# Courses and Curriculum

## Religion at UNE: at Last!!

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For almost three decades the discussions and plans have come and gone, the hopes have risen and fallen, that religion would one day be taught on a full-time basis at the University of New England (Armidale). So it is somewhat curious that in the worldwide depression at the turn of the final decade of the twentieth century, a new position should be carved out of the ever leaner funds available for existing programs, let alone any innovations. But religion is indeed here, and the first steps in a long process of building are under way.

Soon after returning from PhD study, on a Commonwealth Scholarship, at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, Roland Boer was appointed to the newly established Studies in Religion Unit at UNE, which for administrative purposes operates within the Philosophy Department where Prof Peter Forrest is the Head of Department (he also happens to be the Chair of the Board of Studies in Religion).

This year two undergraduate courses are being taught: one on Religious Experience in the first semester, which works to broaden and deepen the more traditional Introduction to the World's Religions courses; the other, in the second semester, addresses the question as to how religion might be studied. While these courses are offered internally in 1992, the big move comes in 1993 when they will be offered externally through UNE's well established Distance Education Centre. Strong encouragement will be given to people interested in postgraduate study, with Studies in Religion entering the MLitt and MA programs, and then somewhat later the PhD program. The final task will be developing a total undergraduate program from first to third year so that students may complete an undergraduate major in Studies in Religion.

With an active campaign to encourage students to study religion at Armidale, there are hopes for a second appointment at some time in the not too distant future.

# Moral and Religious Education in Secondary Schools. The Need for an Independent Program in Moral Education and Some Suggestions for its Implementation.

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Religious Studies is now available as a matriculation subject in all Australian States and in a recent article we discussed some of the philosophical and educational problems confronting teachers in implementing these new religious studies programs (Hobson and Edwards, 1991). It is now timely to consider the place of ethics or moral education programs in secondary schools and their relationship to programs of religion education. We investigate the current situation in three Australian States and point out that this area of the curriculum is presently underemphasised. We argue for a separate program in Ethics in its own right and suggest that while this will have linkages with religious studies courses it should be based on independent moral principles and criteria.

We may begin by pointing out that the major difference in curriculum provision between religious and moral education is that while the religious studies courses available are more adequate and comprehensive than the moral education ones, the former remain optional, whereas in the latter all students in all States are required to undertake some work in moral education. The moral education that is prescribed however generally only exists as sub-units in other programs (e.g. Health, P.E., Religion) and generally lacks sufficient guidelines and depth to achieve worthwhile goals. Given the limited space for subjects in an already overcrowded curriculum our proposal is for an elective subject as with religious studies. However because of its importance we also suggest that a core unit be taken by all students which preferably stands on its own or at least forms a discrete part of a broader curriculum area. Such a unit would contain an introduction to the essential elements of moral education contained in the more extensive elective.

We shall now examine what forms of moral education are presently available in secondary schools in three States: N.S.W., Victoria and Queensland. In N.S.W. the moral education provision forms part of the new Key Learning Area, **Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE)** under the section on Personal Development. A draft for a new syllabus for Years 7-10 has been made available (1991) and the syllabus for Years 11 and 12 was released in 1990 (Board of Studies, NSW, 1990, 1991). The Years 7-10 syllabus is designed to be flexible and while it does mandate ten content areas that need to be covered, individual 'schools may develop and have endorsed alternative courses and programs for the Personal Development aspects of the syllabus' (*ibid.*, 1991, 1).

This is of particular relevance to non-Government schools and is an exception to the general rule of not allowing schools to develop alternative courses where Board determined ones exist (N.S.W. Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, 1989, *Excellence and Equity*, 52).

The introduction to the Years 7-10 draft syllabus makes clear that of the three elements in the program, health is the central one and the underlying goal is 'health enhancing behaviours' (*op. cit.*, p.1). This immediately gives a particular focus to the personal development element which is rather narrow as a rationale for moral education. In spelling out the more specific aims of the personal development part of the syllabus, the key concepts are 'self-esteem and social well-being' (ibid., p.3). Of the ten content strands the only three that have any direct relation to moral education are: Numbers (4) "Interpersonal Relationships", (7) "Personal Awareness", and (8) "Personal Choice". But even in these the major stress is on the child's social, emotional and psychological development rather than moral development per se. Self-awareness and self-esteem and the enhancement of personal decision-making are continually emphasised and there is no doubt that these are all important. However a genuine program in moral education would need to go beyond such notions and introduce students more specifically to issues such as rights and responsibilities, criteria for moral decision-making, ways of resolving moral conflicts, alternative ethical ideals and so forth. Another disquieting aspect of the draft syllabus is the implicit adherence to Values Clarification concepts and methodologies and thus the danger of encouraging relativistic attitudes to morals. The stress is very much on the **process** of decision-making and its implications for the individual with little reference being made to the question of the moral rightness or wrongness of the choice. Indeed the words 'moral' and 'ethical' are hardly ever used in the draft.

The Years 11 and 12 Syllabus continues the same approach but has even less content directly related to personal development or moral education. There is some limited coverage of ethical issues in three other Years 11 and 12 syllabuses, namely *General Studies* (in 'The Society and the Individual' unit), *Society and Culture* and the new *Studies in Religion* course (in the 'Religion and Ethics' option). However in the former two instances the primary emphasis is on legal and social questions and there is very little attempt to address the basic moral principles involved. In the case of the 'Religion and Ethics' option moral issues are only examined from the perspective of a specific religious tradition.

This lack of moral direction in the N.S.W. syllabuses is surprising given the clear set of moral guidelines laid down in the Departmental document, *The Values We Teach* (N.S.W. Minister of Education, 1980, revised 1990). Indeed in the re-issued 1990 version there is a movement away from the more open-ended, pupil-centred approach to developing moral values indicated in the 1988 version to a more conservative approach giving greater stress to religious influences, family values and the need for social responsibility. There seems to be a lack of consultation between the groups responsible for drawing up the two sets of documents (i.e. the syllabuses and the Ministerial Statement). Similarly, the Carrick Report of 1989 makes a number of criticisms of the approach to moral education contained in the **PDHPE** Syllabuses

when it states that 'what must be firmly rejected is any notion that moral education can proceed purely on the basis of reasoning separated from moral content' (*op. cit.*, 168). It also goes on to add that, "schools and education systems should draw from ... [a] basic social morality the common values to be taught to each generation" [ibid.]. It thus seems that there is need for a more coordinated approach to curriculum planning in this area of moral education in N.S.W.

In Victoria as with N.S.W. there is no independent course in ethics; rather moral education exists as part of either studies in religion courses or other curriculum offerings. In Years 11 and 12 ethics and ethical issues are spread across a broad range of courses which include: *Religion and Society*, *Texts and Traditions*, *Contemporary Society*, *Human Development - Home Economics* and *Health Education*. By far the most comprehensive treatment of ethics is to be found in the course, *Religion and Society* in which 'Ethics' is one of the four core units. In fact, this unit is the most substantial offering in ethics in any of the States and represents a good introduction to ethics - although there are still some serious shortcomings if the course is to be an adequate representation of the moral domain. Firstly, although the overview of the unit outlines a broad range of content areas which represent a good ethics program, the unit objectives quickly narrow the focus of attention by allowing students to select just two contemporary issues and consider how they might be resolved. Primary emphasis is given to specifying any assumptions or premises underpinning these issues and defining the steps in the decision-making process in resolving them. Words like 'identify' and 'describe' abound within task descriptions, while 'analyse' and 'evaluate' are less frequent, at least in respect of testing the validity of the assumptions and premises. Thus the unit is largely descriptive rather than evaluative and tends to also reflect aspects of the Values Clarification approach evident in N.S.W. Secondly, the unit fails to distinguish between the religious and the secular moral viewpoints in looking at issues. While religious traditions might have a clear position on 'abortion' and 'dying with dignity' it seems less likely to be so with issues like 'motor cars and driving' and 'prison reform'. In general the relationship between moral and religious perspectives on current issues is not adequately explored and the distinctive features of moral questions not sufficiently highlighted.

Furthermore, while the *Texts and Traditions* course has a worthwhile unit on justice in society and the *Contemporary Society* course a valuable unit on social inequality, both of these courses deal with these ethical issues predominantly from religious and social perspectives respectively. Similarly, in the *Human Development - Home Economics* and the *Health Education* courses, ethical issues are viewed predominantly from human development and health perspectives.

The provision for moral education in Queensland also contains significant shortcomings. The Queensland Department of Education in May 1990 released a draft syllabus of the *Human Relationships Education* (*HRE*) program which covers moral education from Preschool to Year 12. The Department further issued the support kit *Values Through Human Relationships Education* (1990) to help in the development of the *HRE* program. While the above two documents are specifically concerned with moral education they do not stipulate a set syllabus for im-

plementation, but rather indicate a number of important principles for drafting school developed courses with community support backed up by a wide range of examples and curriculum material. This leaves moral education too reliant on the particular commitment and interests that may or may not exist in a given school and community. Like the N.S.W. document *The Values We Teach*, the support kit lists core democratic values or community values which school communities should consider in course development, but unlike the N.S.W. document there is no specific commitment to these values for it asserts that '[these] examples are not offered as prescriptive core values' (:52). It simply suggests the 'process of selecting compatible core values for a particular school community is a most valuable contribution to the identification of the needs and common ground in a very diverse and sometimes divisive area.'(:53). So although the kit recognises the diversity of values existing within a pluralistic society, and recognises the school's role in moral education (:3), it fails to see that promoting a core set of democratic values provides not merely a 'valuable contribution' to a pluralistic society, but as we shall indicate below provides a necessary condition for the very existence of such a pluralistic society.

We may conclude by noting that the programs for moral education in each of the three States studied suffer from a number of serious defects, such as lacking any clear moral identity by being subsumed within other curriculum areas (in N.S.W. and Victoria) or by failing to provide sufficient direction for implementation (in Queensland) and in all cases lacking adequate depth and breadth of content.

We believe there are two basic reasons for the present unsatisfactory state of affairs in the three States and these are unnecessarily inhibiting the growth of effective moral education. These reasons may be summarised as follows:

(1) Fear of Indoctrination: Given that we now live in a multicultural, pluralist society in which there is a wide range of views on moral issues, it is felt by many that the schools have no right to teach any one set of values as preferable to another. Coupled with this fear is the more radical philosophical doubt as to whether we can talk of objective values at all or whether morality is ultimately a matter of subjective opinion. These sorts of concerns have led, particularly in the N.S.W. syllabus, to a reluctance to set down any clear moral guidelines for students.

(2) Uncertainty as to Content: Because morality overlaps with other value areas such as health, social development, psychological well-being, religious beliefs etc. as well as potentially arising in virtually any subject, curriculum planners have found it difficult to decide on just what content should make up a moral education program. This problem has clearly had an influence on the moral education provisions in each of the three States investigated.

However both of these problems can be met and we shall now attempt to show how this can be done drawing particularly on a very useful recent book by Mike Bottery (1990). A fruitful way of responding to the fear of indoctrination is to distinguish different levels at which we can talk of objectivity. Bottery uses the notion in a broad way, attempting to cover all the possible senses in which the word 'objectivity' may be used. The common factor that applies in all cases is the extent of agreement of judgement and degree of authority that can be attributed to a proposition. Bottery distinguishes six levels of objec-

tivity (presented in order of rigour or absoluteness) (*op. cit.* 40-45):
(1) **'Ideal' Objectivity**, which assumes total or certain knowledge;
(2) **'Logical' Objectivity**, which comprises the basic laws of logic;
(3) **'Categorial' Objectivity**, which refers to categories which seem to apply in some form to all human experience, for example mental categories such as motives and intentions, and perceptual categories such as sight and touch;
(4) **'Trans-Social' Objectivity**, this is the level at which moral principles are best conceived to exist. They are trans-social in that they are necessary for any society which desires to achieve stability, happiness, fairness and indeed, survival. Examples would be, treating others as you would wish to be treated yourself, respect for another's property, honesty, helping those in difficulty.
(5) **'Social' Objectivity**, this is the objectivity derived from a group consensus on what counts as real or important. It is more objective than individual opinion but lacks the universality of the trans-social level. The beliefs involved here apply to cultural practices relative to a particular group or society, not to matters that affect the overall health of society.
(6) **'Personal' Objectivity**, at this level we talk about an individual being objective when he or she makes a decision that is not overly distorted by personal bias.

From this analysis Bottery shows clearly which degree of objectivity can be expected of moral judgements, that is, 'trans-social' objectivity. This is very helpful in bringing out that while morality cannot claim to have the degree of objectivity of some areas of human experience, it does have sufficient objectivity to provide a firm basis for the school to base a moral education program upon without being accused of promoting just one person's or group's set of values. By showing the complexity of the concept of objectivity, it enables teachers to adequately respond to the simplistic claims that are commonly made to the effect that one person's or society's values are just as acceptable as those of another.

R. S. Peters provides another version of the argument for teaching a core set of values within moral education programs. He says that 'unless the observance of... (basic moral) duties is the general rule, no society, let alone a democratic one, could hold together for long.' (Peters, 1981) Peters identifies the following important democratic values: freedom, respect for persons, toleration, truth-telling and impartiality (*ibid.*), 37]. Peters' essay brings out the essential link between key moral values and democratic society and provides another perspective on why they can be accepted as trans-social values. (For the full details of Peters' argument see Peters, 1981)

The above arguments thus provide a way of responding to the first of the problems raised, the fear of indoctrination, by showing how we can claim a degree of universality for basic moral values.

With regard to the second problem: doubts about content, Bottery also has a very useful discussion which again involves distinguishing a range of different categories (*op. cit.*. 74-7). Just as it is possible to suggest moral principles at a trans-social level, it is possible to divide such principles into five separate areas of human experience as follows:

(1) **The Personal Area**: This covers moral claims from the point of view of an individual's human existence, key themes being those of freedom, responsibility and meaning. Issues here include respect for one's physical and mental health, prob-

lems of work and leisure, loneliness and shyness.

(2) **The Interpersonal Area**: This covers the standard areas of morality which arise in our interactions with other individuals and includes issues such as fairness and trust, sexual relations and marriage, the rights and needs of the very young and very old.

(3) **The Social Area**: This area brings in the notion that people's moral behaviour is influenced by their membership of social groups and includes such issues as conflicts between personal and social wants, loyalty, problems of minority groups, social problems.

(4) **The Natural Area**: This area of morality has been neglected in the past and includes our responsibility to the natural world, both physical and animal. Key issues here include pollution, ecology, rights of other creatures.

(5) **The Mystical/Religious Area**: This area brings in a new dimension to morality by focussing on such notions as the finiteness of life coupled with its preciousness, the unity of all living things, questions of meaning and purpose. Issues here include reasons for being moral, the problem of evil, people's quests for transcendental meaning.

These five areas give a comprehensive overview of the various elements that go to make up our moral life and enable us to see the possible linkages between the five domains. They also help us to understand the genesis of many moral dilemmas which arise when there are conflicts between principles in two or more of the different areas. Solving such problems involves us in weighing up the importance of the claims of the different areas involved; the claims of the last two realms (Natural, Mystical/Religious) providing important perceptions that are not always appreciated. Another advantage of Bottery's taxonomy of the moral domain is that it enables us to take a wholistic view of the field. This helps show why many moral theories (e.g. those of Aristotle, Kant, Mill, Rawls) fail to gain universal acceptance because they focus on only some aspects of our moral experience rather than its totality.

We now have a clear basis for an answer to both of the problems regarding the teaching of moral education in schools raised earlier (i.e. fear of indoctrination and doubt about content) that seem to have inhibited curriculum planning in N.S.W., Victoria and Queensland. Obviously, further elaboration of the above ideas is needed but enough has been said to show how these problems can be met. We now need to return briefly to the issue raised at the beginning of this paper, namely the proper relationship between moral and religious education programs. The linkage is a complex one in that while both morality and religion have important elements of overlap, they also have their own autonomous rationale and do not necessarily depend one on the other for their conclusions. This is not the place to discuss in any length the precise nature of the relationship and this has been widely discussed elsewhere (e.g. Rossiter (1978), Sealy (1983), Iheoma (1986)). The major point we wish to reiterate is that morality has its own unique content as outlined above in presenting Bottery's five areas of concern and that while the mystical/religious is one of these it is only one of five and is no more fundamental to an understanding of the nature of morality than any of the other four. If anything, we would argue that it is the interpersonal and social realms that are the most fundamental as these are the two that directly raise the effects of our

conduct on other people which we believe is the core of morality.

We may conclude this paper by noting that for the program suggested here to work properly there would need to be a Moral Education Coordinator on the school staff. The role of this coordinator would be similar to that of the Religious Education Coordinator in many non-government schools, to oversee all relevant curriculum offerings in the school and ensure that there is consistency within them and also compatibility between the program and the general life of the school. The latter task is probably more important in this area than in any other aspect of the curriculum for if the moral atmosphere of the school does not support and reinforce what the curriculum is trying to teach in moral education there is little chance of success. As with religious education there is also an urgent need for the introduction of teacher education programs to adequately prepare such Moral Education Coordinators and others to teach in the area of moral education. This is an aspect of teacher preparation that is presently seriously neglected and which tends to rely mainly on short inservice courses. This problem will have to be addressed if the moral education curriculum developments suggested here are to have any chance of success. We hope to have demonstrated that such developments are important and worthwhile and that both philosophically and practically adequate models for the subject exists.

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**Editors' Note:** Members wishing more detailed information on the Victorian syllabus could consult the article by Ray Elliott 'New Courses in Religion Studies for Senior Students' in *ARS REVIEW*, 4, 1 (Autumn 1991) :69-75 and the book reviews in the same issue.

# Book Review

**Set Your Heart On Goodness: Ethics of the world religions (revised edition).**

Arnold D. Hunt, Robert B. Crotty, Marie T. Crotty

Collins Dove, 1991. pp.230 Rrp 12.99
ISBN 0 85924 937 9

The decision to revise and republish this text is timely in the light of the renewed interest in religion studies and ethics - especially within the upper levels of secondary schooling in many Australian States.

The text is partly a response to a need felt by teachers and student alike for a scholarly yet readable resource book which provides an accessible introduction to what can be a daunting area: the ethics of world religions. As far as the formal curriculum of schools is concerned, this resurgence of interest in ethics and religion studies is evidenced, for example, in New South Wales through the definition (1990-91) of 'Personal Development, Health and Physical Education' (Years 7 to 12) as a key learning area with specific reference to moral decision-making, together with a Ministerial Document 'Values We Teach'. In Victoria, it is seen in the development and full implementation in 1991-2 of two distinct two-year studies for senior students - 'Religion and Society' and 'Texts and Traditions' - both of which contain investigations bearing directly on ethics and religious traditions. In Queensland the resurgence of interest in morality and ethics is exemplified in the draft syllabus (1990) 'Human Relationships Education' (Years 7 to 12) and associated support kit 'Values Through Human Relationships'. Similar examples can be adduced in other Australian States.

Given the Hobart Declaration on Schooling (1989) setting out Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia one suspects that these formal curriculum guidelines will continue to gain momentum, pushed along by a growing public interest in, and concern for, morals and ethics in public and pri-

vate life. The sixth of the ten goals for national schools in the declaration specifically states 'To develop in students ... a capacity to exercise judgement in matters of morality, ethics and social justice.'

The revised edition of *Set Your Heart on Goodness* makes the text more accessible to teachers and students alike through the provision of a range of activities throughout the text and through the addition of a concluding section specifically on Activities which provide a possible framework for use by educators of the book as a whole.

(The similarity of the new Activities section with the published Victorian study 'Ethics' - Unit 2 of Religion and Society by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board - is striking, even down to the detail of key concepts, processes and sequence. Victorian educators will feel as though they are on very familiar territory, while others may find the approach a useful introduction to this course for senior students. One wonders whether readers should have been referred specifically to the existence of this course.)

Yet to see this text solely as a reference for secondary education would be a mistake. This reviewer agrees with the Preface to the revised edition when it says 'For those interested in this book simply as a text on the ethics of the world religions the activities can be passed over; the text is self-contained.'

Readers of the first edition will be familiar with the range of ethical approaches within religious traditions which the book covers: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Australian Aboriginal religions. The book succeeds in deftly tracing out major characteristics of each religious ethical 'system'. The chapter on Christianity usefully distinguishes between differing approaches and emphases within ethics by various biblical writings as well as by subsequent Catholic and Protestant traditions. It provides sufficient detail for the student to engage in further study of the primary documents whilst at the same time highlighting the special characteristics of each author/community.

In this revised edition the treatment of each of these religious traditions has been usefully reviewed and extended to include new moral problems and ethical arguments, for example the emergent "environmental ethics" and modern problems in human relationships including gender issues.

Consequently, *Set Your Heart On Goodness* will be of use to teachers and students as a valuable resource for research in the field of values, moral education religious studies and ethics. It is written in a clear and easy style, although one suspects that many secondary students will be lacking sufficient depth of background and motivation to make effective use of it. If the index were able to be extended in any subsequent reprinting this would help to obviate this problem. This difficulty would not be as apparent for tertiary students in religion studies.

One of the issues at the heart of educational debates about religion, beliefs and values in the curriculum is the definition of what constitutes 'religion' and 'ethics'. There are those who argue for ethics as a clear and autonomous field of enquiry and, given the secular legacy of much Australian education, this viewpoint tends to find substantial support in both tertiary and secondary government sectors.

Education sponsored by institutions having a religious affiliation tends to have the opposite problem of finding a rationale and sustainable consensus for encouraging the dispassionate exploration of

both a variety of religious and non-religious approaches in ethics.

The present text intentionally focuses solely on religious ethics in a descriptive manner. It claims not to limit itself to exclusivist, inclusivist or pluralist approaches (p.8) but one is left with the impression that the book as a whole implicitly opts for the third by its structure and method of approach. It avoids making judgements or comparisons between traditions. However, neither does it attempt to define what 'religious ethics' are. It is content to leave this to process-type questions for students to grapple with without offering a range of answers for their consideration (pp.203-7). Instead of saying that teachers would supply examples in this process, it would have been helpful if the text had undertaken this additional service.

The text would also be strengthened if it acknowledged the existence of other non-religious schools of thought which probe the bases for ethical decision-making. There is need for more extended treatments of ethics in a broader sense than that offered by Set Your Heart On Goodness (such as that provided by James Rachel's The Elements of Moral Philosophy, 1986, McGraw-Hill).

This work by Hunt, Crotty & Crotty is, nevertheless, a timely response to the resurgent interest in morals, values and ethics in our society. It goes some distance in filling a gap in much needed resource material and the authors and publishers are to be congratulated on making available this revised and inexpensive edition.

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# Publications in Religion 1990-92

*The details of publication included in this section are those supplied by members. They represent either their own work or work of colleagues members considered worthy of inclusion. It does not pretend to be a bibliography of all works on religion published in the time period. A wider bibliography of Australian religious (mainly Christian) books is printed in Bentley, Peter, 'Tricia Blombery and Philip Hughes 1991 A Yearbook for Australian Churches - 1992. Christian Research Association, Hawthorn.*

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