IV.
Multiculturalism, Education and Ethical Issues

We Do Not Have Racism in Our Religion Education

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Blessed are the ignorant
for they shall maintain their innocence.

Introduction

When I undertook to make a contribution to this series of studies in honour of Victor Hayes, I chose to focus on racism within the broad field of multiculturalism and on religion education within the area of religion. I chose this focus because of my own long-standing and passionate interest in these two aspects.

Having chosen my focus, I hoped to engage in a critical analysis of how the issue of racism is dealt with in religion education curricula in State and Christian schools in Australia. As I got further into my research it became clear to me that if I stuck to my original intention I would have very, very little to write about. So far from there being a diversity of approaches to racism in religion education curricula in Australia, the issue is hardly ever addressed. Rather than abandon the project I have attempted to work through some of the implications of this neglect of one of the major issues of the modern world.

To do this I have divided my paper into four sections:

1. In the first part I present my own understanding of racism, for it is on this interpretation that my critique of the resounding silence in religion education curricula rests.

2. In the second part I attempt to establish the extent of the silence in Australian religion education curricula.

3. In the third part I argue why I believe that the issue of racism needs to be a core component of religion education curricula.

4. In the final section I present my argument for the way in which I believe that the issue of racism needs to be addressed in religion education.

1. What is Racism?

In a number of other places I have argued for the understanding of racism on which this study is based (Moore 1986, 1991a, 1991b).

Basically, I contend that racism is an ideology which has been constructed in the context of particular historical struggles to subject particular groups of people and to justify that subjection. As Henry Reynolds (1987:130) has put it, in the Australian context the gun was used to clear the land of Aboriginal people and racism was used to clear the conscience while doing so.

In her analysis of the construction of the racist ideology, Ruth Benedict (1983) has shown how it developed in three major and subtly different forms. Its first major appearance was in Europe in the late 18th Century. Here people like the Count de Boulainvilliers and the Count de Gobineau attempted to establish the European aristocrats as a distinct "race", that is, distinct from the "race" of European peasants, workers and common people. These aristocrats, they held, came from a distinct blood line which made them inherently superior to the "race" of common people. This racist ideology was used by the aristocrats to justify their refusal to alleviate some of the appalling social conditions of their day and to accede to the clamouring for democracy.

The second and related construction of racism grew out of the colonial experience and gathered momentum, as Shelton Smith has demonstrated (1972:265), in the struggles over the abolition of the slave trade and the emancipation of the slaves. Here the racist ideology constructed a hierarchy of "races" in which physical characteristics such as skin pigmentation were prominent. It was used to extend and maintain colonialism and to bolster the struggle against the emancipation of slaves.

The third construction of racism grew in the context of the great European wars of the late 19th and the 20th centuries, which reached its high point in Nazism. For Hitler the strength of a nation and its culture depended on its "racial" purity. Thus he was at pains to establish the "racial" pedigree of the "German race", which pedigree so established their superiority that it made them also, rightly, the "Master race". In this he justified his great war of world conquest.

Not only did these great historical and political conflicts form the context in which the racist ideology was constructed to justify the violation of inferior "races", they also, through the racist victories won in these struggles, established a deep-seated cultural tradition. By this I mean that racism has become

"institutionalised" in two major senses. It is "institutionalised" in the sense that
it is an ideology which, in one way or another, has become pervasive throughout
the society. So pervasive is the ideology that it is very, very difficult for us in
the modern world not to think of human beings as being members of one or other
specific "race" or to escape connotations of "them versus us" or of superiority in
these classifications of human beings. Racism, however, is also institutionalised
in the sense that the social institutions we now have in a country like Australia
(like our political, economic, legal, educational institutions) and through which
we live out our social life are as they are because the colonial invaders destroyed
the forms of social life they found here and imposed their own. As a result the
descendants of the invaders continue to reap the rewards of racism and the
descendants of their victims are humiliated by having to live out their lives
through the very social institutions which dispossessed them in the first place.

       Once the racist ideology has become so deeply embedded in the cultural
tradition it is continuously available to people to activate. Typically it is
activated in its more virulent forms when people feel that their security is
threatened. As Kalantzis and Cope (1984) have demonstrated, when people are
threatened by unemployment they can call on the racist ideology to make false
but satisfying explanations of their plight (for example, they are unemployed
because of Asian migration).

       Thus, racism includes a number of key elements:

(i)   a false belief that there are "races"

(ii)   a false belief that these races are inherently different from each other (the
         soft line) or that some races are inherently superior to others (the hard
         line)

(iii)   a rejection and subordination of "inferior" or "different" "races":
         • psychologically
         • socially
         • culturally
         • economically
         • politically.

       It is clear that it is this understanding of racism that I am suggesting is
all-pervasive in the modern world. Before I turn to use this understanding to

develop my argument for having racism as a pervasive component in religion education I need to establish what I claim to be the resounding silence in our religion education curricula on this issue.

2. Is it There?

In giving this paper the title *We do not have racism in our religion education* I was making the straight-forward assertion that our religion education curricula in State and Christian schools simply do not address the issue of racism. The evidence on which I base this claim with a reasonable degree of confidence is derived from two major sources:

(a) The first is published curriculum "guidelines" and materials for use in State and Christian schools. I restricted my attention to documents which are widely used in Australian schools like *Guidelines for Religious Education* produced by the Catholic Education Office in the Diocese of Melbourne, Anne Burgess' *Children of the Kingdom*, the various programs published by Sadlier Co. based on Thomas Groome's *Shared Christian Praxis*, *The Sword* materials produced by the Anglican Archdiocese of Sydney, the *Religion in Life* series produced by the Victorian Council for Christian Education in Schools, the R-12 Curriculum Guidelines produced by the Religious Education Project Teams in the Education Departments of South Australia and Queensland and the curriculum outlines, syllabuses and published supporting texts for the newly emerging Senior Secondary curricula in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland. In all these hundreds of units across this range of approaches to religion education it is not possible to identify one single unit which focuses directly and explicitly on the topic of racism.

While the silence on racism in the vast majority of these curricula is total, there are some exceptions to this rule. It is becoming increasingly common to find units on social justice in religion education curricula, especially in secondary schools. Where this happens "racism" is sometimes listed as one social justice issue which schools might explore. In the curriculum materials which I have examined, however, none provides guides or resources to help teachers and students explore the origins, nature, manifestations or consequences of racism. A typical instance of this is to be found in the 1991 K-12 Religious Education Curriculum, *Sharing Our Story* produced by the Catholic Education Office of the Parramatta Diocese, which, in the Years 7-10 section has a unit on

social justice. This unit names "racism" as one possible form of injustice, but the background information provided focuses exclusively on general social justice principles. Another instance is to be found in the *Exemplars*, which are currently being produced jointly by the South Australian Education Department, the Catholic Education Office and the Independent Schools Board. Here there is one topic which has been developed on "Justice". This topic does give slightly more attention to an analysis of racism. It does provide some resources to deal with "*Apartheid* in South Africa" or "Australian Aborigines". This unit, however, develops the story of Archbishop Romero as its detailed case study.

Another exception to this resounding silence in curriculum guidelines or materials produced for religion education in Australia is the Social Justice Resource Book, *Walk in my Shoes* (Stempf, Poussard and Macdonald 1984) which has a major section on the experience of Aboriginal Australians. Even here, however, there is no sustained analysis of the phenomenon of racism. Certainly there is nothing in it which is comparable to the historical and structural analysis of racism which is to be found in its American counter-part, *Peace Through Justice* (Prochaska 1983).

(b) The second source of data to which I have turned to establish the place given to racism in religion education curricula is the notes that I have kept on student descriptions of the religion education curriculum in their own schools which they have submitted as an assignment in the course on religion education which I have taught over the past fifteen years. These students have come from all Australian states, have been working in all education systems and have covered everything from junior primary to senior secondary schools. The records which I have kept cover some 370 case studies. Only two case studies include racism as a topic in the curriculum, and both of these are case studies from the same Catholic school in Adelaide. Twenty-one have units on social justice, but none of these refer explicitly to racism. Most common in these "social justice units" are poverty (9) and old age (5).

Clearly racism is not a priority item in the religion education curriculum agenda in Australian schools.

This conclusion, however, is clearly based on my understanding of racism as an ideology forged in the context of an oppressive struggle for domination. It does not mean that schools themselves do not believe that they are attempting to counter racism in the religion education curriculum. Without having actually

researched this, I believe that schools might argue that their religion education curricula might help to counter racism in either of two indirect ways.

The first is to include in the curriculum studies of non-Christian religions. By no stretch of the imagination can this inclusion be said to be common in Australian religion education curricula. It is totally absent from published curriculum guidelines and materials for use in Christian primary schools. If it appears at all in guidelines for secondary schools, non-Christian religions tend to be dealt with in a single unit in years 10 or 11. In the R-12 curriculum materials prepared for State schools in South Australia studies of a range of world religions feature prominently. Sadly, however, these materials are grossly under-used since few State schools have religion education as part of the curriculum. It is only in the emerging Religion Studies curricula for Senior Secondary students in South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland that studies of non-Christian religions figure at all prominently. In these Senior Secondary religion studies syllabuses, however, (with the possible exception of Judaism), no reference is made to the impact that racism has had on the beliefs and practices of the various traditions. Even syllabuses dealing with Australian Aboriginal religions avoid the issue of racism by focussing on them in their traditional forms. Thus the most reasonable conclusion has to be that if this study of non-Christian religions is an indirect approach to the issue of racism it is extremely indirect.

The second possible indirect attack on racism may be argued from the attention that is given in many Christian school curricula to the uniqueness, worth and value of each human person as created, loved and gifted by God. This certainly is a theme that runs across most curriculum guidelines and materials prepared for Christian education. Most often this is used to help students affirm their own sense of dignity and self-worth. Commonly it is extended to encourage students to affirm the dignity and worth of others and to examine how things might get in the way of this and lead us to hurt others. Prejudice is sometimes asserted to be a way in which this hurt is done.

I will return later to examine the inadequacy of this individual worth and prejudice approach, but concede that this understanding is so much a part of the popular (Cohen 1987) and religious (Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax* 1989) understanding of racism that religion education teachers may seriously believe that through this indirect approach they are addressing racism in the curriculum.

I began this section with the question "Is racism addressed in religion education curricula in Australia?" The conclusion I draw from the evidence is

that, with the most minimal and rare exceptions, it is not. I concede, however that some teachers may argue that it is indirectly addressed through far from common studies of non-Christian religions or through slightly less rare attempts to reduce prejudice.

3.   Why Should it be There?

Perhaps the irony in my title for this paper did not escape you. In this section I wish to develop three major arguments for including racism as a pervasive component of any religion education curriculum. In doing so I wish to establish the racism inherent in the silence, how the silence distorts our subject matter, and lay the foundations for the final section in which I will establish the basic principles which I believe need to inform our approach to racism in religion education.

(a) The Explicit Directives of Major Ecclesiastical Authorities

Perhaps the easiest place to begin my argument is with the explicit directives which major church bodies have given to their members on the issue of racism. This hierarchical argument may not be terribly convincing in an era when disregard of church authorities is no longer seen as a cardinal sin. We should, however, be aware that statements have been made about the duties of Christians, and especially Christian educators, to address the issue of racism.

In their *Pastoral Letter on Racism and the Conversion of the Human Heart* (see Pontifical Commission "Iustitia et Pax" 1989:80) the Australian Catholic Bishops had this to say:

> It is our responsibility as followers of Christ to acknowledge and address the issue of racism prepared by a true change of heart with a resolution for practical action in the years ahead. As pastors we recommend that all of us ... consciously opt for the elimination of racism by every means, **especially education**. (My emphasis)

The Pontifical Commission has stated that:

> In the formation of a non-racist conscience the **role of the schools** is primordial. (Original emphasis)

To achieve this:

> it may be necessary to revise scholastic texts which falsify history, pass over the misdeeds of racism in silence or justify the principles behind it. (Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax* 1989:57-58)

No less strongly the World Council of Churches declared:

> Racism ... is an assault on Christ's values and a rejection of His sacrifice. Wherever it appears, whether in the individual or in the collective, it is sin. It must be openly fought by all who are on Christ's side, and by the Church as the designated vehicle and instrument of Christ's purpose in the world.
>
> It is a matter of regret and for repentance that the churches have come so late to the recognition of this responsibility. (Rogers 1980:95)

To carry out this open fight:

> The World Council of Churches, through its member churches, should continue and intensify the educational process in matters of racism for the whole church community ... (Rogers 1980:97)

(b) The Falsification of the Human Record in Religion Education Through its Silence on Racism

Religion education takes two principal forms in Australia. The one is a form of catechesis, evangelisation or development of understanding of Christian belief and practice in Christian schools (or through right of entry provisions in State schools). The other is a form of religion studies which typically relies heavily on a history of religions or phenomenological approach (see Lovat 1989). I wish to show how, in their silence on the issue of racism, both approaches present us with distorted understandings of the religions involved.

Religion education curricula in most Christian schools could hardly be appropriately characterised as studies of the Christian tradition. By and large they read, and feel, like protracted sermons or homilies enlivened by a large variety of interesting classroom strategies to get students directly involved. This sermon-like character of religion education is best exemplified in the way in which the beliefs and practices of the Christian Church are presented to students. Here Christian beliefs are presented as timeless truths. They are presented as being pure, beyond distortion and having the capacity to transform human life

and to lift human life out of its morass of sin. One looks in vain to find presentations of the Christian tradition which show how all of its major doctrines and practices have been used not only in the political struggles against racism but also in the theological constructions of the racist ideology itself.

It is imperative that we recognise that in the concrete, historical struggles over racism both theologians who repudiated it and those who promoted it turned to general doctrines in the Christian tradition like the doctrine of creation and shaped it in ways which supported their struggles for or against racism. The historian Smith (1972), in his study of the use of creation theology in the American South over the emancipation of slaves, has demonstrated how those theologians who supported emancipation and the integration of slaves into every facet of social life argued that as the descendants of Adam and Eve all human beings are the children of God and bear the image of God. Thus all human beings are of equal worth and have equal rights and endowments. By contrast, Smith has shown how those theologians who opposed emancipation and the integration of the ex-slaves into church or society argued that God had indeed created all human beings and loves and values them all equally. In his wisdom, however, God has created the different "races" and accorded them different attributes. It is against the will of God for the races to mix or to amalgamate. Indeed, God has so ordered the human dispensation that he has created some "races" to be subordinate to and to serve other "races".

It is not only theologies of creation and providence which have become embedded in and part of the struggles over racism. In her study of the World Council of Churches' stance on racism, Rogers (1980) has shown how it has grounded its anti-racist stance in a theology of redemption. Through Christ's death and resurrection we are all made members of the one Body of Christ which must get expression in the physical association and union of Christians in their Churches. Racist exclusion and segregation thus violate Christ's act of salvation. Smith (1972) and Scherer (1975) have shown how racists in their theology of salvation have stressed that our union with each other is a spiritual union only since it is constituted through a mystical, not physical, union with Christ. It is thus sinful to attempt to bring members of different "races" into associations and amalgamations in Christian congregations.

Not all Christian doctrines have been so overtly used in the theological construction of the racist ideology. However, contemporary Black Theologians, (for example, Cone 1970, Jones 1974, Wilmore 1973, and Moore 1972) reflecting on Christian traditions in the light of their experiences as the victims of

racism, have helped us see how particular interpretations of all major doctrines are experienced as racist and as helping to sustain racist oppression. One illustration of this is the analysis by the South African Black Theologian, Ntwasa (1972), of the doctrine of God. The traditional use of the person metaphor of God, he argues, especially when that "Person" is imbued with absolute power and unchallenged authority, makes God feel very much like the ruling racist South African Government and its security forces to South Africa's oppressed black people. This feeling is reinforced by the iconography of the Christian Churches in which God and Christ are unmistakably white males in seats of great power. These metaphors, Ntwasa holds, reinforce the racist status quo and need to be replaced by inter-personal and relational metaphors which affirm equity such as "God is love" or "God is justice". Black Theologians are engaged in often radical reconstructions of Christian doctrines and practices, which on the face of it, do not appear to be racist at all.

What I am arguing here is that for Christian religion education curricula to present Christian doctrines as if they are or have been immune from racist construction and thus as innocent of implication in the construction and maintenance of racist ideology and practice is to distort the historical record beyond recognition. It is to maintain theological innocence at the price of truth. I am also arguing that it is a distortion of the truth to present these doctrines as powerful safeguards against racism. Writing about American Christians' attitudes in the struggles over slavery the historian Scherer states; "Christian faith and community usually displayed no special potency for insulating white members from the prevailing attitudes to black people" (Scherer 1975:154). That is as true today as ever it was. To pretend in our religion education curricula that it was otherwise and to fail to acknowledge the extent to which racism is alive and well in the Christian community is to distort reality.

No less damaging and distorting is the studied avoidance of the issue of racism in our religion studies curricula. While I am an ardent advocate of the serious and sustained study of non-Christian religions in all religion education curricula (Habel and Moore 1982, Crotty et al. 1989), the connection between racism and, for example, the study of Australian Aboriginal religions is not self-evident, least of all to our students. If we wish these studies to make a contribution to our understanding of racism and the struggle against it, we need to make the connections overt. We need to point out, for example, how the phrenologists in the early part of the 19th century gave scientific credibility to the views of many Christians in Australia that Aboriginal Australians, as a

distinct "race", were savages who lacked the mental and spiritual capacities for spirituality, morality and civilisation (McConnochie et al. 1988, Reynolds 1987). To include a serious study of the spirituality of Aboriginal Australians is one attempt to fight against this racist construction which continues to thrive in the Australian cultural tradition. This connection, however, needs to be made overtly. Their study of Aboriginal Australian spirituality will not in and of itself help students understand how the racist ideology denied the possibility of their having any spirituality.

To undertake studies of Aboriginal Australians' religious traditions, or any other religious traditions, in a way that does not show how those religions got caught up in and transformed by the colonial and Nazi experiences and the racism they spawned is to distort those traditions by lifting them out of time and space. What most non-Christian religions have become and now are can be understood only to the extent that the impact of racist ideology and oppression on them is understood. Wilson (1973) has provided us with an account of the transformation of religions in most countries colonised by Britain and many articles in Swain and Rose (1988) trace Australian Aboriginal religious reconstructions. The response within Judaism to the long history of anti-Semitism and especially the holocaust is richly documented (for example, Levin 1977, Flannery 1965, Poliakov 1974) and there is growing research into the link between the experience of European racism and the modern Islamic revival (for example Iqbal 1958, Siddiqui 1984) and modern Hinduism (Brown 1977). Student texts and religion education curricula and syllabuses typically avoid the issue of racism. This is sometimes true even of Judaism. The most common way in which religion studies curricula avoid confronting the reality of racism is by presenting them in their ancient and traditional past. While it is undoubtedly true that all living religions do have connections with their ancient past, that is not the way in which they are in the modern world. To avoid the transforming impact of racism on them is to distort them as living religions. It is also to obscure our understanding of them.

When the "we" who are engaged in the studies of non-Christian religious traditions are Christians (or linked by cultural ancestry to the Western European Christian tradition) and we avoid the issue of racism, what we end up doing is preserving the illusion of the innocence of Christianity and our own cultural tradition. Beyond this, we insulate ourselves from having to come to terms with the spiritual resilience and resistance which is alive and well in those traditions; a

spiritual resilience which our racist tradition confidently asserted was lacking in them.

(c) The Message of the Null Curriculum

The null curriculum, that is, the curriculum which remains silent on the interplay between racism and religion, not only distorts our understanding of the religion into which we might wish to draw our students (in Christian education) or of those religions which we would like our students to study (in Religion Studies), it also makes our curricula racist (albeit unwittingly so). More importantly, however, the message of the null curriculum is that there is no need for reparation or to engage in the ongoing struggle against racism.

The modern world still bears racism indelibly imprinted on its patterns of thought, its social structures and its collective and individual behaviours. This remains true despite the significant advances made in the struggles against racism in the latter half of this century. The struggle is far from over. Since racism penetrates every nook and cranny of human experience, curricula which do not overtly address it and take sides with its ongoing victims and others engaged in the struggle against it, can quite legitimately be accused of tacitly supporting racism. As Wren (1986) has argued, on social justice issues political neutrality is not possible. Not to engage in the fight against injustice is effectively to side with the dominant forces which sustain injustice. Racism and religion do not live in separate worlds. And, in relation to racism, as I have already argued, religion is not necessarily anti-racist. It is not even neutral. Religion education curricula which do not recognise this and become overtly anti-racist can only help to sustain racism.

In the calls from international bodies like the United Nations, governments and ecclesiastical hierarchies, there is a surprisingly consistent thread of argument in relation to racism which has significant implications for religion educators.

One aspect in this thread is the assertion that we all have a responsibility to attempt to undo and make reparations for past wrongs in the history of racism. For both the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church this undoing means privileging the voice of the victims of racism and listening closely to their religious experiences (Dorr 1991). Not to do so is to continue the racist tradition of placing these people on the margins of humanity.

The other major aspect of this thread is to become actively engaged in and supportive of anti-racist activity whenever it is taking place. This thread is most

strongly articulated in the Program to Combat Racism of the World Council of Churches (Rogers 1980). It is, however, also clearly articulated in the Catholic community. Thus, for example, Pope John Paul II on his visit to Southern Africa in 1988 called on the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference to be concerned not simply to change people's hearts, but also to change racist structures (see Pontifical Commission 1989:66). In their pastoral letter on racism of 1980, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, the American Catholic Bishops say:

> The structures of our society ... are geared to the success of the majority and the failure of the minority ... The sinfulness is often anonymous but nonetheless real. The sin is social in nature in that each of us, in varying degrees, is responsible. All of us in some measure are accomplices. As our recent pastoral letter on moral values states, "The absence of personal fault for evil does not absolve one of all responsibility. We must resist and undo injustices we have not caused, lest we become bystanders who tacitly endorse evil and so share in the guilt for it." (quoted in Prochaska 1983:84).

Religion education curricula which are silent on racism are hardly likely to contribute much to the process of "resisting and undoing" it.

It was necessary for me to be fairly extensive in this analysis of the implications of the distortions and message within the null curriculum on the issue of racism as it laid the foundations for me to suggest how I believe it should be included in the religion education curriculum in the final section of this paper.

4. How Should it be There?

Here I wish to establish five curriculum principles which I believe should inform the way in which racism is included in the religion education curriculum.

(a)   A Direct Study of Racism

My first principle is that I believe that we need to study racism overtly and directly, rather than indirectly and by subtle inference.

By this I mean that we should study racism as a specific, concrete, historical phenomenon involving real human beings who did actual things to other people of whom they had specific racist perceptions. It is from such a deliberate and focussed study that we and our students may gain clearer understandings of the nature, manifestations and effects of racism. As an

example of what I mean I refer you to the little gem produced for the United States schools, *Peace Through Justice* (Prochaska 1983:78-105).

In arguing for such a direct approach I am arguing against those approaches which have theorised that racism is the product of prejudice or ignorance and thus believe that it can be dealt with effectively by eliminating prejudice or ignorance. It may be that I am prejudiced against some group of people whom I might identify as a different "race" from my own. If so, that "prejudice" is much more appropriately understood as the effect rather than the cause of racism. It may also be that I, indeed, am not prejudiced. I do not have to be prejudiced to benefit from racism or to participate in its maintenance. The prejudice thesis is a far too simplistic analysis of racism to constitute the foundations on which to build to counter-racism. It shuts out the historical and institutionalised dimensions.

The ignorance theory has all the same weaknesses as the prejudice theory in that it individualises and personalises it. It can also, as we have seen, lead to studies of other cultures, in which the role of that culture in constructing racism or of racism in constructing that culture need not be explored.

Beyond these theoretical arguments, there is simply no evidence that these indirect approaches have worked in the sense of actually reducing hostile attitudes and behaviours (see Moore 1991b). They certainly have done nothing at all to contribute to our knowledge or understanding of racism.

(b)   A Direct Study of the Religion-racism Connection

For religion educators the direct study of racism needs to focus on the complex interplay between religion and racism in the history and construction of racism. Part of this study has to include the crucial role Christians have played, and continue to play, both in constructing racism by racialising major Christian doctrines and practices and in using Christian doctrines and practices to resist or oppose racism. Equally crucial to this study has to be the impact of racism on the whole spectrum of non-Christian religious traditions; how racism transformed these traditions by the accommodations and resistances to it and their appropriations of it into their own patterns of belief.

Again in advocating this direct approach I am also trying to reject such simplistic analyses of the racism-religion connection which suggest that Christian belief and practice either has been or now is a pivotal and vital force in countering racism. This is simplistic in its suggestion that the problem (that is, racism) is "out there" and that Christianity has the answers. It never was like that

and it is not like that now. Within Christianity it is only those Christians who for a whole host of complex reasons, have taken up the struggle against racism who have constructed Christian beliefs and practices in ways which are overtly anti-racist.

(c) Privilege the Voice of the Victims of Racism

Our religion education curricula will become anti-racist, I believe, when we drop our masquerade of neutrality and deliberately and overtly side with those engaged in the struggles against racism. Not all of those engaged in these struggles have themselves been the victims of racism. Certainly, however, it is those who have suffered most at the hands of racism who have borne and continue to bear the brunt of the struggle against it. In these struggles they look for solidarity from others who are willing to join forces with them. They do not look to these others to lead or to dominate the struggle. This means that if our curricula wish to be serious about racism they have to give an unreserved priority to the experiences, analyses and perceptions of racism by its victims and how they believe the struggle against it needs to be waged. Further, given the ravages of racism, religion educators who are at all interested in the power of religious experience and insight to sustain and inspire people in the extremes of adversity will also privilege the voices of those religions which have suffered so much at the hands of racism.

(d) Make Racism a Pervasive Focus Across the Religion Education Curriculum

The issue of racism is not an optional extra in any religion in the modern world, least of all in Christianity. As such it is inadequate for it to be addressed as a special unit in the curriculum or as one possible topic in a special social justice unit. Within Christianity, as we have seen, no doctrine or practice has been left unracialised by the constructors of racist ideology and practices. Equally, no Christian doctrine or practice has not been revisited and reconstructed by those Christians who have been engaged in the bitter struggles against racism. Those with a concern about racism know that there is no doctrine or practice which rides above these conflicts, unsullied by them. There is thus no conceivable topic in Christian education which has no connection with the issue of racism. If this is so, and if our curricula need to privilege the voice of the victims of racism then our religion education curricula in every topic need

to be sensitively in tune with how the Christian victims of racism (and their anti-racist allies) have reclaimed, renamed and reconstructed the tradition.

In precisely the same way in religion studies curricula it is inadequate for racism to be studied apart from the various religious traditions as a depth theme or current issues topic. In almost every tradition, as we have seen, major or subtle shifts have been made to every aspect of traditional belief and practice in response to the phenomenon of racism. This being so, anti-racist religion educators need to be sensitively in tune with the role that racism and the religious responses to it have played in effecting these shifts.

(e)   Orient the Curriculum to Action for Justice

What understanding we have of racism, its nature and effects, has emerged not primarily from disinterested academic studies of it. It has come as people have taken sides against it and taken up the struggle to "resist and undo" it. These social and political actors have indeed engaged in serious and sustained study of racism. They have done so, however, primarily in order to be able to struggle against it more effectively. In South Africa, for example, while some Black Theologians are lecturers and researchers in universities, most of these same academics have spent years in prison, under detention orders or in exile. Their insight comes from their engagement in the struggle for further engagement.

This same principle, I believe, holds good for religion education. Our students will gain most insights into the nature of racism not simply by studies of it but also by engagement in the struggle against it. And careful reflection on such insights has little point if it is not used to inform their ongoing participation in the struggle. Thus our pedagogies in religion education should be oriented towards enabling our students to become more informed and more effective participants in the struggle against racism.

Conclusion

In this paper I have confined my attention to but one major social justice issue which has direct implications for religion education. In giving this study this specific focus I do not wish to suggest in any way at all that other social justice issues such as poverty, classism, sexism, ageism, ethnocentrism and anthropocentrism are not of equal significance. Racism is, of course, linked in powerful and complex ways with each of these other forms of injustice and does

not function in isolation from them. My focus on racism was to attempt to get racism on the religion education agenda.

Even without taking into account racism's intersections it should be clear that what I am proposing is a shift of monumental proportions in our approach to religion education. It is a shift from the current state of silence to racism becoming an all-pervasive focus. To achieve it would require a re-writing of all of our curriculum guidelines and materials and a huge training and development program for all religion education teachers. That would be difficult and expensive, but would rest on the miracle of policy developers, curriculum planners and religion education teachers believing that it is necessary. After a life-time in the struggle against racism I do not believe in miracles. The architects of our religion education curricula do not know the experience of racism from the inside and thus are not compelled by a sense of urgency to confront and undo it. I understand that, even though as an exile from that bastion of Christian racism, South Africa, it pains me. I see hope, however, in the slow emergence of social justice onto the religion education curriculum agenda. Perhaps as social justice gets a higher profile racism will secure a place for more sustained analysis.

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Multiculturalism and the Study of World Religions

Eric J. Sharpe

> *Ancroft Comprehensive (School) had certainly had a religion all right, fashionable and, in a school with twenty different nationalities, expedient. It was anti-racism. You soon learned that you could get away with any amount of insubordination, indolence or stupidity if you were sound on this essential doctrine. It struck her that it was like any other religion; it meant what you wanted it to mean: it was easy to learn, a few platitudes, myths and slogans; it was intolerant, it gave you the excuse for occasional selective aggression... Best of all, it cost nothing... (P.D. James, A Taste for Death)*

There are positive and negative ways of doing most things, not least in the world of education. "Anti-racism", as casually and slightly cynically described by that most accomplished of writers P.D. James, is an excellent example of the negative approach to the encounter of diverse nationalities, cultures and creeds under the one educational roof. By "negative" I do not mean wrong-headed or undesirable; a synonym might be "defensive", in much the same way that a football team forced to defend, must take care on no account to make elementary mistakes. Anti-racism is a defensive notion, a program of avoidance, and sometimes a type of damage control.

Given that circumstances have thrown human groups together (for reasons too well known to need enumerating), how they react to one another is of the essence. Anti-racism tends to work on an ascending scale of persuasion, but is always addressed only to the receiving community. The focus is on the one who is not the stranger, not the newcomer, not the alien, not the "ethnic", who is urged (commanded, warned) not to harass the one who is. The program therefore will have succeeded to the extent that the migrant, refugee or stranger is not insulted, ostracised, attacked or otherwise made to suffer for being "foreign"; all is well to the extent that open conflict is being avoided. Anti-racism is therefore a matter of things that are not done, words that are not used, judgements that are not passed, slogans that are not scrawled on walls, windows that are not broken. Virtue is imagined to be the absence of chargeable

offences, harmony the absence of violent confrontation. In some circumstances, there will be those who are so relieved at having achieved that much, that the need to go further will not be felt at all strongly. Also it will be argued, quite rightly, that a cautious overture has to be a first step toward a meeting of minds, and where there is initial distrust (for whatever reason, whether real or imagined), every step towards overcoming it has to be welcomed.

In our pragmatic world, for the most part one is not required actually to like the people with whom one works, and those who do, may be a privileged minority. Liking and respect are not synonyms. Even in the absence of actual liking, one learns to make adjustments and allowances, to recognise danger signs and interpret nuances. Human society is based on the need for human beings to be, in the biblical phrase, "members one of another", to balance one's own rights and privileges against those of others. In these days one hears little enough of responsibility, as contrasted with the monotonous insistence on "rights"; but an ethical system which has nothing to say about mutual human responsibility, is hardly worthy of the name. A one-sided insistence on rights (one's own, or those of a particularly favoured group) is the worst of all recipes for social harmony; where minority and majority rights come into conflict, as they so often do, the social tension is simply compounded. Arguably, therefore, if the educationalist has only limited resources, multicultural education based on anti-racism may have come some small way towards instilling respect for diversity, and that, for all its initial negativity, is far preferable to most alternatives.

Before we proceed any further, a word about the vocabulary we have grown accustomed to use might not be out of place. (I am not rash enough to suggest a new vocabulary, however much it might be needed: for that we might have to wait until some currently fashionable terms collapse from exhaustion.) First, it is surely wrong to use "racism" as the functional opposite to "multiculturalism", since race is an accident of birth, while culture is the sum total of all the mainly acquired (that is, learned) characteristics and values that distinguish human communities, small and large, from one another. It is the merest truism that human beings seem to have innumerable ways of demarcation and separation - heredity, environment, history, language, law and custom, food and drink, dress and deportment, and all the rest. Having these in a particular combination establishes an "identity"; a sense of belonging here, and not there. Identity is a fine thing to have - except that it usually serves to tell you who you are not, more clearly than it tells you who you are. Also, one tends sometimes to

suspect that the whole of this terminology is brought into play more to label a deficiency than to celebrate what there is for all to see. "Identity" in particular is often a minority concern, and part of the terminology of exile and oppression - or of neglect.

How religion fits into this pattern is easily observed, much less easily explained.

In the P.D. James quotation with which we began, anti-racism was actually identified as a "religion" - a value-system not to be questioned, which required conformity and submission, while tending to encourage dissimulation, if not outright hypocrisy. In most of the educational institutions of the West, one is tempted to say that the role of religion is either so little understood as to be easily ignored; or so well understood as to be best avoided. I tend to the first of these explanations, while allowing that at times, the second carries a certain force.

If I may be forgiven for being slightly autobiographical for a moment, I do not recall having learnt anything of value about religion at my grammar school, excellent as it was in so many other ways; while at Main Street Methodist Church, I learned about commitment and devotion, but not about religion (which seemed to be what the Catholics and Anglicans did). The windows started to open a little at Professor Brandon's comparative religion class in Manchester University in 1955 (my second year: first-year students in those days were not regarded as mature enough to be turned loose into the fields of Osiris and Orpheus). Why, though, had I to wait so long? Why had China and India, for instance, never rated a mention at school or church, other than perhaps as inconceivably remote mission-fields? My father had served in India and I was used to the taste of curry; the world of the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita and Bhakti was, on the other hand, in every sense new.

I can now see that the main shortcoming of the comparative religion discipline of the late 1950s was that we were not really taught to regard "world religions" as living options in a contemporary world, but rather as exhibits in a museum, as menagerie animals, whose day had come - and gone. But then there were very few Indians on the streets of Manchester and none at all in Lancaster where even Italian icecream was exotic beyond all measure. I still recall the Indian student in Manchester in the mid-1950s who asked me to explain "the difference between Hinduism and Buddhism" and how difficult I found it on the basis of the little I had read.

The overall impression of pre-1960s comparative religion was unavoidably one of a type of antiquarianism. It was urged that no religious tradition could be understood apart from a knowledge of its origins; so far so good. But what it signally failed to do was to relate the remote past to the living present. Even in the case of Christianity, where so much attention was paid to origins, a little less to the Protestant Reformation and none at all to the twentieth century, syllabi had nothing to say on the process by which the present had **become** the present. Similarly with Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam; the life of the Prophet, the Eight-fold Path and the theories of the Advaita Vedanta one knew; the place of these traditions in the modern world one did not. When the attempt to modernise the approach began finally to be made by the Academy in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, it met initially with a good deal of resistance from the side of those who feared for their texts. One could appreciate their point: having learnt their *Religionsgeschichte* on the basis of documents in the original languages, and having had to force themselves camel-like through the needle's eye of philology, many could not quite bring themselves to the point of allowing that the world was full of believers for whom orthopraxy had the upper hand on orthodoxy, and who were prepared to take the finer points of textual criticism on trust.

The times they were a-changing, though, and nowhere more spectacularly than in the realignment of religions and cultures of the modern world. Educational assumptions that had shaped syllabi for half a century, proved to be no longer valid. Europe and America were no longer the Christian nations whose responsibilities included the supplying of enlightenment to "lesser breeds without the law". Since 1900 two major and innumerable minor wars had thoroughly undermined whatever moral superiority the West might have once believed itself to possess. By the late 1970s all but a handful of the West's former colonies had been cast adrift on unfriendly oceans, while in the West itself, much of a once-dominant religion had assumed the hurt and bewildered expression of an elderly relative who had once been deferred to, but was now only visited occasionally, being otherwise ignored.

A word frequently used during the "Religious Studies revolution" of twenty or so years ago, was "sympathy". The argument went like this: in the past, the elderly relative aforementioned, in younger and more vigorous days had been guilty of the sin of pride in imposing her own standards of belief and behaviour on innocent children of a benevolent nature (alternatively, on heirs of the ancient and subtle wisdom of the East). This had been "arrogance", born of

missionary enterprises of a century or more of colonialist, imperialist exploitation. It was therefore to combat the arrogance of the past that we urged one another to exercise "sympathy" in the encounters of the present. We exhorted our students, and one another, to learn to judge Benares by the standards of Benares and not those of Birmingham, Boston or Bendigo.

How well we were prepared to do this is another matter entirely. I am not aware that anyone has made a serious attempt to document and analyse the theory and practice of teaching religion in the period from about 1950 to about 1980, but it seems fairly clear that what was involved was what it is now fashionable to call a paradigm shift - or rather, that changed circumstances demanded such a shift, but the need was met only locally and in piecemeal fashion. Then, as later, the words "something will have to be done about it" were easily spoken. What was much more difficult was to know what precisely needed to be done and with what resources.

A tragedy has been somewhere defined (or at any rate described) as a situation of conflict in which there are no simple rights and wrongs, but in which both parties are equally right, given the premises on which they are operating. Resolutions of conflict may be hard to come by; they will not be found at all unless the parties concerned are prepared to examine and where necessary to modify their own presuppositions and first principles. In matters involving religion, such a capacity is rare and its exercise tends to lead to turmoil. About education, I cannot speak with confidence, never having understood the profession's intricacies. However, the combination of religion and education has always seemed to me to be a peculiarly volatile one, liable to cause explosions if not treated with extreme care.

At the primary and secondary level, it still seems to be a fairly safe assumption that where "religion" is taught to "children", it is as a rule with the parents' approval, even where the parents are not notably religious on their own behalf. This may be the real reason for the remarkable conservatism for such teaching - to the extent of regarding the ordained ministry as its only fit and proper communicator, even where the minister in question has no weapon save his or her earnestness wherewith to turn aside the scorn of youth. Every parent wishes his or her child to have such opportunities as the father or mother missed or (more usually) ignored. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22: 6) was no doubt once true; possibly it still is, though with the all-important proviso, "provided training is being carried out by the right person". In all but a tiny number of instances

today, the attempt is being made by entirely the wrong persons, under unsuitable circumstances and against the seldom-acknowledged but all pervasive background of a mental attitude varying unpredictably between indifference and outright hostility.

It is a matter of common observation that these potentially destructive conditions exist much less frequently where an honest attempt is made to present students - of whatever age - with a kaleidoscope of religions in the plural, rather than with a single morally intrusive and intolerant world-view. Exclusivity and uniqueness are very proper subjects for theological discussion among the well-informed. They cannot be made the starting point of the attempt to equip young people for intelligent life in a demanding and often bewildering world of competing values.

Back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I was one of those who argued **against** making the pragmatic demands of an intensifying multiculturalism in the UK an all-sufficient reason for introducing the **comparative** study of religions into schools. I and a few others considered that any educational system which neglected to inform its students about the functions and roles of religion in world affairs, past and present, was guilty of criminal neglect. This it seemed to me was true, irrespective of the demands of short term expediency. I am still of that opinion. But I have learned to make allowances. For the kind of multicultural policy that begins by measuring the respective voting power of the communities concerned, I have no respect whatsoever, having seen it in operation at fairly close quarters. But throw together the offspring of several dozen nations and cultures into the same educational melting-pot, and it simply will not do to treat the most important of all subjects exclusively in the terms laid down by one group of its interpreters, however insistent. In that way lies submission, but not understanding.

If a multicultural society is aiming no higher than at peaceful coexistence, then the subject of religion may well be omitted from the curriculum without any great sense of loss. After all, religion has always been a highly contentious subject, and is guaranteed to remain so. Religion is intricate, once it has passed its "Away in a manger" stage, and may place a strain on young computer-trained minds. Religion makes demands of the kind upon which educational (and other) psychology turned its back almost as soon as it was invented. Above all, religion is divisive: it discriminates (surely the wickedest of all terms!) between the enlightened and the unenlightened, the righteousness and the unrighteous, occasionally between Jews and gentiles and often between the rich and the poor.

If then, one objective - perchance the only objective - of a multicultural society should be to proclaim the equality (whether before God or one another does not much matter) of all those who are a part of it, then might not the teaching of religion be a hindrance, rather than a signpost, along the way? Might it not be safest to settle for a secular program of religious avoidance, rather than a venture into the minefields of religious observance.

This is all very well, but it hardly does justice to the convictions of those who really **have** convictions, when those differ from the secular majority.

Round about Christmas 1991, while staying with relatives in the south of Sweden, I had the opportunity to read through a dozen or so issues of the journal of the (socialist) Swedish Teachers Union, *Lärarnas Tidning* (The Teachers Newspaper). It was an instructive experience. Card-carrying social democrats have always been desperately afraid of what they have usually put down to religious "authoritarianism", especially when exercised on the impressionable young. Naturally enough, the Union was also concerned about the rumblings of disquiet that have been heard recently in some, at least, of Sweden's schools on the sensitive subject of immigration. On the first count, *L.T.* contained much material on the introduction into some schools of a course-plan on moral education, sponsored by Lions International, and labelled *Lions Quest*, but allegedly originating somewhere in the vicinity of Scientology. Another focus of opposition was the phenomenon of the independent Christian school, especially when linked with neo-Pentecostalism. In both cases the educators scented a non-egalitarian approach to the school and went on the attack accordingly. Consistent egalitarianism is, however, desperately difficult to maintain in education (at any level) except at the cost of mediocrity - which is precisely what critics of the Swedish education system accuse it of having brought about since the 1960s, though that is by the way. It is especially difficult to sustain in a multicultural setting.

Before about the 1960s, Sweden could hardly be called a multicultural society. Since then, however, a steady influx of refugees, political exiles, "guest workers" and others have made some Swedish cities into the kind of multicultural forum to which we in Australia have long been accustomed. In times of economic prosperity, Sweden coped with this influx well enough; but in the early 1990s, in a manner similar to that already observed in Germany, France and Italy, a backlash has begun, mainly among the young and the unemployed. The dismally predictable details need not, however, concern us.

The 5 December 1991 issue of *L.T.* contained several major articles on multiculturalism, racism and anti-racism in Swedish schools. It was clear from these, firstly, that the problem is being taken seriously, but secondly, that the role of the study of religion in helping to resolve it, was being fairly systematically (and perhaps quite deliberately) overlooked. There was a tone in these articles that I personally found slightly disturbing.

It rested, I believe, in the tacit assumption that it is as important to identify and root out "racists" as it is to foster intercultural understanding - a punitive rather than a preventative approach, and one admirably designed to foster a barely-warranted sense of moral superiority among the witch-finders. One recalls the P.D. James quotation with which we began, to the effect that anti-racism was both intolerant and an opportunity for "occasional selective aggression" - namely, that directed against those failing to measure up to the requisite standards. A very similar phenomenon is to be observed among the "politically (or spiritually) correct" in an adjacent corner of the educational field, an unreasonable amount of whose energy is spent on anathemas.

The way out of this impasse is, however, not to be impatient of anti-racism merely; but to point out how much more serviceable it is to use one's educational opportunities not simply to uproot error, but to foster positive human relationships along the lines of capable dialogue. The teaching of world religions is clearly not the single all-sufficient answer. It is on the other hand that part of the answer most calculated to induce the highest level of acute nervousness in the greatest number of people. Acute, but for the most part unnecessary. The saying, "you don't know what you don't know", is seldom more applicable than in connection with the teaching of religion multiculturally. At one extreme there are those who appear to be unable to conceive of the teaching of religion on any other basis than that of indoctrination. At the other there are the rarefied souls who seek the ineffable experience, speak loftily of the educational process in religion as "the teaching of the unteachable to the unteachable by the untaught", and simply cannot be bothered with the rest. In between there is the multitude whom none can number, who never having been exposed to the effective teaching of religion on any level, and notably unwilling to take advice, fall back on stereotypes. That some of these are educational decision-makers, and others politicians, improves matters not at all.

It is, though, far less difficult than is often supposed to stretch multicultural awareness beyond the restaurants and "folkloric festivals" to the synagogues, mosques, temples, churches and chapels where most people (those

of the secular West may be excused) are most themselves. Presumably it is a the bogey of indoctrination that prevents one group, and the terror of syncretism that prevents another, from making more use of these opportunities. On the library front, the literature of world religions is practically boundless, and in a society like ours, of unlimited access. The resistance of the religiously orthodox one can appreciate, and up to a point, one can sympathise with it: what is harder to deal with, is the inertia of the otherwise intelligent on the one hand, and the opposition of the ill-informed (such as is exhibited on every occasion when an unfamiliar religious group proposes to take up residence in a new location) on the other.

To sum up: anti-racism is at best a short-term substitute for genuine intercultural awareness. Without the element of the study of religion, the deepest level of cultural motivation will remain inaccessible. But because of bad precedents, valuable opportunities are often not recognised for what they are. Education into the new societies which will increasingly characterise what is left of the twentieth century cannot safely neglect the study of religion - though it may already be too late to repair the neglect of the past.

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Religion and Ethics
in a Multicultural Society

Max Charlesworth

Introduction

One of my main preoccupations over the last ten years or so has been in the area of bioethics which is concerned with the ethical implications of the new forms of biotechnology. Major questions arise about, for example, the moral status of the human embryo, the possibility of embryo experimentation, organ and tissue transplants, the medical prolongation and termination of human life, the manipulation of human genetic structures to avoid genetic diseases, the use of *in vitro* fertilisation in surrogacy arrangements, and so on. The larger and more general question also arises: how is it possible in a pluralistic society where people have very differing ethical views (many of which have a religious basis) to reach any kind of community consensus so that we may, as a society, control and regulate what happens in this area? As we know, this is a formidably difficult question. The difficulty, however, is compounded in a multicultural society such as ours where ethical views of various minority groups are often derived from religious foundations radically different from, and sometimes at odds with, the general quasi-Christian ethics (attenuated and secularised as it may be) of our society. (I am well aware that the notion of multiculturalism is not a clear and distinct idea, but I hope that its meaning will become more precise in the ensuing discussion.)

In France President Mitterand set up in 1984 a National Consultative Committee on Ethics in the Life and Health Sciences to overview biotechnological and bioethical issues. On that committee, apart from medical and legal and governmental representatives, there are also representatives from what the charter of the committee calls "the four main philosophical families of France" - Catholicism, Islam (now the second largest religious grouping in France), Protestantism and Marxism. These various groups not only have differing ethical views about the issues mentioned before, they also have differing views about the foundations of ethics and the nature of the ethical

enterprise, as well as about the relationship that ought to obtain between the sphere of ethics or morality on the one hand and the sphere of law on the other hand. Many Muslims, for example, believe that if a practice is contrary to the Islamic religious law then the State has the right, through the civil law, to prohibit that practice. In fact in many traditional, religiously based societies the distinction that is made in liberal democratic societies between the sphere of personal morality and the sphere of law, simply does not obtain. We will return later to bioethics and the possibility of a community consensus on bioethical matters, but for the moment we may simply note that in a multicultural society special problems arise about both - though I also want to argue that multiculturalism provides special opportunities for enlarging and enriching the community debate or conversation about such matters.

The Salman Rushdie affair is, of course, a dramatic example of the severe, and apparently intractable, religio-ethical problems that can arise in a multicultural society. Leaving aside the attitudes of those Muslims outside the United Kingdom, many British Muslims also see Rushdie's book as blasphemously and sacrilegiously offensive to their Islamic religious beliefs and at the same time demand that the British law directly intervene in a sphere which in the majority British culture is not the State's nor the law's concern. Some British Muslims have indeed demanded, in effect, that the British legal system adopt the same view of sacrilege (at least with respect to Islam) as the Islamic *Sharia* does itself. Here the conflict is not just about differing ethical views but about the whole nature of ethics and its social implications.

We have a lapidary example of the same situation on our own doorstep. I refer here to the question of Australian Aboriginal land rights, and more generally to the recognition of Aboriginal customary law within the British/Australian legal system and indeed of Aboriginal culture within Australian society. The Australian Aboriginal concept of land is basically a religious one since the land of any group is seen as the iconic vehicle or mediator of spiritual power - the power of the Ancestor Spirits - in Aboriginal culture. In the same way, Australian Aboriginal customary law has a wholly religious basis in that it derives from the law of the Ancestor Spirits. However, in contemporary Australian society Aborigines' claims to their land can be made only within the context of British/Australian property law, even though the legal concepts and categories of the latter distort and falsify the whole Aboriginal meaning of land and land ownership. The European view of the land is a secularised version of the Judeo-Christian idea that God has created the land, and

nature generally, **for us** so that we have, as Aquinas put it, "*dominium*" over it as, so to speak, trustees. But for Australian Aborigines, as has often been remarked, they are "owned" by their land: in a very real sense it has "dominium" over them because it is the vehicle of spiritual power that endows them with their identity.

These three cases then raise questions about religiously based minority groups, with religiously-based ethical and social ideas, within a multicultural society such as ours. The more general question also arises as to whether the whole idea of multiculturalism is itself an essentially secular one. Thus it might be argued that religious pluralism and tolerance is possible only in a society based upon the secularist premise that the sphere of religion and the sphere of the State are distinct and separate, and further that no religion can make absolutist and exclusivist claims. Historically, it could be said, the separation of religion and the State only became possible in Europe with the loss of power of Christianity and the collapse of the European religiously confessional societies after the French Revolution. In this view, pluralism and multiculturalism presuppose that religious groups give up any absolutist and exclusivist claims and are prepared not merely to tolerate passively other religious and non-religious groups, but to positively respect and welcome them in a genuinely multicultural situation. Put in another way, there is a contradiction between multiculturalism and absolutist and exclusivist religions that subscribe to some form of the principle "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus est*".

Culture and Multiculturalism

So far we have been assuming that the concept of multiculturalism is unproblematic and we must now put that simple-minded assumption into question. Goering is supposed to have said that when he heard the word "culture" he always reached for his revolver and I think that many people are inclined to do the same when they hear the word "multiculturalism".[1]

To begin at the most general and abstract level: in a sense the notion of "culture" is itself a cultural construct. It has been remarked by Lukacs and others that each age redefines the notion of "nature" to suit its own needs and the same is true of the complementary notion of "culture". In other words, we define the notion of culture to fit our own cultural requirements. For us, after Durkheim, the idea of culture implies a tightly structured epistemic grid that dictates how we apprehend and think about the world, and a tightly defined set of values which provide a framework for meaning in our lives. To this complex epistemic

and value structure some kind of tacit or "unconscious" agreement or consensus is given. For Durkheim, of course the whole function of religion is to promote this consensus. It may be difficult in particular cases to spell out or make explicit precisely what that fundamental consensus involves, but we must suppose that it exists, that it is well defined and relatively immutable, and that it has determinative force on everything, no matter how trivial, that occurs within that culture. There is nothing that happens in a culture that may not be explained (in the strong sense of that word) in terms of that culture. For Durkheim it is this which makes sociology, and the social sciences in general, possible: unless culture were defined in this way then the social sciences could not be "sciences" in any strict sense.

In this view of culture a society can by definition have only one epistemic structure, one set of values and framework of meaning, and only one cultural consensus. The idea of a multicultural society - if we were to take it at its face value - is a contradiction in terms. There can of course, be a certain tolerance of minority sub-cultures within a society but ultimately they must toe the line of the dominant culture, otherwise we end inevitably in social schizophrenia and anarchy. The Durkheimian notion of culture in fact operates in much the same way as the Hobbesian idea of "sovereignty". Just as for Hobbes there cannot be any real political change without revolution (the replacement of one "sovereign" by another and a complete renegotiation of the "social contract"), so also in the Durkheimian view of culture the possibility of radical change and development becomes problematic. In this view there are very strict limits to the amount of change and diversity that is permissible in a culture and the possibility of cultural division and anarchy is continually invoked as a warning and a threat.

To some extent this simplistic concept of culture was refined by de Saussure, and his structuralist heirs such as Lévi-Strauss, who proposed that we see culture on the model of language. Just as a language is an "arbitrary" or constructed system of signs operating according to grammatical and syntactical rules, so also a culture is a set of conventions governed by rules. But the structuralists' emphasis upon synchronic, ahistorical analysis, as against diachronic or historical or genetic explanation, once again made the idea of radical cultural change and diversity problematic.

Curiously, the feature of the linguistic model which might have been fruitfully exploited, namely the generative character of language, was largely neglected by the structuralists. A language, as Chomsky has reminded us, is a rule-governed system, but the rules of language are essentially open-ended in

that they permit new combinations of words: it is always possible to generate completely new sentences in a language and we are not limited merely to recycling a limited and closed set of elements. In other words, a language is capable of radical change and generation and of tolerating a great deal of diversity within its structures. (It is worth while reflecting on the variety of languages that are comprised under the rubric of "English" and how impossible it is to pretend that there is some kind of central, paradigmatic, tightly defined, unitary and pure "English language".) In the same way, if we construe the notion of culture according to the linguistic model we can say that the "rules" which govern any culture are open-ended and generative in that they allow radical change and diversity within the culture they govern. This kind of openness or generativity can be seen in fact as an index that a culture is alive and well and not in a fossilised state.

A culture is then not necessarily a tightly structured and defined and unitary and immutable system any more than a natural language such as English is, though we can for various ulterior purposes pretend that it is so. If we may put it a little paradoxically, a culture is much more "multicultural", much more tolerant of internal diversity and change, than the Durkheimian view allows.

These remarks apply to all cultures. But they have particular relevance, it might be noted in parenthesis, for Australian Aboriginal culture, the understanding of which has suffered especially from the Durkheimian model. Thus no less a figure than the great T.G.H. Strehlow has claimed that Aboriginal society is utterly conservative and bound rigidly by religious tradition, and until recently the view prevailed that the Australian Aboriginal peoples lived in a "timeless land" with a culture that was similarly timeless and unchanging. But in actual fact there is enormous diversity both **between** particular Aboriginal cultures and **within** particular Aboriginal cultures. Thus a particular group may incorporate a complex series of "Dreamings" (religiously based world views and ways of life) and a number of quite different languages. Again, there is an amount of innovation and reinterpretation and adaptation within Australian Aboriginal cultures and they are certainly far from being the closed and conservative systems they are supposed to be. (Charlesworth et al. 1985)

There is, of course, a distinct Australian Aboriginal culture just as the two hundred Aboriginal languages belong to a distinct linguistic family (in the same way that English and German and Sanskrit belong to the Indo-European family), but that culture is much less unitary and immutable, much more "multicultural", than is commonly thought.

Modern Western Culture and the "Anthropological Turn"

If our purely philosophical and formal analysis of the concept of culture shows that it is much less unitary, and much more open to diversity and change than we usually think, it is also possible to show that Western culture is open to what might be called cultural polycentrism in a quite specific way.

Lévi-Strauss says somewhere that the crucial differences between Western culture and other cultures is that we have anthropologists and they do not. In other words, we Westerners are interested in the life-worlds of other people and prepared to enter empathetically into them, but those others are not usually concerned to practise anthropology on us. We participantly observe them but they, generally, do not see any point in, so to speak, returning the compliment.

Lévi-Strauss's remark was no doubt intended as a half-joke, but it has deep implications in that the "anthropological turn", as we may call it, is a definitive feature of the post-Enlightenment world-view. What I mean by the "anthropological turn" is not merely an interest in studying the ways of life and exotic customs of "primitive" peoples, or even the structures of "*la pénsee sauvage*", but rather the set of assumptions which make anthropology possible: that there is a radical distinction between "nature" and "culture"; that all cultures are contingent and (in de Saussure's sense) "arbitrary" human constructs like languages: that there is an inescapable relativity in cultures; and also what might be called a cost-benefit structure to them in that any particular cultural construct only achieves certain advantages or benefits at the cost of certain disadvantages or limitations (you can have either Shakespeare or a South Sea Island lifestyle, but not both).

This awareness of the constructed character, contingency, relativity and cost-benefit structure of all cultures also deeply affects the way in which we Westerners live our own life-world, and it is no longer possible for us to pretend that the structures and values of our particular Western cultural construct are in some way privileged or paradigmatic. In a sense we moderns live in our own culture very much as an anthropologist lives in the culture he or she is studying. In other words, we live in our culture as participant observers - at once enmeshed in it and at the same time detached from it and standing in critical judgement on it, catching ourselves in the cultural act, as it were. Paradoxically, our culture is one where the limitations of culture are openly acknowledged and where the whole traditional notion of culture has been devalued and "de-centred". Just as it

would be absurd to pretend that English or French is the paradigmatic language (though Heidegger claimed that German was the philosophical language *par excellence*), so it seems absurd to us (though we have many hesitations and backward looks) to claim some special and privileged status for our culture, as though it were the model culture against which all other world-views and ways of life were to be measured - the universal culture dictated by the canons of reason as against local and tribal cultures.

This points to the possibility of a cultural polycentrism (a multicultural culture) quite at odds with the Durkheimian view. Whatever may be said about the unitary and conservative character of traditional cultures (and we have seen some reason to question the simplistic assumption that they are essentially unitary and conservative), modern Western culture not only tolerates but positively values cultural diversity and change.

The Liberal Ideal

We can approach this whole question from a completely different direction by considering what might be called the liberal ideal. I am aware that the notion of liberalism is an extremely complex one, but in its broadest and simplest terms liberalism is the doctrine that it is possible to have a society without any substantive consensus on moral and religious values. The only consensus or tacit agreement required of the members of a liberal society is that they agree to disagree; in other words, to tolerate the personal world-views and value systems of each other so long as they do not infringe upon each others' freedom to follow out their own way of life. Put in another way, in a liberal society personal freedom is taken to be the supreme value so that any attempt to impose a particular consensus of any kind is excluded. This is the difference between a liberal society and a confessional society of the traditional kind, that is, a society based upon a determinate set of moral and religious and political values to which all the members of the society are supposed to give assent and allegiance. The liberal act of faith is that it is possible to have a society without such a set of values (save for the value of personal freedom) and without such a consensus.

John Stuart Mill was one of the first to adumbrate in his famous essay, *On Liberty*, the ideal of a liberal society of this kind. What Mill envisaged was what I have called a polycentric view of culture - a society composed of a number of quite distinctive sub-cultures each with its own distinctive set of values. For Mill indeed the liberal society is of its very essence pluricultural. It is not only

that it tolerates a wide diversity of "experiments in living', **it positively welcomes and encourages such diversity as a condition of social and cultural vitality.**

If a culturally polycentric society is not merely a philosophical possibility but, as I have been assuming, a desirable and practicable ideal in Australia, it is clear that we are faced with a fundamental rethinking of what it is to be an "Australian" and what the "Australian way of life" might mean. So far in Australia multiculturalism has been seen merely as the toleration of ethnic variety within the framework of the dominant culture which is white, English-speaking, with British legal and political institutions. But the multiculturalism that is being argued for here is obviously of a much more radical kind. Indeed, it is so different from our present position that we find it difficult to conceive of the structures and institutions that would be needed in such a society. We are in somewhat the same situation as Marxists are regarding the "classless society": all we know about it is that things will be very different!

Religious Sub-cultures in a Multicultural Society

If we are to understand multiculturalism in this way there are a number of implications for religiously based sub-cultural groups within our society. First, such groups must recognise in some way, and in some sense value what I have called polycentrism as against the Durkheimian view that a society must have a unitary set of values and framework of meaning and a unitary cultural consensus. Put in a negative way, if any of the constituent sub-cultures were to say in effect: we can only live in our social relationships with other groups if the values of our particular sub-culture are adopted as the basis of a unitary cultural consensus – then, by definition, a multicultural society is not possible. As I remarked before, this raises difficulties for certain religiously based sub-cultures, that is, sub-cultures where the social consensus is based upon a religious consensus and where citizenship and religious membership are seen as identical. What religious sub-cultures have to accept is that they cannot carry their theocratic or confessional views about the relationship between religion and society over into the wider society. (This is, of course, at the heart of the Salman Rushdie affair). Traditional Aboriginal groups find no difficulty in admitting that other groups may have their own "Dreamings" and their own religious Laws. Again, some forms of traditional Hinduism admit, on theological grounds, the possibility of different "ways" and of different religio-cultural forms. Certain historical forms of Judaism and Christianity and Islam, however, have insisted that their

religio-ethical-social values are universal and absolute and exclusive and that the best that other groups with other competing world-views and values can expect is grudging toleration. Most contemporary forms of Christianity, on the other hand, willingly and positively recognise a degree of relativity both with respect to the various bodies within Christianity and also with respect to the other world-religions. While most Christians would in some sense, still hold that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus est*, their concept of what the *ecclesia* is has undergone a radical transformation from a unitary one to what one might call a multicultural or polycentric one. In one sense, indeed, the ecumenical movement within Christianity and between Christianity and other religions, is a form of ecclesial multiculturalism motivated not just by what is seen to be the unfortunate and regrettable fact of religious divisions, but also by an awareness that there may be some positive kind of Divine meaning in the fact of religious pluralism both within and without Christianity.

Multiculturalism also requires that the constituent sub-groups recognise some form of what I called before the "liberal ideal". As we saw before, the liberal act of faith is that it is possible to have a society without a consensus upon a determinate set of moral and religious and political values to which all the members of society give assent and allegiance. In a liberal society personal freedom is taken to be the supreme value so that any attempt to impose a particular consensus is excluded. In the West the Christian Churches have gradually come to terms with the liberal society, although there are some attempts by some Christian groups from time to time to impose their religio-ethical values as the social consensus for all, particularly in the area of reproductive and family issues. (The role of the Catholic Church and fundamentalist churches in the present debate about abortion in the USA is a case in point). Ultra-orthodox forms of Judaism and Islam, however, totally reject the separation between religion and the State and the idea that the State and the law can be religiously agnostic. For them the liberal ideal and the multicultural society can, at best, only be tolerated *faute de mieux*.

Australian Aboriginal Culture and Multiculturalism

I turn now, more specifically, to the issue I raised before, namely the existence of the profoundly religious culture of the Australian Aborigines within the wider Australian society.

It is an irony of ironies that since its very inception Australia has been a "multi-cultural" society in the sense that the geographic region we call

"Australia" has accommodated two totally different cultural traditions within it: Australian Aboriginal culture on the one hand and English-European culture on the other hand. Of course the latter has always pretended that it is the dominant culture and that the Australian Aboriginal world-view and way of life is a culture only in the courtesy sense. The legal fiction used to justify the white settlers' appropriation of the Aborigines' land - that the territories of the Aboriginal peoples were *terra nullius*, land that was not really settled or occupied or "owned" - also expressed white colonialists' view of Aboriginal culture. For the first white settlers it was laughable to claim that the Australian Aborigines had any kind of real civilisation - a set of values that added up to a culture. Thus it was taken for granted that the Aborigines would inevitably become assimilated into the majority and superior white culture or at best form a minority sub-group with its own customs within Australian society. It was never seriously contemplated that the existence of Aboriginal culture alongside white European culture constituted a multicultural situation. We had to wait for the post World War II migration of Central Europeans, people from the Baltic States, Greeks, Italians, Turks, and later on Vietnamese and Cambodians, before we were willing to recognise the possibility of Australia being a multicultural society and the claim that the Australian Aborigines might be a distinctive part of that cultural variety. It took the arrival of the "new settlers" to force us to recognise the claims of the original inhabitants!

The realisation that there is what Colin Tatz (1982: Pt 1) calls an "Aboriginal civilisation" in the full and authentic sense is no doubt still half-hearted and, as the recent sad history of the Aboriginal land rights movement shows, does not go very deep in the white Australian community; but there is now at least some awareness of the richness of Aboriginal culture and that we white Europeans share this continent with a people who have a totally different world-view and way of life. (It should be remarked that we ought strenuously to avoid any kind of romanticism regarding Aboriginal culture and recognise that it is subject to the same law which applies to all cultures; namely, that any cultural system buys certain plusses or advantages at the cost of certain minusses or disadvantages.)

Paradoxically, the fundamental cultural dualism that has characterised Australian society since its beginning two centuries ago is expressed most vividly in the land rights discussion. As Kenneth Maddock has argued, the assumption behind the land rights legislation is that traditional Aboriginal views of land ownership can be expressed in the terms and categories of

British-Australian property law. But, as Maddock puts it, it is difficult to find correspondences between the complex and subtle Aboriginal view of **land "ownership"**, reflecting as it does the whole Aboriginal religious world-view, and white Australian secularist ideas of land tenure. Maddock states:

> Land rights are necessarily expressed in English legal language. Whether Aboriginal or not we need to guard against being misled by the accidental semblance of a legal term to an English word used by Aborigines. The danger is best avoided by going behind the English word to the native word. The problem then arises of the meanings given to Aboriginal words - *gidgan* (owners), for example, or *djungkayi* (managers) - in an English-law context. Should both have rights or one only? If both have rights, should they be equal? And we are back to the difficulty of translating between utterly different cultures. It is one thing to ask an Aborigine what the difference is between a *gidgan* and a *djunkayi*. It is quite another to ask whether a *gidgan* is a full proprietor (or ought to be treated as one) under Australian law. (Maddock 1983:52-53)

What Maddock refers to as "the difficulty of translating between utterly different cultures" extends in fact to almost all aspects of Aboriginal culture and white Australian culture. As I have said before, what we call "Australia" comprises two distinct and separate civilisations and world-views, one basically religious and the other basically secular, and the fundamental question, which underlies the land rights issue and every other Aboriginal/white issue, is how the two can co-exist in a meaningful way? In other words, how should the majority white culture treat the minority Aboriginal culture and what should be the relation between the two? What we are talking about here is not Aboriginal rights to land, or to recompense for past injustice, or to special treatment as a depressed socio-economic group, but the right of a whole culture or civilisation to exist and develop with as much autonomy as possible. There are four possibilities here:

(a)   White Australians can use their numbers to oppress, or at least deny recognition to, Aboriginal culture as an autonomous and irreducible entity. After all, there are 15,000,000 of us and a mere 150,000 of them.

(b)   White Australians can practise a policy of benevolent assimilation towards Aborigines, regretfully recognising the inevitability of the

eventual absorption of Aborigines into white Australian culture and smoothing the way for that transition.

(c)   White Australian culture can allow and encourage Aboriginal culture (and Aboriginal culture can agree) to exist and flourish within a genuinely multicultural situation.

(d)   White Australian culture can grant full autonomy and self-determination and "sovereignty" to Aboriginal culture so that there would be a distinct and separate Aboriginal "nation" within Australia.

The first two possibilities have already been unsuccessfully tried, and the fourth possibility, given the realities of Aboriginal social organisation which currently precludes any idea of a pan-Australian "nation" (as well as larger political realities) is not really feasible.   We are left then with the third possibility, and in my view it is in that general context that the debate over land rights, and all other Aboriginal/white Australian issues, can be carried on most fruitfully. As I have said, the fundamental issue is that Australia comprises two irreducibly distinct cultures, and the fundamental question is what relation should obtain between the minority religiously based Aboriginal culture and the dominant white secularist Australian culture? In other words, how can the two live together in a multicultural situation?

This multicultural situation that exists between Aboriginal and white Australians in fact helps us to place the larger multicultural issue, the existence of other European and Asian sub-cultures within Australia, in perspective. If we could work out what cultural polycentrism or multiculturalism involves with regard to the Australian Aborigines then we would have a new and deeper view of what it means with regard to other sub-cultures. I said before that it was ironic that it took the advent of the "new Australians" to force us to recognise the claims of the original Australians, but in a sense it is only if we solve the Aboriginal "question" that we will be able to solve the larger question of whether a genuinely multicultural Australia is possible.

If a multicultural society is not to be merely a cheek-by-jowl agglomeration of diverse individual sub-cultures, there must be mediating institutions (legal, social, political, and so forth) within it helping the constituent cultures of a multicultural society to understand each other and providing means for translating between them. As we saw in the case of the Aboriginal land rights movement, it is easy to "translate" Aboriginal concepts of land tenure into

Australian legal categories if we assume that the latter have some kind of priority and superiority. Ours is the dominant culture and it is we who consent to recognise Aboriginal rights in terms of our legal system. Aborigines must make their claims to land in terms of our legal categories, not in terms of theirs. But if we recognise that Aboriginal views of the land differ profoundly from our views (based largely on British property law) and cannot be directly or fully expressed in our legal idiom, then the problem of inter-cultural translation becomes more problematic. The same is true of all the basic concepts of Aboriginal religion and indeed, as I have already remarked, of the whole of Aboriginal culture.

Nevertheless, although we are faced here with two different culture systems, we can provide some kind of translation between them. We are not, so to speak, reduced to simply juxtaposing the one over against the other without any possibility of comparison and mutual understanding. An extraordinarily significant attempt at this kind of cultural translation is provided by the Australian Law Reform Commission's Report, *The Recognition of Aboriginal Customary Laws* (1986). Again, in education there have been attempts at cultural translation that are genuinely multicultural in spirit.[2]

In the religious sphere there has been enormous development in knowledge of the richness of Aboriginal religions and spiritualities, but at the practical level a genuine Christian and Aboriginal "ecumenism" has scarcely begun.[3]

In a recent and very significant essay Robert Bos has shown how open to such ecumnism certain forms of Aboriginal religion are. Speaking of the Yolngu people in Arnhem Land, Bos has this to say:

> The Dreaming is expressed in symbolic thought; in symbols which are multivocal and open-ended, and therefore open to different interpretations and adjustment. What Aboriginal culture does is to embrace "an ideology of non-change", but from an anthropological point of view this is not at all the same thing as regarding the Dreaming as unchanged, unchanging and unchangeable.
>
> Aboriginal people protect and uphold unquestioned and final authority of the Dreaming as the foundation of social existence and the basis for personal meaning structures. Even though the Dreaming is regarded as having been laid down once and for all by the supernatural beings, this in no way precludes an ability to come to grips with new experienced realities. These new aspects of the empirically experienced world may, if considered to be significant,

come to be regarded as emanating from the supernatural beings in the Dreaming.

The Yolngu have sought to come to grips with the challenges presented by social change. The Dreaming, far from losing its authoritativeness in the new situation, has had its content considerably expanded in order to continue to provide a relevant ideological framework for social practice, and new ritual forms to impress these on the members of society.

Far from preventing social change as some anthropologists have supposed, the Dreaming may in fact facilitate and enable it by maintaining a body of agreed symbols, as long as these symbols themselves are sufficiently open-ended to be subject to re-interpretation. The Yolngu may well have discovered what we have yet to discover; how to maintain social cohesion and prevent disintegration in a world which is rapidly changing. (Bos 1988:435-436)

Religious Ethics and Bioethics

I would like now to return to a point I made at the very beginning of this essay about bioethics and the possibility of some kind of community consensus in this area. There have been a number of attempts to show that such a consensus is possible among the major world religions about, for example, the sanctity of human life, respect due to embryonic and foetal life, the use of reproductive technology, the prolongation and termination of human life and so on. However, it is very difficult to detach particular ethical conclusions from the whole religious context which gives them meaning, and in any case we can learn more from recognising the differences between the various religio-ethical views rather than forcing them into some kind of artificial and syncretic agreement.[4]

To take a concrete example, the standard Jewish and Islamic views on the development of the human embryo and foetus are that is does not become a human person with rights until some time after conception. Abortion before that time is morally undesirable but it is not equivalent to homicide and it may be allowed in certain circumstances. In the mainstream Jewish view an unborn human foetus is not legally considered to have a soul (*nefesh*) or to be a person until it has been born. Morally, however, the fertilised egg is considered to be "mere fluid" up to forty days after conception. Some rabbinic authorities allow abortion up until this stage, but others allow abortion only when the mother's life is in danger. (Rosner 1986:142-156) Again, some rabbinic authorities oppose any kind of experimentation on human embryos save in exceptional

circumstances (Jakobovits 1988). Others, however, argue that a "fertilised egg not in the womb, but in an environment - the test tube in which it can never attain viability - does not have humanhood and may be discarded or used for the advancement of scientific knowledge" (Rosner 1986:118).

In the mainstream Muslim view the human embryo and foetus undergo a series of transformations or "creations", the last phase being "ensoulment" which occurs after 120 days (three months) after conception. It then becomes a person in a moral and legal sense and has rights. After that time it may not be aborted save in exceptional circumstances. (Rahman 1987:112-113)

Up until 120 days, however, there does not appear to be any reason for opposing embryo experimentation.   On the other hand, some Buddhist authorities take up a more conservative position which sees the human embryo right from its beginning as human life which must be protected. As a Buddhist scholar has recently put it, Buddhism discourages the taking of life of any living being:

> because, according to Buddha, for every single living being, the dearest is one's own life. All beings fear pain, harm, and suffering, and seek comfort and fearlessness. This is one of the most basic teachings which can be applied to all biomedical issues. ... Taking someone's life means you accept the idea that someone else can take your life against your will. Since this is not so, in Buddhism, taking life is not regarded as correct action.   Buddhism uses the terms "skilful" and "unskilful" (*kusala* and *akusala*) instead of "right" and "wrong".
>
> In Buddhism "wrong" action is called unskilful action, because it always brings suffering and pain as its result.   Buddhist ethics does not discuss morals for morality's sake.   We cannot trace any ontological concept of sin or evil in Buddhist ethics. Thus, unskilful actions are discouraged because they result in suffering. (Taniguchi 1987:76)

This last remark is important since it reminds us that Buddhist ethics does not even share the same basic ethical concepts as Western ethics. Again, neither Buddhism nor the other religiously based ethical systems we have been discussing, have any kind of "natural law" tradition, that is the idea of an autonomous, rationally based, ethics valid for both Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

There are severe difficulties in comparing various religio-ethical systems and translating between them. At the same time, the knowledge that there are

these radical differences between religious traditions has its own value in that it injects a note of caution and relativism into the debate. If two major world religions hold that the human foetus is not a human person in the full sense until at least forty days, or even 120 days, after conception, conservative "pro-life" Christians ought perhaps be less absolute about their position that the human embryo is a person right from the moment of conception. Vice versa, if mainstream Christianity accepts that the acknowledgment that human life is sacred does not entail keeping terminally ill people alive at all costs, then Jewish and Muslim theologians ought perhaps to be less dogmatic and absolute about their position that nothing can be done to shorten a person's life. The standard Jewish position is that "only the Creator, who bestows the gift of life, may relieve man of that life, even when it becomes a burden rather than a blessing" (Rosner 1986:204). Again, according to Islamic law, God is the author of life "therefore a person does not "own" his or her life and hence cannot terminate it" (Rahman 1987:126). One might very well, of course, adopt that position for specifically **religious** reasons, but it is another thing to see it as a universal ethical prescription addressed to Jews and non-Jews, Muslims and non-Muslims, believers and non-believers alike. If one is a Jew or a Muslim one's concept of God as author of life will play a major part in determining what one may do or not do with one's life. However, if one is a Hindu or a Buddhist, or an Australian Aborigine, where that concept of God simply does not apply, one's attitude towards the voluntary termination of one's life may be quite different, especially at the popular level.

These differences are brought out vividly in a recent discussion about the care of gravely impaired newborn children in Israel, India and Japan.[5] In Israel, an observer reports, basic religious beliefs such as "to save one life is as if one saves the whole world", and "life for a second is worth life for 120 years", preclude physicians from withholding treatment from newborns. The popular religious atmosphere, this observer reports, "precludes physicians from discontinuing respiration therapy in infants with chronic lung disease: no plugs can be pulled in this society". (Eidelman 1986:19)

In Indian society, on the other hand, Hindu religious beliefs about fate on the one hand and rebirth on the other hand have a direct effect on the treatment of disabled newborns. Thus,

> quality-of-life considerations play a significant role in decision-making concerning the imperilled or very ill newborn. ...
> The definition of quality of life is left to the individual physician and

> the family. If one dies, it is destined. If a child or infant, especially
> one who is impaired dies, it is felt that this is predetermined and we as
> mortals cannot do anything about it. Quality of life rather than
> security of life is a consideration because of a strong belief in rebirth.
> (Siva Subramanian 1986:21)

In Japan the care of imperilled newborns is influenced by social attitudes based on Buddhist and Confucian teaching. As it has been put: "The Japanese mentality, nurtured in the Confucian ethos to respect law, order, authority and social status, did not change even after the rapid modernisation of Japanese society with its emphasis on science and technology". As a result Japanese physicians play a largely paternalistic role. "Physicians ask if parents or families, in the shocking aftermath of (the birth of) a defective child, understand what faces them, and if they can give truly informed consent for treating or withholding treatment". Again, the value of the child is seen in relationship to the family or the larger community and not independently or autonomously.

> Autonomy, an important bioethical principle in the Western social
> context, is out of keeping with the Japanese cultural tradition. Our
> culture, nurtured in Buddhist and Confucian teaching, has developed
> the idea of suppressing the egoistic self. To be autonomous and
> independent is sometimes regarded as egocentric. Thus in Japan each
> human being is dependent on others in the family, and the social,
> economic and political communities. (Kimura 1986:22-23)

Even if, as I have argued, there is little hope of reaching some kind of consensus on the central bioethical issues, the existence of different religio-ethical traditions in our multicultural society can enrich the debate by bringing new perspectives into play and by acting as a relativising influence (indeed by questioning the terms of the debate). At the practical level, of course, it is important that the ethical views of various groups in our multicultural society regarding reproduction, the termination of life, death and dying, the meaning of illness and suffering, the difference between male and female disease, and so on, be recognised so that appropriate medical care may be given. This is especially important in the case of Australian Aborigines who often use traditional, religiously based medicine and Western medicine in tandem.[6] But it also applies to other ethnic groups particularly with regard to psychiatric medicine where religious views of the "soul" are directly relevant (see Kleinman 1980), and also to matters such as major organ transplants. For example, given Buddhists' belief that the soul takes three days to leave the body, interference

with the body of a clinically dead person to obtain a major organ for transplanting would seem to be precluded for them.

So far, the bioethical debate in Australia has been dominated largely by Christians on the one hand and secular humanists on the other and we have heard very little from other religious groups in our midst such as Australian Aborigines, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. It is high time that we took their views seriously into account.[7]

Conclusion

These ruminations on religion and ethics in a multicultural society have ranged over very different topics and issues. But the connection between them is that multiculturalism - the recognition that Australian society is made up out of diverse sub-cultures and that there are very great social benefits in promoting what I have called cultural polycentrism and variety - has profound implications. Almost all the major sub-cultures in Australia are increasingly likely to be, in the future, religiously based, and their ethical views (if we can use the word "ethical" in its widest sense) derive from a religious framework. In one sense, as the Salman Rushdie affair shows, that makes the multicultural venture much more difficult, but in another sense it provides a potent source of cultural enrichment and also of ecumenical creativity and development in the religious sphere in Australia.

Notes

1   The following two sections have been adapted from my essay "Education and Cultural Diversity", (1986:1-3).

2   See Stephen Harris (1984). The highly original work of Dr Helen Watson in this field also deserves notice. See Helen Watson (1989).

3   However, the work of Fr. Martin Wilson through his journal *Nelen Yebu*, and of Robert Bos and the group at Nungalinya College deserves special attention.

4   See Robert M. Veatch's anthology (1989), especially Section 3, "Medical Ethical Theories Outside the Anglo-American West".

5   *Hastings Centre Report*, August 1986, "Caring for Newborns: Three World Views", pp.18-23.

6   See, for example, Catherine Berndt (1983:121-38).

7   We have to remember that what counts as a bioethical issue is something that is also culturally shaped. For further reading about bioethical discussion in other religious traditions see Kimura (1990). On Thai Buddhist attitudes to medical genetics see pp.155-6. On Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim views on embryonic life see Bowker (1986:164-179). See also the series, Health/Medicine and the Faith Tradition, edited by Martin E. Marty and Kenneth L. Vaux.

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foibles and Foibles
- Comparative Ethics and
Multiculturalism in Australia:

A Critique of the Smolicz Model of Multiculturalism

Tom Atherton, and Nigel and Genia Hart

The authors intend the following discussion to prove as multifaceted in its comments as the interests of the person to whom this book is dedicated have been multi-layered, and as the ethnic and ethical components of this country are multicultural and themselves multi-faceted and multi-layered. It is with the intention of separating out some of those layers, of casting fresh light onto some of those facets, that this contribution adopts a constructively critical style which, its authors hope, is consonant with that of Vic Hayes himself.

Thus our exploratory questions about ethical issues are those of practitioners of ethical education, our comments about multiculturalism those of supporters who want to see the issues we raise debated, the better to defend the concept against its critics.

Above all, our comments are those of people whose concerns are themselves ethical and whose origins are, in the broadest sense, impeccably ethnic. As Vic himself has done, we write with concern for multiculturalism as our prime focus.

* * *

This chapter examines one version of the concept of multiculturalism which has emerged in Australia. To facilitate this examination, we will use some insights of contemporary ethics and sociology.

Ethicists (Frankenna 1964, Strawson 1974, Kohlberg *et al.* 1990), especially neo-Kantian ethicists, make three or four distinctions which serve to separate one type of ethics from another. They are mostly agreed that the central concept in Ethics is "right/wrong". The technical term for identifying this group

is deontologists. Other ethicists agree that the central concept in Ethics is "good/bad". Like Aristotle, they are best described as aretologists. While acknowledging this plurality within the discipline, we find the deontological approach more useful for our analysis.

Deontologists, or more simply, rule-theorists, argue that rules exist for determining right or wrong behaviour. Theorists like Kohlberg suggest that such rules can be hierarchically arranged or schematised. Such rules range from the fairly specific, concrete and culturally relative on the one hand, to fairly abstract, universal rules (or principles) on the other hand. The terms used to identify these different types of "ethical" rules vary widely.

We have adopted the following terminology:

At an individual level, we talk of "moral" values or *mannerisms*. Ethical rules at the small group/sub-cultural level are *mores*. These mores govern group behaviour. They are fairly specific, but they are not shared universally, nor are they binding upon societal behaviour.

At a higher level of generality would be *rules* which include "honesty", "tolerance", and above all, "respect for private property". The legal system in Australia particularly enforces rules such as the latter. They are binding on all citizens within a pluralistic country like Australia, for Anglo-Celts and other ethnic groups alike.

At the highest level of generality and abstraction, rules for legitimating the "right" are frequently called *principles*. State "morality" yields precedence to "Ethics", the territory of alleged universal or transcendental ethical principles.

The problem with "Ethics" is that even the most abstract and allegedly ethical principles, like "justice", are not one and indivisible. There exist a plurality of "justice/ethical" rules, each of them incompatible with the other.

Rawlsian "justice-as-fairness" for instance, subscribes to a contractarian, distributive concept of justice (Rawls 1971). This concept or rule informs social welfare planning and is presumably the guiding principle behind the welfare state. In contrast, "justice-as-entitlement" (Nozick 1983) suggests that each is entitled to what s/he inherits or earns, and no other has a right to it. This rule informs capitalism in its least inhibited forms. The Marxist view of justice is different again (Buchanan 1982).

Both rules and ethical principles can be perceived as competing in the market place of ideas and practices in multicultural Australia. Sometimes power or pressure groups favour one, sometimes the other. Neither enjoys overall

supremacy. It may even seem that "might is right" (as Thrasymachus tried to persuade Socrates in Plato's *Republic*).

Mannerisms, mores, morality and principles can each be usefully paired with four terms which we will use to describe group behaviour in multicultural Australia.

Individuals have foibles. These highly idiosyncratic mannerisms govern personal behaviour within the primary group.

At a higher level of generality, mores govern the behaviour of historic-ethnic groups. This chapter treats, without disrespect, the obligation to "speak the mother tongue" at home, which Smolicz (1979) calls a "core value", as midway between a foible and a ffoible. Moral rules are double-ff foibles since they are definitive of the group which applies them.

Moral rules like "honesty", "respect for individuality" and "tolerance" are the cement which keep Australia together. Together with ethical principles like "justice", they are binding on all Australian citizens in multicultural Australia. We call the moral rules capital-F Foibles and ethical principles capital-F Fables. Smolicz calls these "overarching values".

This chapter will suggest that these moral and ethical rules (capital-F Foibles and Fables) are no more than Anglo-Celtic double-ff foibles elevated by rhetoric into the multicultural centre of Australian life.

Our conclusion is that, as a model for Australian multiculturalism, the Smolicz approach needs radical reconfiguration. We offer some preliminary thoughts about this process.

* * *

To this point we have introduced two equivalent four-term arrays (mannerisms-mores-rules-principles; foibles-ffoibles-Foibles-Fables). We now elaborate upon and exemplify the second set of terms.

In ordinary language, were an individual item of behaviour unusually idiosyncratic or eccentric, we might label it a mannerism (refusing to talk to telephone-answering machines), a superstition (putting one's left shoe on first), a foible ("and one for the pot"), or some other equally dismissive label.

Of course, my foible might seem to you a rank superstition. Your reaction probably depends on your view of the prophylactic properties of *allium sativum* (garlic), and the reported persistence of vampires in my immediate vicinity. But we may assume well-mannered (or younger, or female) members

of our primary group would generally restrain their comments about my foible in the interests of interpersonal harmony.

Should all primary-group members share my view of garlic, it would progress from being an individual foible to becoming a group ffoible. Thereafter, our family affection for *allium sativum* may or may not attract adverse public comment (of the sort now happily outlawed by various antidiscrimination legislations) from outside the family circle.

Should the society as a whole choose to privilege garlic in its non-culinary applications, this belief/practice/complex could be elevated to Foible (societal rule) status. *Allium sativum* could even be promoted, as a universal/suprasocietal prophylactic principle, to Fable status.[1] That is, it could be instanced as an atemporal, transcendental truth which explains all manner of otherwise mysterious things.

We obviously take this example seriously enough at an intersubjective level to commit it to paper, possibly regardless of how our audience will react. Had we kept it to ourselves individually or within the authorial subgroup, no damage would have been done to our credibility. For in our society, it tends to be the case that a private ffoible is no liability.

However, we are well aware that our anticipated readership is heterogeneous in composition. Multiple memberships of other groups throughout the society are probably common. By making public our ffoible, therefore, do we run the risk of personal ridicule, professional scorn, systematic exclusion from the company of nongarlic consumers, systemic sanctions, and so on? Our subgroup might accord garlic, as the guiding principle of our authorial efforts, Fable-ranking. Nevertheless, and for all we know, society as a whole might well act on the (un)articulated belief that it would be "feeble to accept such foibles". For in our society, it tends to be the case that a public ffoible can be laughable.

To this point, the discussion has been conducted in general terms. The issues aired have been as stunningly obvious in their way as the smell of garlic on someone else's breath. They may be dismissed as eccentricities with which "the system" can, on the whole, cope quite comfortably.

After all, isn't "respect for individuality" a tenet of Australian behaviour, even if not phrased thus? We let people "do their own thing" in this country; we say, "the battler's as good as the boss" (to adopt a gender-inclusive equivalent of "Jack's as good as ...") and so on. Other utterances will come to mind, in themselves reflecting the mores and moral orientation of our society.

In other words, our foible could well occupy an area of tolerance or indifference. Only if we forced our opinions about garlic on people would we constitute a threat to consensus. Only then might rights (or entitlements) be at risk. At some point, however, we could predict such a ffoible would stop being a joke and become a nuisance. At that point, the system would need to legitimate itself to its majority stakeholders, and act against perceivedly disruptive minority interests.

Like graffiti, our ffoible could eventually make it to being deemed a "menace". Once picked up by the media, a "moral panic" might ensue (Hebdige 1979). An obvious instance of such a panic is the "back-to-basics/ forward-to-fundamentals" of the periodic literacy-in-schools debate. The proponents of the panic try (no doubt in good faith) to promote their ffoible to Foible status in order to access resources, achieve power, change the status quo and so forth.

The corollary is that any opinions about the misdirection of the debate may get demoted to ffoible status and disregarded thereafter. For in our society, it tends to be the case that contradictory ffoibles can't coexist; the first one to become a Foible drives out the other.

* * *

Before our readers reach or pass that point of tolerance/intolerance, we move into multicultural mode. It is not entirely accidental, as our readers may have guessed, that we used garlic as the foible-focus for the preceding discussion.

Multiculturalism, as practised in this country, often sits well with Myk Mykyta's minimalist definition:

> multiculturalism is when people know something of other cultures and
> respect each other's cultures, (1991)

that is, it is intersubjective but not, we suspect, meant to be trans-subjective. On this view, multiculturalism is about substructural enrichment of the dominant culture. It is a way of showing that we can all value and gain from what's on offer at the Dimitria (Greek Cultural Festival) or the Dozynki (Polish Harvest Home Festival).

Thus multiculturalism often focuses on distinctive behaviours of the migrant communities in our midst. Those community behaviours include

cultural manifestations which can be commodified ("how quaint") and thus made acceptable for mainstream consumption.   Prime instances are dancing and cooking.   People will pay to watch and eat.   Garlic, however, is not about to become a staple element in mainstream cooking.

This "fact" was forcibly drawn to the attention of one author by a pre-school parent.   The latter obviously felt empowered by virtue of her cultural positioning to comment disparagingly about "garlic breath".   Eating garlic is, for that individual at least, an unacceptable facet of multiculturalism.

By comparison with the 50s reaction to brown bread and salami sandwiches and the like, which made the lives of many migrant school children miserable, this is pretty small cheese indeed (fetta, for preference).   Nevertheless, such remarks should serve to remind us that, in our society, the price of multiculturalism is eternally making sure one's ffoibles don't clash with mainstream Foibles.

Where such clashes occur, small-f values and virtues often don't cut much ice against the preferences/prejudices incorporated in the big-F rules. Where they do cut ice, one imagines it is because some interest group has gained sufficient leverage in the corridors of power to ensure a change of attitude.

* * *

One is often urged to sound utterly loyal to a cause, in this case, multiculturalism.   Expressing no reservations can be counterproductive, however.   The most valuable critique may come from committed insiders rather than from outsiders.   Their distance offsets their detachment; by contrast, our involvement enhances our interest in getting things thought through.   By acknowledging our difficulties with certain aspects of the multicultural concept, we hope to resolve such difficulties as exist (whether they exist subjectively, intersubjectively, or trans-subjectively).

We feel this is a key distinction: are our difficulties foibles (because of individual authorial values), or are they ffoibles (due to the virtues of the secondary groups to which we belong, for example, academia or mainstream Australia), or again, could they be Foibles (the result of disjunction between society's rules and the multicultural concept)?

To address these questions concretely, we draw upon the work of J.J. Smolicz, a prolific Adelaide academic proponent of a multicultural model.   His scientific background has no doubt influenced his methodology as much as have

his ethnic origins and Australian experiences. Thus in one article he favours an integrative (holistic), scientific approach rather than an analytical stance (Smolicz 1974). We shall make apparent the significance of this orientation for his multicultural model at a later stage.

Smolicz (1989) has consistently articulated a values-approach. Thus his model distinguishes core values from overarching values. His usage justifies our switch from the values-virtue-rules-principles terminology to foibles-ffoibles-Foible-Fable. We suggest his term ("values") should not be confused with foibles (as we have labelled individual values in a moral sense). Smoliczian "core values" approximate to ffoibles (or group virtues) which are individually maintained/activated in order to attain genuinely bilingual (for example, Polish/Australian) status. We locate his "overarching values" somewhere between Foibles (societal rules) and Fables (the suprasocietal principles underpinning those rules).

When Mykyta (1991) maintains:

> it is impossible for (cultural) practices not to become modified through the exchange (of what is not specified) and the process of sharing and learning,

he immediately modifies that assertion by noting that such modifications occur "in the original environment". By implication, such modifications do not occur in subsequent environments. He asserts that:

> the trouble with emigre cultures is that they are always fossilised, they stop at the time of leaving the country ...

We would wish to suggest Mykyta's observation operates like any generalisation. It is true in some senses: a culture of origin will have greater resources than its various emigre groups can muster. Conversely, it may experience less pressure such as to share with and learn from (for example) guest workers, than is experienced by those guest workers, themselves emigres, or its own emigres.

This observation is true of some features of emigre cultures. Such features will vary, probably depending on the degrees of congruence between the cultures of origin and reception. It is less true in other senses. Obviously an emigre culture does change, though not necessarily in accord with changes occurring in its culture of origin. Finally, of some cultures it is perhaps more true than of others.

* * *

Let's begin by unpacking the notion of core values which are an essential part of the Smolicz model. That model itself seems to have remained static since the end of the 70s (Smolicz 1989). In summary, groups are defined by certain values which are indispensable elements of their culture. These may be language, religion, an emphasis on the family, a sense of group-continuity and so on.

Appropriately, Smolicz calls these core values. Thus you may drink vodka, eat borscht, belong to a folklore ensemble and so on. If, like many fourth and fifth generation Chicago Poles, you don't speak the language, however, you're only activating residual components of your cultural tradition. In that case, so far as Smolicz is concerned, you are ascriptively but not truly Polish ("all are not Polish who polka").

Sara Paretsky's Chicago PI Pole, V.I. Warshawski, is a fictional illustration of this phenomenon. V.I. is the orphaned detective offspring of a Polish policeman father and an Italian opera-singing mother, both first generation immigrants. She does speak some Italian but can't stand her Polish relatives. Her loyalty to her Warshawski cousin, which motivates her involvement in *Deadlock*[2], is indifferently Italian and Polish in its origins. Paretsky's protagonist is not intent on preserving her ethnic heritage: V.I.'s leanings are all mainstream American.

In V.I.'s case, the weakening of the core values of her potential ethnic communities has produced someone who tans well in summer, hums opera in the car while on assignment, and is extremely tenacious. Nevertheless, V.I. Warshawski is considerably less an obvious "ethnic" than, say, native Americans like Joe Leaphorn in Tony Hillerman's *A Thief of Time* or Billy Blackhorse Singer in Roger Zelazny's *Eye of Cat*.

One alternative to core-weakening leads to what become the "fossilised" or residual behaviours of a V.I. Warshawski. Thus contemporary Greeks resident in Greece no longer tend to dance the Zorba. In Australia, however, dancing remains an observable behaviour which identifies one as "truly" Greek. At least, it seems to do so in the minds of the main postwar immigration.

Such behaviour helps draw the lines between "us" and "them" so essential for maintaining the enclave culture of many European immigrants to this country. In its time, it has simultaneously served two purposes. The first was as a necessary assertion against the perceived (and reported) hostility to

"New Australians" of the Australian community of the 50s. Unintentionally, no doubt, such foibles also reinforced the hostility felt in the culture of reception.

Such enclave culture in Australia is not uniquely "European". Ponder for a moment upon the phenomenon of Adelaide's satellite city of Elizabeth: from the late 50s on, many English migrants settled in this set of northern suburbs. There they perpetuated a colonial version of Coronation Street and other subcultural/regional variants. Less isolated in some senses than Greeks or Poles because of TV's ongoing use of English programming, the availability of English-language media gave the broader society an illusion of cultural continuity.

In fact, English migrants still suffered culture shock - not to mention outright hostility - in everyday life in this country. Such anti-English feeling in this country made a mockery of the Australian cultural cringe of the time.

Admittedly, "Poms" spoke the language (or versions of it) with greater fluency on arrival than most "reffos" or "Balts" could manage. Even so, it should not be imagined - as much multicultural writing seems to imagine - that Australian culture is monolithically Anglo-Celtic. Indeed, English culture itself is, to coin a phrase, pretty "polylithic".

Scouse (as heard in *The Liver Birds* and *Bread*) only became acceptable with the Beatles and Cilla Black in the mid 60s. Prior to that time, RP (received pronunciation) or Standard English was the norm in a class- (and accent-) conscious culture. In *Porterhouse Blue*,[3] Tom Sharpe captures the English obsession with positioning people within the fine gradations of the class structure, in part because of the security of "knowing one's place".

For the southern English, civilisation still reportedly stops at any point ten miles to their immediate north. Mitford's U/non-U categorisation of "Englishspeak" (1956) has recently (1980) been revisited[4]; such distinctions can still help to place people in a complex hierarchy. England is as divided geographically, culturally, and socially as Australia - only perhaps more obviously.

Similarly, when Smolicz talks of Polish core values, we suspect he really means the values of the educated urban elite of Warsaw and Krakow. Industrial Gdansk in the north, rural Kielce in the south, workers and peasants from the provinces are not likely to be seen by a Warsaw/Krakow intellectual as paradigmatically Polish. Poland's history is an untidy tale of political havoc, for example, Partition (1792-1918). Such havoc was wreaked by Poland's

Francophile and Francophone gentry/landlord class upon its Polish-speaking peasantry, whose ffoibles the upper class despised.

Such internal divisions are neither recent nor unique. The two groupings had little in common two centuries ago; unsurprisingly, the Poles of the immediate post-war immigration themselves created two community centres - Dom Polski in Adelaide proper, Dom Copernicus in the western suburbs, divided on class lines. The earlier immigrants, products of pre-war Pilsudskian Poland, have had little sympathy for the emigrant Poles of the post-Solidarnosc period, brought up as they were in the post-war Poland of Gomulka, Gierek and so on. (Bethell 1969)

Smolicz has maintained contact with contemporary Polish high/intellectual culture. He has held academic posts in Australia, England and Poland. The Polishness of a Smolicz is dynamic and developmental, with constant updating. By contrast, many emigres have not seen Poland since 1940. The Polishness of these aged ethnics is preservationist. Transmission of their memories to their children has been a high priority. Such memories have been necessarily limited by class, gender and other considerations such as age and education at departure, and subsequent opportunities and experience.

Other limitations are now becoming apparent. The phenomenon of the ethnic aged, for instance, is increasingly well documented in this country. Many have been abandoned by their children, are unable to communicate with their Anglophone grandchildren and are often functionally illiterate in their own language and in English. We suggest this phenomenon is a by-product of the preservationist tendency of the emigre cultures and a cause of the residualisation of much of those cultures.

In part, the plight of this first generation reflects the mobility of our society, both upward and outward. The second generation denies its roots. It semi-assimilates with the Australian community with which it competes for employment and prosperity. In part, this situation may reflect the irrelevance of a first generation anchored in a past with which it has bored its offspring for four or five decades. Once the first, parental generation of the postwar immigration passes (and anyone who reached adulthood in prewar Europe is now a septuagenarian), all that can remain of what Mykyta calls their "fossilised culture" will be what Smolicz calls "kitchen culture".

These are cruelly elitist but correct descriptors, in our view: NESB (non-English speaking background) Australians may be fluent in talking of what

to wear, where to go and the trivia of everyday teatime chat. In other words, kitchen culture is efficient in its own setting, but that setting is restricted.

All the same, we agree with Mykyta that all too often they are not (indeed cannot be) involved in the current dynamics of their culture of origin. We agree with Smolicz[5] that all too often they may lack the language and conceptual frameworks to explore the philosophical and political concerns typical of "high" culture. Crucially, moral and ethical dimensions unique to their cultures of origin may be diminished over time. Their foibles and ffoibles are thin materially, rather than morally residual.

When one's culture is restricted to reworking past and increasingly peripheral concerns, what are one's chances of renegotiating the moral and ethical concerns which are seen as "core" to one's culture? When one's code is restricted both by class and culture, what are one's chances of sustaining intensive debate about the kind of moral and ethical concerns with which this chapter is concerned?

To pose those questions in strictly multicultural terms: should the third and fourth generations decide to reactivate what's left of their heritage, what of that heritage will then be left for them to reactivate? The outcome may well be an Australian equivalent of V.I. Warshawski, a non-Polish-speaking Pole. In Smoliczian terms, however, whatever V.I. may be, one suspects he would not consider her a Pole.

Solutions to this problem have varied. One has been Saturday School, where children attend classes organised by their communities outside the normal schooling system. Another has been the push for Community Languages in the State's mainstream schools. Unfortunately, Education Department logistics seem to dictate that children of, for example, Greek background in a catchment area of say, predominantly Italian children may become semi-trilingual (English, some kitchen Greek, some Italian) rather than genuinely bilingual (English and Greek to the same oral and written standard, in both their "kitchen" and "high" culture versions).[6]

This is a resource-problem: the effect is equivalent, however, to any assimilationist attempt to deny such children the chance to become bilingual.

Even where resources are not an issue, elitism still occurs. Italian children from the Mezzogiorno can suffer an equivalent fate. At home they speak a local dialect; at school, they learn Piedmontese Italian as the standard for their homeland.[7] The net effect is to discredit their dialect and alienate them from their regional roots. It's hard to see much difference between not letting a

European child speak its community language, and not letting that child speak its own version of the community language in question.

There are thus contradictory forces at work on this "ethnic" side of the multicultural equation.

* * *

We now turn to the other (Anglo) side of the multicultural equation. Smolicz (1989) suggests Australia is defined by certain values which are indispensable elements of the national culture. These "overarching" values are common ground on which all individual groups must agree. Such agreement could prevent the kind of weakening (or "fragmentation") at a societal level which Smolicz perceives at the level of the individual cultures.

Smolicz cites (*op. cit.*) with approval the Fitzgerald Report insofar as it recommends, "Immigrants will be required to respect the institutions and principles which are basic to Australian society ... Reciprocally, Australia will be committed to facilitating the equal participation of immigrants in society." These basic "institutions and principles" (rules in this chapter's terminology) include:

- parliamentary democracy
- the rule of law
- equality before the law
- equality of women
- universal education
- four freedoms - of speech, press, religion and of the individual.

For these to be "overarching" values clearly implies that they take priority over (override) core values. At the same time, for Smolicz (and Fitzgerald) they underpin the arena(s) within which those core values can be exercised. To restate this chapter's scenario, just as individual foibles (values) are subject to the group ffoibles (virtues), so ffoibles are seen by Smolicz as properly subject to Foibles (rules).

It is clear, by the way, that many of Smolicz' overarching values are offered as procedural rules. We would suggest they are really mores (ffoibles) in the sense used in this chapter. Law (not to be confused with justice) is a way of arbitrating disputes over, for example, rights; equality before the law is a means,

like universal education, whereby equal opportunity (though not necessarily equal or even just outcomes) is demonstrably made available to all people.

Similarly, the "freedoms" listed by Fitzgerald are procedural rubrics which cover arrangements to facilitate the delivery of certain rights. In any event, the assorted freedoms are constrained by various legal mechanisms.

Let's take the case of freedom of religion. This allows people of one religious persuasion to practise their faith without undue let or hindrance from other faiths. This freedom is a limited right. Granting the equivalent freedom to other faiths may run directly counter to the original intention of such freedoms.

Specifically, overarching values establish ways to do certain (public) things. They also imply there is a public price to be paid for doing them "wrongly". Not wearing one's bicycle helmet, for example, attracts a fine. Sikhs, for instance, are exempted from this proviso (Foible) on religious grounds (ffoible), an exemption which presumably doesn't offend any other faith on purely religious grounds.[8]

At the same time, overarching values (purported Foibles) leave as matters of no public concern (adiaphora) ways to do other (private) things (if indeed one wants to do them). Thus worshippers of X may privately pray for the demise of Y-worshippers, but not in public. Nor can they help their deity in his/her efforts to put their prayers into practice.[9]

We suggest Smolicz assumes foibles can be harmonised with ffoibles (and with one's primary group, for example, the family): providing there are no noises and no bruises, it's no-one else's business. It becomes other people's business when for example, the police have to intervene to protect public order or private property. At that point Foibles (rules) become involved.

This traditional area of State non-intervention is regularly under attack from both the Right (the Festival of Light's obsession with what people do and watch in their bedrooms) and the Left (domestic violence, child abuse). Depending on one's stance, one may deplore pornography or violence, or even both, we assume; crusaders mostly seem to require that they prioritise one or the other as someone else's foible to be overcome.

In either case, these are matters of power and dependency: who decides for whom, and on what bases? We maintain both the myth of consensus and also the consensual myth of hegemonic societies[10] through the adoption of overarching values: such Foibles offer procedures to defuse conflict.

Smolicz' assertion is that public behaviour (ffoibles) should be governed by Foibles which are common to all cultures in Australia. His belief apparently

is that commonality makes them culture-neutral in their impact. Parliamentary democracy, for instance, approaches bi-partisan or Fable status in his scheme of things: it's above and beyond debate, as a Good Thing in Itself[11]. Providing a particular cultural group gives its imprimatur to parliamentary democracy, on this reading, it should be allowed to go its hardest in its other areas of interest (so long as they don't conflict with parliamentary democracy).

Unfortunately, parliamentary democracy is extremely culture-specific. It's specifically the product of liberal bourgeois Western societies. Despite the so-called "end of history" (the demise of the "communist menace" in its cold war guise), it is still not a globally-favoured option. Despite its Smoliczian status, therefore, parliamentary democracy has not achieved true Fablehood - it's only a Foible (a national rule) at best.

Certainly many communities in this country do not come from a parliamentary democratic background. Pilsudskian Poland would be one case in point. Other instances could be adduced to show that the so-called "overarching values" (purported Foibles) of the Smolicz model are in fact merely overpromoted Anglo- "core" values (ffoibles) writ large.

More seriously, Smolicz offers no way to manage a clash between these Anglo-ffoibles (his supposed overarching values) such as freedom of religion, the equality of women, and non-Anglo ffoibles (core values) such as Islamic theocracy or the subordination of women in patriarchal societies like our own. The latter example begs the question of whether Fitzgerald (and Smolicz) understand equality of women in the same way as Greer and Arena, for instance. Continuing to beg that (probably unanswerable) question, let's instead examine the conceptual impasse.

Some ffoibles can be accommodated at no great cost to society. Out of sight, nude bathing at Maslin's Beach is now largely out of mind (unless and until the media make an issue of it again). In effect, it has lost its Foible status for Anglos. As society has adopted a generally more relaxed attitude to states of seaside undress, nude bathing has lost its moral import. One can imagine it might seriously offend the (non-Anglo) ffoibles of groups which retain strict attitudes to such self-exposure.

Such ffoibles can be accommodated at individual cost. In other instances that individual cost may be deemed too high by the host culture.

The Iranian *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie for *The Satanic Verses* aroused considerable ire in many circles. Irrespective of the literary merits (if

any) of the book and the powers of anticipation (if any) of its author, the issues as presented in the media seem fairly clearcut.

On the one (overarching) hand, freedom of speech (a Western Foible) is said to be at stake: if a member of one group can't write what s/he wants about certain other groups because they might take offence, then the next thing is that we'll have no blonde jokes (foibles).

On the other (core) hand, the dignity of Islam (an Iranian Foible) is at stake: if one can't defend the honour of one's Prophet because the society in which one lives is Christian or post-Christian by official religious persuasion (ffoible) and secular by propensity (foible), next thing you know we'll have ... (anyone willing to incur a fatwa all their own can feel free to fill in this space).

A common secular view[12] is that an injustice has occurred: the Rushdie right to live by the pen has now become his right to die because of it. The theocratic view is that an obligation has been incurred: the insult to Islam has to be redressed.

The Rushdie foible (writing what he wants to write) clashes with an Iranian Foible (against blasphemy; from a Western perspective, a ffoible) which in turn contravenes a Western Foible (authorial freedom of speech; to Iranians, a ffoible), itself subject to contestation within, for example, England.

It would be Eurocentric in the extreme to suggest that our Foible should take precedence over their Foible in any universal sense: clearly "freedom of speech" and "freedom of religion" are specific to Anglo-Celtic Australia. As suggested, they are really overpromoted Anglo-ffoibles. How would Smolicz reconcile such an issue in the multicultural context?

Lest we take the Rushdie case too lightly, let's remember that Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* provoked equivalent emotions, though not parallel threats, in the religious sphere in the West. Significant protests occurred in both Australia and America.

In the secular sphere, the use of gender-inclusive language has met with significant (if generally suppressed) resistance. Again, the MacKinnon - Dworkin stance on pornography[13] as a violation of the rights of U.S. women has been seen by its opponents as a thin end of the censorship wedge.

Clearly, there are points of incommensurability in each exchange. As one might expect, people are not talking from the same perspective - Western liberals, Islamic fundamentalists; permissive secularists, oppressive censors; the gender divide. One could extend the axes of conflict to include black v white

(the use of the bouncer by West Indies fast bowlers in Test cricket), unborn v living (abortion), young v old (almost anything).

In each case, one group (Rushdie or Scorsese supporters, pornographers or simply those against censorship) are asserting individual rights against those of the group (religious believers, women, or simply those in favour of censorship). Crucially, we would not want to link in any sense the pro- and anti-censorship factions with other people who happen in this instance to be on their side; it is conceivable that the parties to these debates could reconfigure themselves along quite different lines on other issues such as women against proponents of patriarchal fundamentalism.

The point is that there are two sides to every issue. Neither side will admit their mote is bigger than anyone else's beam (better, yes, but not bigger). To rephrase the words of an old saying:

Yes, we have no foibles, we have no foibles today...

Alternatively, we all reckon the Fable (God) is on our side, and that all the foibles are on your side. The Smolicz model does not appear to recognise that its over-arching values are no more than over-promoted Eurocentric ffoibles.

What kind of multiculturalism is possible under this kind of dispensation? One possibility is that strong cores (theocracy) will need to be so diluted that they are effectively residualised; another possibility is that community cultures will be so "de-cored" (like apples) that all that remains of them is a fossilised shell (the peel). Exceptions will be cores like language which apparently are not contentious in the Anglo-Celtic scheme of things.

In either case, community cultures may achieve mutual equality among themselves. We suggest they will not attain co-equality with Australia's Anglo-Celtic culture so long as proponents of multiculturalism like Smolicz use such devices as unacknowledged Anglo core values to provide a framework within which they wish to legitimate multiculturalism in this country.

Our feeling is that, as a model for Australian multiculturalism, such approaches need radical rethinking in order to reach a genuine bipartisan point of departure. We offer some preliminary thoughts about this process as a fitting tribute to someone whose ongoing interest in multiculturalism will no doubt help to foster such developments.

Notes

1   As Huxley (1950) in *Brave New World*, London: Chatto & Windus (originally published in 1932), elevated Soma, so J. Allegro and G. Wasson have instanced mushroom worship as a source of both Christian and pagan religious inspiration.

2   Paretsky, S. (1984), *Deadlock*, the first in a series of feminist hardboiled PI novels.

3   Sharpe, T. (1974). Sharpe's comments on English core values mostly centre around the unsuspecting anti-hero of the novel, the College servitor, who knows his place in the scheme of things.

4   Mitford (1980), originally published 1956, and Buckle (originally published 1978).

5   A view expressed in his writings, seminars and so on.   The "kitchen-culture" idea is not original with him; it runs counter to the defence of the non-elitist (that is, working class, black) culture of the last two decades.

6   Personal communication with friends whose offspring enjoy mixed ethnic origins (usually not of "high" culture level) but don't enjoy the way in which conformity with that "high" culture level in their own language(s) or, worse, in third languages, is sought.

7   Personal communications.

8   Several letters to the Editor in the Adelaide *Advertiser* centred during the second half of 1991 on the exemption granted to this SA community from the recent enactment of legislation to generally compel the wearing, by bike riders, of compulsory headgear.

9   Marcuse (1965) made much of the notion of "Repressive Tolerance" in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*.

10   The *locus classicus* for this concept is, of course, Gramsci (1971).

11   The phrase is from that quintessentially English piece of humorous "history", *1066 and All That*.   George Mikes (1946, 1975) demonstrates that non-Anglos can achieve competence in that ultimate Anglo core value, humour.

12   A recent instance is Stephen Spender's article "Hoist by His own Petard" in *The Spectator*, 267/8523, 16 November 1991, signalled on the cover by the question, "Did Rushdie ask for it?"

13   For example, MacKinnon (1989), chapter 11. Digby Anderson in "Porn before Lager" (subtitled "Freedom of Speech is Highly Selective" in *The Spectator*, *(op. cit.)* enunciates the typically conservative view of that august organ.)

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Myth, Mass Media and Multiculturalism

Garry Trompf

Advertising

I am sitting, half-transfixed, half-bemused, as the "Ideological Octopus" extends its tentacles (Lewis 1991). Within two minutes I am drawn into the televisual multi-cultural mix of Australia - a little Japanese man standing starkly besuited on an un-Japanese-like plateau finishes extolling a Mitsubishi limousine with the 'orientally polite' request to "please consider"; a stern, spirit-like figure then speaks indistinguishable German behind images of precision automotive engineering to clinch the unexpected point that Mobil, too, is committed to perfect standards; then we behold a Chinese family jiggling Lipton Tea on Hong Kong harbour - one bout of advertisements just before it was plumed New Guinea dancers 'doing the jiggling' - and capping off our culture-catching catena a richly Italian, Pavarotti-like serenade is necessarily sung over Australian pasta.

On and on, on and off, the images of *consumerismo* rise and recede before my eyes - I experience 'picnolepsy' as Paul Virilio calls it, that "jerky interruptedness, that convulsive state of being pressed to absorb one image complex after another" (Virilio and Lotringer 1983:34). The seductive black man transports Tia Maria through the shutters to refresh the white woman in the heat of some unplaced African or West Indian location, where blacks are meant to be; a young hero gives up his motorcycle and keeps his blue Denim Jeans so that, at some mysterious Macassan-like wharf, he can persuade a local power-broker to crane him across to his woman on board ship; when a young hero leaves the screen and his woman for a share of Twisties in the stalls he eludes that proverbial bunch of Arab marauders - and of course one will expect to hear the very best of Hollywood, BBC or South African personalities giving credence to this or that breakfast cereal, this or that gum, spread or delicacy. By the time one has occasionally confused the advertisements with the travelogues or adventure films between them - and been surprised about it - a realisation slowly dawns that cultures can sell, that multi-culture is a medium of the market, and that multi-culturalism is in part a media 'product'.

Roland Barthes writes of all this as myth - he presumably means modern myth (to be deconstructed by post-moderns).   For to Barthes, myth is "a language-robbery"; to create a myth one steals from language its chance of naturalness and undistortedness, in fact, myths "empty reality".   Speech which is quite readily placed in a semantic world of more straightforward significations and   recognisable   political   locations   becomes   falsely   naturalised   and de-politicised.   The bourgeois is highly adept at transforming plain forms into ambiguous signs, and mirroring the world by re-significations which serve its own ends. (Barthes 1972:126, 142, 154-55)   These ends are, from a more distinctly economic viewpoint, 'capitalist'.   Western audiences and readers are consumers; but, since they are already converts to what the Evangelists of the Cargo preach to them, if one audaciously reads a little bit extra into the Barthesian   text,   these   ends   are   simultaneously   psycho-religious.   The bourgeoisie is not able to imagine *l'Autre* - those peoples, let alone individuals, alien to its own culture - and thus it domesticates or reconciles the outer world within the only *Ordo* it knows to be safe, by countless projections of stereotypes and familiarising images.   In our Australian advertisements above all - not just on television, but on billboards and in 'magazine culture' - the images of other cultures   mix   the   invocation,   sometimes   celebration,   of   the   exotic   with marketability.   And such a mix marks for Barthes the mythic mode, since

> Myths are nothing but this ceaseless, untiring solicitation, this
> insidious   and   inflexible   demand   that   all   men   [sic]   recognise
> themselves in this [or that] image, eternal yet bearing [today's] date ...
> nothing but a Usage,

for those who, by inertia perhaps, by habit, by sheer exhaustion, are ready to be used (*ibid.*:170).

Myths?   Surely here we are far from a conventional understanding of them as a narrative structure with some kind of plot or some 'fable of the fabulous'?[1]   A single image, certainly, or more precisely one picturing of a cultural form which beckons us to decipher its less overt significations, may **allude** to the mythic.   The Cheesepops are consumed by the young woman in a nightie sitting up in her bed, and either a Tarzan of the jungle or an Errol Flynn-like   Arabian   sheikh   will   make   an   appearance,   and   so   romantic myth-heroes of modern movies - Sontag's "heroism of vision" - will be appropriated by **fleeting** allusion (Sontag 1978:85ff.).   Such manoeuvres go to show that elsewhere or at another time operations of mass communication have

already created new, or recast old, narrative structures of a mythic character - in adventure films and travelogues above all - which make possible the epilepsy of allusions in advertisements - indeed make the fitfulness work. That these prolonged visualisations of cultural settings other than our own - stories set in darkest Africa or on some tropical isle - have brought more multi-culture to us, into our living rooms and the "hearth culture" of Australia, at no travel expense or arduousness, is undeniable (Stretton, personal communication 1970, yet see 1987:209-12). But of course it is a currency of foreignness mediated through the lenses of those who believe they know what will make for successful cinema or popular consumption. It is already bastardised cultural reality - a point to which I shall return - and any advertisement's allusive usage of other cultures only renders the hidden bourgeois consumerist 'act of rape' easier to detect. Yet the advertisement itself is the very barest myth - rather depleted of and only suggestive of the discursive, somewhat like Vico's heraldry of an heroic Age[2] - and it is truer to say advertising steals from myth. We are just left sensing "the legend behind the legend", as one billboard for Jockey underpants tells us, as some fellow's pants come down, and it is for us to work out what legend is being designated or used, what item - the underpants or the organ so obviously behind them - is being reckoned legendary.

The constant solicitations of consumerism allude to the mythic mostly without ever pretending to create a myth, because the brief messages and image-making for the marketing of products will be changing as advertisers get new ideas, and besides, the attempted image may fail - even be damned as racist[3] - and might need to be replaced very quickly by another. For this reason Barthes' *Mythologies* do not quite work. Actually a nice foil to his book is *L'Autre par Lui-meme*, (1987) by Jean Baudrillard, a post-modern who is needed here to tout a post-modern, and who leaves the word 'myth' behind for 'obscenity'. It is not just sexual obscenity, however, not just Jockey 'undies' and Berlei 'bras' which are at issue here, but the destruction of personal and theatrical distances. When an "entire universe unfolds unnecessarily on your home screen", we are shown rather than made to think, and everything Cargo evangelists require to be shown is framed in the box and we have no choice but to follow the moving focus.

> Obscenity begins when there is no more spectacle, no more stage, no more theatre, no more illusion, when every-thing becomes immediately transparent, visible, exposed in the raw and inexorable light of information and communication. We no longer partake of the

drama of alienation (of distance), but are in the ecstasy of communication. (Baudrillard 1988:21-22)

There is no sighting of myth's landmarks in this piece of analysis. An object before us under ordinary circumstances has more mythic potentiality, because *au natural* such an object "never quite reveals its secret", but the televised, advertised commodity is blatantly, forcibly "legible", and is made to "manifest even its visible essence - its price". Of course Baudrillard has usefully taken us here to another extreme, presenting matters as if not even allusiveness is possible in the pure "giddiness", the "aleatory, psychotropic fascinations" of immediate visual pleasure (*ibid.*:23,25).[4] Yet in fact there is room for meaning, and when it comes to other cultures, as also to other motifs like sexuality which might not have any direct connection with the goods being sold, mental associations are constantly and deliberately being exploited, so that the mystery, the skills, the contentedness, the pleasant environment of other's worlds, enhance the reasonableness of purchase. The trouble is, indeed, the spectacular and the theatrical are all too easily reappropriable by the media for this same sort of goal. It is imaginable that select features of any culture, any religion, any mythos, any tradition can be mocked up imaginatively as a selling-point, and at this point in time and into the foreseeable future more people have more incentive to use cultures to sell products than to appreciate those cultures for their own sake. (And when they have successfully sold their products, perhaps they will sail or fly off to another cultural setting and use the facilities set up by **their own** culture's producers - a Hilton or a Sheraton - which will basically remove them from the people indigenous to that setting, and once again they will replicate their bourgeois usages at a safe distance.)[5]

In this adjusted light we see that 'evangelists of consumption' desperately need myth as part of their repertory. Advertisers are by no means dealing with a uniformly gullible audience. Most people 'see through' sales pitches and do not expect to respond to them with any air of conviction or act of commitment, any more they would a door-to-door peddler. Advertising therefore always needs reinforcements of **apparent authenticity** to make any headway - appeals to common-sense, pleasant or seductive associations, good humor, or wherever deemed worth trying allusions to fabulous, exotic, historic, 'archetypal' (and thus in a general sense) mythic elements in the mind.[6] We are not treating myth here as mere fable or half-truth, from which "the great world, half shrewdly, half doggedly, manages to escape" through a natural skepticism, at least according to

George Santayana (1906:167), although this is the rather old-fashioned view of mythology to which Barthes, rather curiously, never quite abandons. We are adopting a more updated deferential approach. Why not say it then? Advertising often robs myth as well as language, and - whether one opposes or interlinks myth and reality - it is a set of 'logo-techniques' forever stealing from reality as well.[7]

As for multiculturalism, advertising certainly mediates it - for consumerist ends. That it is important to view salesmanship together with the general projection of a society, even world, of inter-cultural harmony is beyond doubt. The projection, which is capable of being filled out in a hundred-and-one visual images, is utopic (and especially in that sense mythic) in character, and it is a wonder the Australian government, churches and other agencies bent on social harmony, have not done more to set attractive expressions of various cultures side by side, spliced *in seriatim* as a suggestion of a supracultural unity. Purveyors of private enterprise are only too eager to fill the breach, and to make business look better by appropriating a mythic motif to make every corner of the market feel better about itself. That is important precisely because advertisers' images of 'foreign societies' are the most widely disseminated evocations of multi-culture in modern society. Not everyone participates in this or that ethnic festival and for the most part, in Australia, such celebrations are mainly for the members of the particular cultural groups concerned. Not many will seek out special exhibitions rejoicing in human diversity - like the famous photographic panorama *The Family of Man*, which Barthes so vehemently criticised as vacuously pietistic (*op.cit*:100-102). Millions at any one time, however, will be glued to their entertaining 'black boxes' and what they perceive will already be inevitably superficial. Quick allusions to our collective humanity can reach every living room simultaneously - and cheaply.

When superficiality and 'hidden persuasions' are combined, it becomes increasingly difficult to make intelligent discriminations between the genuine and the 'phoney', between flippancy and serious issues (Packard 1981, Pearson and Turner 1966). After hearing greetings in Arabic, Chinese, Serbo-Croatian, Italian and the like, for instance, we are expected to buy 'Versatile Ceramics'. Or, to take another recent Australian television commercial, which exploits the momentous events of contemporary history, Gorbachev and Yeltsin are found to exchange comments about yet "another revolution" - the "Knotty Pine Revolution" in furnishings! The world is flattened out for the product's sake, and commercial advertising is virtually always found to be constituting some

kind of foil - some kind of assault or subterfuge - against the desired "authenticity, responsible directedness and (multi-)cultural attractiveness" from which optimistic defenders of mass media would like to see our generation, including our children, receiving benefit. (Bertolini *et al.* 1976:256)[8]

Advertising, in any case, is highly specialised ideology without need of explicit verbiage to disclose 'cultural capitalism' for what it is. Media masters bombard the hidden values of distinction, as Pierre Bourdieu acutely argues, a thousand prejudgements as to what we should value and thus possess for ourselves. A kind of *goût barbare* pervades, with hardly a sign of public debate, and a swallowing up even of 'cultural profundities' into the shallow sales-pitch. Through the strains of Handel's most famous chorus and passing scenes of the Old World comes the shout "Halleluia! It's here! The free booklet about holidays in Europe!" What is enshrouded with pre-evaluated bourgeois distinction becomes the "choice of necessity", always both pleasurable and right unless we have enough aesthetic and discriminatory sense to rebel, or have learnt to apply an alternative "qualitative analysis".[9]

The News

News reporting is the secondmost consistent purveyor of multi-culture in the mass media. Its manufacturers purport to eschew myth and report fact, of course, but it has long been recognised that newscasting is subject to the most intense prejudices, and we must now ask ourselves about other kinds of distortions, some of which seem to carry mythicising tendencies. After all, is the situation with the mass media not a good deal worse than in 1946, when, with one of her 'unpopular opinions', Dorothy L. Sayers lampooned the press for not being free?

> Every newspaper is shackled by its own set of overlords. (Each) is controlled by ... the interest of advertisers [we have already probed their sphere], ... (and each) determined by the personal spites and political ambitions of its proprietor.[10]

The modern communications industry has become subject to an extraordinary complexity of pressures. Most advertising is now integrated through powerful advertising agencies; these have a remarkable influence over television programming, and they are in turn subjected to varying degrees of pressure from business magnates.[11] Newscasting will inevitably suit their predilections, as it has also the virtual 'monopolists of media' in this country -

Murdoch, Packer, Fairfax, Bond and their like.[12] A point has long been reached in Western society in which we have become "surfeited with information" (Groombridge 1972:129), but this common criticism in fact suits, and now in a sense legitimates, those who prefer events to be projected from "the single point of view" (Miller 1971:63ff.). In newsrooms, what is more, reporters and scriptwriters are cramped by pressures to follow certain routines if they are to achieve what is most demanded from the top (and which soon becomes most desired by themselves): "to catch the greatest number", even capture as entertainment, and thus the more successfully sell either print or programme. (Dwyer *et al.* 1987:60)[13] The "routines of journalism" have to do with packaging stories with catchy 'code-words' and 'style moulds' both designed to maximise interest and known to bring promotion within the media industry. Todd Gitlin (1980:7) describes these as "media frames"; they are

> persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organise discourse, whether verbal or visual.[14]

The distortions which result are well known enough: sensationalism, false emphasis, suppression of context, inaccuracy, plain reversal of facts, random and gratuitous invention, and plain suppression.[15]

How each news item reaches its audience makes for one among a million complicated stories, and there is little point in analysing every single one as a contrivance of untruth when, all in a day's productivity, quick decisions have to be made about giving this article more or less profile here or excising half a dozen allegedly unnecessary or unaccomodatable sentences there. What is of more concern for us here is whether the commoditisation of newsmaking takes on a mythic - or better still mythicising - character. And where, we might also ask, does multiculturalism sit in relation to media frames and the mock-up of marketable information?

Interestingly, myth or myth-making hardly enters into contemporary debates about the promises and limitations of the news media (and perhaps that is salutary, given the recent rehabilitation of myth by the doyens of social and religious studies; Jung, Lévi-Strauss, Eliade, and so on). Most recently, considering what was not disclosed about atrocities during the Gulf War, or what general opinion was engineered and dissidence suppressed, a charge of "propaganda" has been seriously levelled against the American newsmakers.[16] For much longer it has been a common point of criticism that newsbroadcasting

tells us what we want to hear. It is palpably selective for the ethos it prefers to cultivate and hopes is 'out there'. Who in Australia, for instance, learnt how Gorbachev announced to the seceding republics of the USSR late in 1991 that a new unity was only possible in the name of Jesus Christ? Which newspaper commented on the Russian President's additional statement that the Gulf War was a "catastrophe of global proportions"? It did not suit our secularist and pro-American press to highlight such, yet both items happened to be coupled as headlines in Brazil, for a society at once strongly Christian and suspicious of United States dominance in world affairs.[17] The mass media, too, often does not tell us what we would like to hear on the grounds of ethics. Regulations to protect individuals against libel, for example, can be expediently taken aboard by press lords to quash publicity against the interests of powerful clients.[18] Yet for all such bias, slanting, distortions, deliberate omissions and 'concoctions of atmosphere', the term myth has not seemed appropriate and is perhaps best reserved for something more specific about the world of modern communications.

Neo-Marxists prefer ideology to myth when analysing the methods by which the media help set agendas for social and political discourse. The media's "patterned experiencing of the world" takes place in the ideological realm, and "hegemony is the name given to a ruling class's domination through ideology, through the shaping of popular consent" by print and picture.[19] In Todd Gitkin's evocative jargon, a "hegemonic process" reveals itself as a "prime time ideology" when political figures and situations are presented on screen are 'conditioned' though pre-chosen, character types, genres and visual formulae. The producers settle on some 'slant' and try to convey how problems are solved, 'covered' or 'wrapped up' by arrests, the dousing of some chemical spillage, words of relief by a survivor, strong words from political leaders (on the 'right side'), wise comments by a chosen commentator, and so forth (Gitlin 1979:25ff.). On this analysis, myth is too weak a term to capture both the 'mind-set' and 'mind-moulding' which goes into information production. If indeed as much of these do go into the newsmaking process as neo-Marxists contend; the realities of the media industry are such that ideology might be too strong a word for the *mêlée* of consciousness put into the day-by-day construction of pages and programmes. There may be special - usually politically sensitive - instances of ideological manoeuvering (see Mills 1984), but in the ordinary course of events the mass media is more a **reflection** of ownership and editorial interests than the tools of directly imposed views. Tycoons expect certain orientations from their

editors; they are not constantly ringing them to make sure they tow a consistent line and thus cramp their creative decision-making. By the same token reporters are expected to have imbibed a given organisation's ethos and thus apply their skills, inspirationally and energetically, in keeping with it. The paramount concern in the communications industry, what is more, is to sell purported 'truth'. News without the clear impression of veracity will neither be watched nor read.

Here we begin to alight on a sound reason for referring to myth in connection with the news-media, after all. Ideology is too conscious to be translated as mythic, unless perhaps we choose to see its propaganda products as 'myth-making' (the older fashioned sense of myth again). But the presence of **prevailing myth(s)** in or behind Western newsmaking is surely a genuine enough factor in our whole equation. Just as Habermas would have of critical sociology that it asks

> "what lies behind the consensus, presented as fact, that supports the domination of time, and does so with a view to the relations of power surreptitiously incorporated in the symbolic structures of speech and action (Habermas 1973:11-12),

so a critical, complete analysis of the mass media must ask why such media are there at all, and why is it that those who sell their labour to the communications business pipe the same general tune and play the same relatively conformist roles in their competing for scoops, sensation and saleable story. A simple answer appeals to "the structural peculiarities of ... multinational capital" (see Jameson 1981:11); a more complex, penetrating response will show how capitalist competition lends itself to social psychological conditions in which people sincerely believe they are acting in the service of truth (as 'reporting accurately', 'exposing crucial issues', 'conveying a better understanding of the world') when the system in which they operate militates against these ideal possibilities. The prevailing myth is, however, and it is one that advertisers of newsmaking project on the market, that what does appear in tomorrow morning's newspaper or tomorrow evening's television news is the world of ongoing truth - in spite of the fact that a deeper analysis reveals both the many pitfalls of its practice and the hidden imperialism of its very structures. The myth is absolutely necessary for the mass media's existence, otherwise both its operants and consumers will perceive themselves abandoned in a sea of illusion. What legitimates the myth above all is the on-proceeding, by now long-inured tradition of mass media and

the common recognition - through cross-checking between information agencies by the operants (Reuters, Consolidated Press, and so on), and between actual presentations of news by readers and viewers - that enough veracity is being conveyed.   What upholds the myth are the self-justifications of the news-producers and the general trust of the public; their cynicisms are tamed sufficiently to accept the system.[20]

Among intellectuals, mind you, anxieties over the nature and possible effects of modern mass media have long been voiced.   They query the narrowness in the coverage of world affairs (although in Australia the parochialism of the press and the news is much milder than in comparable Anglophone situations - in the United States significantly, and of course South Africa).   Intellectuals have often lamented how watching television wastes the valuable time of the new prosperous workers who ought to be improving their literacy (even if the critics themselves remain susceptible to the box's 'relaxing' powers). (See Gabor 1963:18) And the intelligentsia have long questioned the freedom of the mass media - and not because they have misunderstood the more recent 'complexification' of the communications industry, but because, in hoping for a liberalised dissemination of knowledge, they now feel "terribly gypped", wondering somewhat obsessionally whether the press has ever been free at all.[21] The intellectuals, then, or at least a vanguard of them, have been the "masters of suspicion", who serve - perhaps I should say ought to serve - to disclose the myths we live by and puncture our initial naivety.[22] That has been and should be a task of spiritual scholarship as well, to confirm *maya* or lay bare the demonic.[23] The media industry would be seriously threatened by either a genuine prophetism or too penetrating a critique; in its ethos intellectual and spiritual complacency is to be preferred and criticism transformed into yet another version of 'complaint culture'.[24] (What the media prefer, indeed, is the very opposite to the spirit which has motivated the publishing of Dr. Victor Hayes, to whom this volume is dedicated).

What, now, of the multiculturalist issue?   Multiculturalism is a socio-political ideal voiced in Western countries which has become domesticated by the media. In Australia the newsmakers have made it a kind of "touchstone of political correctness", while those who question an increased ethnic diversity through new immigration policies become the pretext for media reports of 'complaint culture' (Glover 1992:6, see also Blainey 1984, Milne and Shergold 1984). The excitement of any vitriolic interchange on the subject becomes more important than the serious issues of a debate. Special interests and pressures

lying behind the news presentations concerning ethnic pluralism, furthermore remain largely hidden, and the day to-day complexities of inter-ethnic relations and conflict are realities barely exposed (sometimes on the ground that groups, whose activities or troubles might have been reported, or communities as wholes, need protection from projected images of 'racial tension').

Western multiculturalism as political rhetoric and policy has come in for some recent, rather savage criticism for not delivering 'the goods'. In Anglophone contexts, in fact, the building of ethnic enclaves has been more of a common pastime than the interlocking or the building of bridges between families of different national, and especially continental, backgrounds.[25] Australians are by now used to the new ethnic enclaves - of Italian Leichhardt and Arab Punchbowl (Sydney), of Asian Glen Waverley (Melbourne), and so forth - just as they are their old Chinatowns, but they are already sensing that the purported aims or ideals of multiculturalism, as social policy, have not materialised satisfactorily.

Is multiculturalism a "myth" in that case? As government policy and programme, no, for social policies are not instrinsically mythic; yet one might fairly conclude that, for (the small l) liberals who have been projecting a future scenario in which all peoples mix freely and harmoniously (and perhaps eventually blend into a 'new Australian generation' through marriage), multiculturalism is a utopic (*eu-topic*) myth. It is one which is also prospectively embraced by immigrant groups (as the welcome image of a social unity they have only known as disintegrating or never realised in their 'old world'), yet it is one which is not eagerly (or easily) put into practice on and after their arrival. It is also a myth which is rejected (or, more accurately, drastically qualified) as misguided by traditionalist, illiberal advocates of White Australia or an Anglo-Saxon Western world; and also deeply questioned by Aboriginal leaders, who ask what the pretensions of multiculturalism might be if black/white - bi-culturalist issues [26] - have never been settled. But its detractors aside, yes, multiculturalism does carry a mythic character.

The mass media feeds on this element. Advertising alludes to multiculturalism as a 'good association' for selling; newsmakers highlight its rhetorical exponents or opponents, and in both general tenor and the variety of slants upon it they have upheld and mouthed its virtues. On the other-hand, the media has also often belied it and let it down. This deflation consists not just in occasional racist reporting (see Sankaran and Agocs 1991:3ff.), nor even that much in their subscription to the hegemonic processes which bring Anglophone

or Anglo-Celtic - sometimes ostensibly Christian - values to the fore (an understandable development, since Australia media institutions started in a White Australian context, and since the Australian national mythos derives from the British imperial connection, and a development which in turn has given rise to ethnic presses and television time for 'neglected enclaves'). The real undermining consists in the failure of the mass media to relay what is actually happening in the world of ethnic diversity - the real world of Vietnamese and Lebanese gangs, of xenophobic lobbying to prevent the erection of a Buddhist *vihara* in this suburb or a Zoroastrian meeting house in that, of racism against blacks on Queensland buses, of Japanese business imperialism, and so forth - because news-producers, even while being chary of reporting events which might ignite conflict or defamation cases, cannot present a composite or analytical picture of what is happening in any case. Apart from allowing a free hand to a few daring columnists, newsmaking is bound by its protocol to report on other people's brief analyses and diagnoses, and injects information-snippet-and-story after snippet-story into its paragraphs and newsbreaks as if we would be the wiser for a daily wade through disjointedness. This is a glaring reflection of that prevailing myth we have already isolated - the myth that reality is a series of undigested media reports to be made with assiduous speed by 'a smart team' that grabs and sells facts, when both this prevalence and the utopic myth of multiculturalism should be radically reconsidered. What no longer seems possible to disseminate widely and publicly is now desperately needed in the current ethos: prophetical ethical judgement for a start (who will be allowed air-time to roar against our psychic debasement at the hands of the 'time - sorry, media - lords'?), and the reappraisals of scholars (but serious scholarship and the media mix no better than oil or water these days, and who, among all those millions preferring saturation by the media *maya* of the nineties will stop to read or listen?).

Notes

1   For long-term background, Aristotle, *Poetica*, compared with, for example, Welleck, R. and A. Warren, (1963 edn.), *Theory of Literature*, Harmondsworth: Penguin. pp.190-91.

2   Vico, G. (1744), *La Scienza Nuova*, summarising of IV(V), 930, (translated by T.G. Bergin and M.H. Fisch Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968, p.340).

3   A recent set of Australian bill-board advertisements portrayed a Hahn beer being served by a long-necked West African woman and on a man's vastly distended lower lip. Accusations of racism against blacks gave these posters a short life.

4   Compare with Baudrillard's (1968), *Le Systeme des Objets*, Paris: Gallimard, pp.65-67; and note also Marx, K. (1973), *Grundrisse*, translated by M. Nicolaus, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp.225-26.

5   New-fashioned, *avant-garde* tours to avoid being "prostrated ... at the great altar of tourism" notwithstanding. See McKinnon, W. (1991), "Wild New World" in *The Open Road*, NRMA, Aug. p.46, on this new trend. On art and the media more generally, see Lewis, J. (1990), *Art, Culture and Enterprise*, London and New York: Routledge.

6   That is, mind involving more than consciousness, and thus stimulation of the non-conscious (including what have been too narrowly defined as bio-physical processes) through visual and auditory effects of the media. See Bateson, G. (1973), *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind*, St. Albans: Paladin; compared to Jung, C.G. (1968 edn.), *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, translated by R.F.C. Hull, Bollingen Ser. 20, Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press.

7   Historicity (against which myth is more counter- than anti- historical to follow Northrop Frye (1991), *The Double Vision*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p.17) is most vulnerable for presuming high standards of description as to "what actually happened". On logo-technique, see Barthes (1967), *Elements of Semiology*, translated by A. Lavers and C. Smith, New York: Hill and Wang, p.31.

8   The longer term affects of media advertising on personal value systems has never been evaluated.

9   See especially Bourdieu's (1979), *La Distinction: Critique Sociale du Jugement*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, pp.431ff, 433ff; and Lazarsfeld, P.L. (1972), *Qualitative Analysis: Historical and Critical Essays*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, pp.76ff. (but the latter applying ideal bourgeois values without philosophical justification).

10   Sayers, D.L. (1946), "How Free is the Press?" in *Popular Opinions*, London: Victor Gollancz, using Pink M.A. ed. (1954), *Points of View*,

London: Macmillan, pp.20-21; Wilson, H. (1988), "Communication as an Industry", in *Communication and Culture*, edited by G. Kress, Sydney: NSW University Press, pp.55ff.

11   Note especially Barnouw, E. (1975), *Tube of Plenty*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp.44-57, 119-34, 184-91; and Wills, G. (1970), Consumption and Welfare: *Caveat Emptor* to *Caveat Vendor*", in Tillet, A. *et al.* (1970), *Management Thinkers*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp.239ff.

12   For background, see, for example, Edgar, P. (1979), *The Politics of the Press*, Melbourne: Sun Books.

13   See also Postman, N. (1984), *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, London: Heineman, Part 2.

14   See also, Goffman, E. (1974), *Frame Analysis*, New York: Harper and Row, pp.10ff.

15   Sayers' phrases for her own personal experiences with the press, *loc.cit.*:22-25.

16   By Noam Chomsky, no less, (1991), in "Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda" in *Open Magazine Pamphlet Series* 10, Westfield, N.J.; see also his "The New World Order" in *Ser.cit.* 6:13.

17   Especially *Mundo*, Rio de Janeiro, 4. Dec. 1991. p.1.

18   See, for example, Department of Journalism (1991), *Dilemmas in Media Ethics*, Videos, Brisbane: University of Queensland.

19   Gitlin *op.cit.*, p.9, compare with pp.11ff, 254ff, and for background, Gramsci, A. (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith, London: Lawrence and Wishart; Williams, R. (1977), *Marxism and Literature*, London and New York: Oxford University Press, pp.108ff.

20   For sidelight see, Szechko, T. (1985), *Television and Historical Reality*, Paris: UNESCO.

21.   Lazarsfeld, *op.cit.*:128, compared with pp. 127-9 (with my qualifications).

22   For background, Ricoeur, P. (1970), *Freud and Philosophy*, translated by D. Savage, New Haven: Yale University Press, compared with Trompf, G.W. (1990), "Religious Faith and Social Scientific Reductionism" in *Religion and the Social Sciences*, edited by P. Forrest, Proceedings of the Social Sciences Seminar, University of New England, Armidale, 1989, p.82.

23   Bases for a powerful spiritual critique can be found, for example, in Asanga's *Mahayanasangraha* X JJ, etc. (Buddhist and Eastern), and Tillich, P. (1963), *Systematic Theology*, vol.3, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.244, (Judaeo-Christian).

24   That is, reported episodes of challenge beckoning response in the following day's news. On the recent usage of 'complaint culture' in the media, note *Time Australia*, 1992, 7(5):82-7. Academics, of course, can succumb to this syndrome, see as a recent example in Religious Studies, Bailey, G. (1991), "The Discourse of Christianity and the Other" in *Australian Religion Studies Review* 4(2):61ff.

25   For one onslaught, Fukuyama, F. (1991), *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.; and on the recent, stronger tendency to create ethnic enclaves in urban areas, especially in the United States, see the opening gambit of Walker, D. (1992) "Louis Farrakhan and America's 'Nation of Islam'", in *Islands and Enclaves*, edited by G.W. Trompf, New York and New Delhi, chapter 5

26   Thus, Pattel-Gray, A. (1991), "The Great White Flood", Lecture delivered to the 16th Annual Conference of the Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 3-6 Oct., (the basis for the Australian Council of Churches Anti-Racism Package, 1992)

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