

Brian has a First Class degree in Theology and Religious Studies and a Masters in Holocaust Theology, both from Bristol University in the UK. Brian has led Religious Education and Philosophy departments in the UK and Australia, been an examiner in both countries, and acted as Mentor to trainee teachers on the Bristol University PGCE course. Having written four A Level Revision Guides and recently acted as the External Reviewer for the VCE Philosophy Study Guide, Brian's passion and skill is developing robust, engaging and academically challenging RE in the classroom. As well as writing on this theme, he has spoken at several RE conferences in the UK and Australia (memorably at the 2011 DAN Conference). Brian sees himself as much a fellow pilgrim as a presenter, and values critical engagement with teachers and students.

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# **Review of Saving Jesus Redux: A Jesus for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The Rev. Nikolai Blaskow

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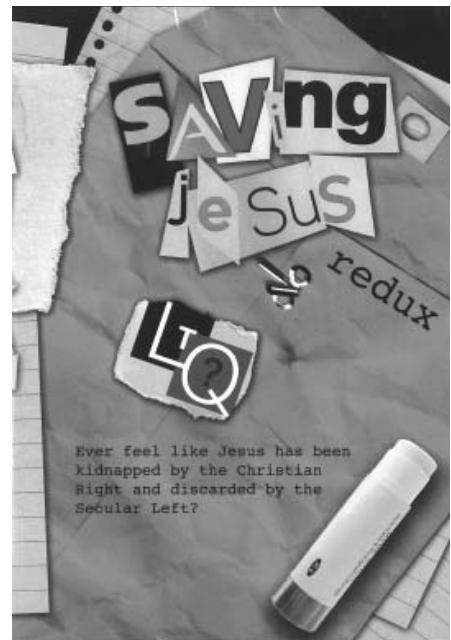
*Saving Jesus Redux* is for people like me to some extent; for those who ever thought that the church looks nothing like this man that they worship and talk about so much, or that there was something special about Jesus, but couldn't put their finger on it. More than anything, though, it's aimed at Christians who perhaps need to know more about Jesus than they want to, and for those who have had questions about Jesus, but fear asking them in a church that might call them a heretic for doing so.<sup>1</sup>

This blog review of *Saving Jesus Redux*, a revision of *Living the Question*'s 12 session DvD series,<sup>2</sup> pretty much sums up the appeal this resource might hold for the conservative Christian. More importantly, I think *Saving Jesus* presents us with the exciting possibility of building bridges of understanding with our more skeptical young audiences. If given the opportunity, I think our students will relish the challenge of this audacious project.

*Saving Jesus* pulls together an all-star roster of biblical and theological scholars, including Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, Diana Butler Bass, Amy Jill-Levine, and Walter Brueggemann, to name just a few. These scholars tackle the big questions unflinchingly, with intellectual rigor and without flamboyance.

- Is Jesus *historical*?
  - Is Jesus *human and divine*?
  - Are the *Gospels*: community perspectives, a human product and just ancient perspectives?
  - How do we evaluate the *evidence*: piece together the fragments, smooth over the discrepancies and make sense of the glimpses we are given?
  - How do we reconcile Jesus the Jewish *mystic* with the post Easter *cosmic* Christ?
- 

- How do the *message of empire* and the *message of the 'kingdom'* mirror each other – militarily, economically, politically and ideologically?
  - How do we understand the *birth narratives* of Matthew and Luke?
  - Indeed, how do we interpret the significance of the *incarnation*: what does this interruption and irruption in history mean for the human race?
  - How are we to interpret the *teachings* of Jesus - as wisdom story telling deeply steeped in the Hebrew tradition of parable, aphorism, humour, irony and metaphor? If the Gospels are narrative, what kind of story do they tell?
  - What was Jesus' program? What does the *kingdom/empire/occupation of God on earth* mean exactly?
  - How did Jesus' program 'fit' with his Jewish *mystical, prophetic* and *historical* past? How does it align with John the Baptiser (Jesus' mentor) and the anti-Temple movement?
  - If *compassion*<sup>3</sup> is the way of transformation, the way of Jesus, the way of community, the way of divinity, the way of justice - what does that *way* look like in practice?
  - Who killed Jesus? What does it mean to read the text in a *historically faithful* way?
  - What can *atonement* mean in the twenty-first century?
- 



- How are we to understand the *post-Easter* experience of the disciples?
- Why is Jesus worth saving or more pointedly, do we even need to save him?
- Is Christianity the enemy of Jesus? Or - how do we save Jesus from the Church who has betrayed him?
- Is there another reformation happening around us? If so, what is its character? And how might our understanding of the 'historical Jesus' help us to move with the times?

The immediate practical question for us is, *what role might this series play in the Religious and Values Education classroom?*

From the questions above you can gauge that the material is better suited to Years 11-12, and certainly an ideal resource to support the various examinable Religious Studies Courses offered in each State. However, the format of the series – 12 x 28 minute programmes each comprising 4 x 10 minute segments – makes them highly adaptable as discussion

**Students will come away with a sound grasp of the latest scholarship on Jesus in his historical context, and how our understanding of Jesus has evolved over time.**

starters for Year 10 RaVE classes exploring ethics, Christian origins or the Jesus project.

What will students and teachers of religion come away with as a consequence of working through the series?

Firstly, a sound grasp of the latest scholarship on Jesus in his historical context, and how our understanding of Jesus has evolved over time. The series will enable teachers and students alike to reflect critically on what is 'early,' and what is 'late' in early Christian thinking about Jesus: from the Jewish mystic Jesus of Nazareth as he saw himself, and was understood by the first disciples, to the post Easter cosmic Christ and the growing understanding of early Christian communities trying to survive in Roman occupied territories. Students will also come to appreciate how our perception of Jesus has altered in the last fifty years in the light of new evidence. Marcus Borg, for example, speaks of the various lenses through which we may view the life of Jesus: through the modern study of Jesus as a developing tradition, through Judaism, in Jesus' own tradition as spirit person, wisdom teacher, healer and social prophet, and through the interdisciplinary study of Jesus and Christian origins where we come across such notions as Messiah, Son of God, Word of God, Lamb of God and Light of the World. John Crossan in turn, helps us understand the continuity and discontinuity between John the Baptist's message and Jesus':

- John is *future* centred (the great clean-up is about to happen),
  - Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom argues that this clean up is *already* happening,
  - John speaks punitive, 'violent' judgment (the axe at the root of a corrupt tree),
  - Jesus argues for peace through love: a restorative justice of reconciliation.
- • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

**Students will be able to see just how subversive early Christianity was in the Roman Empire, and why it was only a matter of time before the movement experienced persecution.**

Secondly, students will be able to see just how subversive early Christianity was in the Roman Empire, and why it was only a matter of time before the movement experienced persecution. How, for example, Jesus' message of the kingdom radically engaged his followers in a countercultural movement that opposed the four strands integral to Rome's identity and imperial theology: military power, economic power, political power and ideological power. And how Augustus' claim to have brought peace and to have conquered (*victory then peace*), is countered by Jesus' message of the kingdom as peace (non violence) through justice and reconciliation. Moreover, Augustus' titles: *Pontifex Maximus*, *Imperator*, *Pater Patriae* and *Divi Filius* are deliberately counterposed by the claims of the early Christian community of Jesus as: *High Priest*, *King*, *equal with God the Father* and *Son of God*. In similar vein, Augustus' *res Gestae divi Augusti* ('the acts of the god Augustus,' which was inscribed in bronze in Rome and all over the empire, including massive inscriptions on triumphal arches and temples and public walls), was perhaps parodied by St Luke's *The Acts of the Holy Spirit (of Christ)*.

Thirdly, as a further consequence of understanding Jesus' particular historical context, students will understand the nativity accounts of Matthew and Luke in a new light, particularly regarding their intention to question which *Son of God* (divinely born), the Christians wanted. Was it the *Son of God* born of Mary, who releases us from our debts, who is peaceable and on the side of the poor? Or the *Son of God* born of Apollo, who imposes taxes, uses force to impose peace and manipulates the masses? Students will also come to appreciate the variety of Jewish literature employed at the time of Jesus, upon which the Gospels and New Testament writings draw, including the *wisdom tradition* with its humour, irony, use of metaphor, parables (short fiction) and short sayings (aphorisms), as well as the *protest literature* such as Jonah and Job with the message *you get what you deserve, you deserve what you get*. Here once more we see the subversive nature of Christianity. In these stories God becomes unclean, changes sides by associating with the impure (the Samaritans, tax collectors and harlots) and displaying a radicalism that says, in effect, *blessed are the poor and the 'unclean'* because at least they don't oppress others!

Fourthly, and finally, *Saving Jesus* raises challenging questions about the status of Christianity as an institution in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Has it actually misrepresented, or even betrayed Jesus' original program, thus becoming Jesus' enemy? Does Christianity require a radical overhaul - a reformation of what we believe to be true? Today we are witnessing new waves of change and people hungry for spiritual truth.

### **Saving Jesus raises challenging questions about the status of Christianity as an institution in the 21st Century.**

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Our scholars suggest we need to rediscover the radical Jesus of contemporary scholarship. This calls for the exercise of an expansive mystical imagination that communicates – in an intelligent and persuasive way - who Jesus is, and what he stands for in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Since I started this review of *Saving Jesus*, the original blog quote I opened with has been removed from its site and replaced by a far more critical one by a different author.<sup>4</sup> Brenton Dickieson's criticism reflects a conservative viewpoint, and identifies the areas of historical and theological interpretation in *Saving Jesus* that I think some readers may find challenging. For example:

- While Dickieson appreciates the series' post-colonial faith perspective and that it was politically and socially subversive, inclusive, anti-imperial, compassionate, loving, and imaginative, he reacts strongly to what he perceives to be its 'tone of polemic—the battle against conservative, traditional, historical, and literal readings—paint(ing) this entire series in colours of war. In a curriculum trying to draw out the fine shading of living a Jesus life, what comes out are the stark contrasts of black and white and red.'
- He also attacks the series for being at best self-deceptive, at worst deceitful. He maintains, for example, that John Shelby Spong's assertion that 'the idea of the bodily resurrection occurs nowhere in the earlier documents of the New Testament—that it occurs nowhere in Paul,' is contradicted by the

record: 'Besides the fact that Paul was a Pharisee, a community that believed in bodily resurrection, I don't think Spong accounts for 1 Cor 15, where Paul speaks clearly of bodily resurrection leading to 15:17, "if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain.'" Plainly, 'the series skirts the issue altogether, and claims that it is presenting the real story by cutting out the bits that don't fit with their views.'

- In the end, the demarcation lines for Dickieson's protests are clear: 'For conservative Bible readers, the formula is simple: the story of Israel is one of God working in history, so they take a passage as largely historical unless the context or genre suggest otherwise. For the minds behind *Saving Jesus Redux*, there is a more complex mix of reading the Bible as metaphor and history.'
- And there is disappointment in what Dickieson calls 'an anemic faith, one that is founded on beautiful ideas or the fads of contemporary ethics and aesthetics, while eschewing Israel's message that God enters into history.' He goes on to criticize what he sees as the series anti-Jewish stance: 'I don't think they mean to be anti-Jewish; they have thrown the baby out with the bathwater.'

- And finally there is this broadside: 'So, my disappointment is palpable. Instead of watching this video, I would encourage people to actually read Marcus Borg, Brian McLaren, Walter Brueggemann, Amy Jill-Levine, Dom Crossan and Helen Prejean. Their individual works, whether you agree with them or not, are far better than this collective whole.'

While for the most part I would challenge Dickieson's critique as lopsided and at times misinformed, I do agree that there is a polemical tone to the series that can be overly dismissive in places. In this sense *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* by Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright (Harper, 2000), achieves a more balanced result. But then again, writing a book and producing a series with so many voices is a much more difficult task.

In conclusion, I rate *Saving Jesus Redux* a great resource for teachers who are prepared to use it judiciously in the classroom. It will certainly generate many fruitful discussions and provide valuable historical and theological insights. In the end, it's all about the quest for truth, as Blaise Pascal observes:

What a long and strange war it is where violence tries to crush truth. Hard as it may struggle, violence cannot weaken truth, and its efforts only make truth

stand out more clearly. Truth, however brightly it may shine, can do nothing to stop violence, and its light only irritates violence even more. [However] [w]hen discourse is ranged against discourse, what is true and convincing confounds and dissipates what is based only on vanity and lies.<sup>5</sup>

### Nikolai Blaskow

Chaplain and Head of RaVE  
Radford College, Canberra

*Saving Jesus Redux Series* (NTSC format) costs \$249 and can be purchased from: [www.mediacom.org.au/?ProdCat=Living%2Bthe%2BQuestions](http://www.mediacom.org.au/?ProdCat=Living%2Bthe%2BQuestions)

### Endnotes

1 <http://theendofevil.wordpress.com/2014/01/03/review-saving-jesus-redux-from-living-the-questions/> Accessed February 2013. This website is no longer in use.

2 [livingthequestions.com](http://livingthequestions.com)

3 A word which has its roots (before the Latin) in Aramaic, meaning 'womb,' thus speaking of compassion as a nurturing ethic.

4 Brenton Dickieson,  
<http://apilgriminnarnia.com/2014/01/29/redux/>

5 Pascal as cited by René Girard in Battling to the End (East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 2010)

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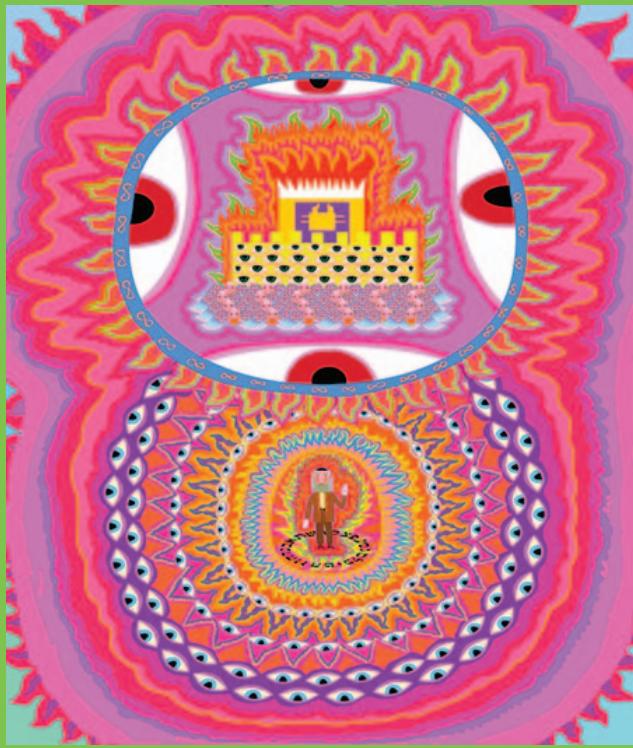
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**Cover Image:**

*Jerusalem above, the temple within* – Michael Strum

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The Zohar, a primary Jewish text of the mystical approach to religion, hints that there is a spiritual Jerusalem that dwells within – the kingdom of heaven, and in that Jerusalem is a temple of fire, where the archangel Michael performs as high priest.

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**Review of *Saving Jesus Redux: A Jesus for the 21st Century***

Nikolai Blaskow – Canberra



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