

Values education for intercultural and interfaith understanding

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Turning and turning in the widening gyre,
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed; and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.
The best lack all conviction, whilst the worst
Are full of passionate intensity. W.B. Yeats

On 18th November 2004 Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan said that 'the fundamental standards of humanity are increasingly being ignored' and that there is an 'absence of justice' in the world. I believe he is right. Imagine a seesaw—it swings up and down on a central pivot. It is hard to hold the seesaw straight—it will tend to swing down on one side or another. I want to suggest that the seesaw can provide us with an image of the difficult situation we face today in terms of values education as well as, just possibly, a way forward. I should say at the outset that I start from a position of pessimism about values education in an interfaith and intercultural world. The challenges are immense and meeting them is not easy.

One side of the seesaw—tolerance and relativism

The Greek philosophers were by no means the first of the world's great thinkers. The Chinese philosophers and the Buddha pre-dated the Greeks (although Confucius lived within 57 years of Plato), the influence of the Persian Zarathustra on both the West and the East has been enormous and Hindu sages have had a profound influence. Nevertheless we owe to the Greeks and particularly to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle the idea of a search for values such as Truth, Justice and Goodness and this search has pre-occupied many people for more than two thousand years. It has traditionally been part of the western legacy. I want to argue that, for many, this search has become a thing of the past and the very idea of the word "values" needs to be re-visited.

Human beings often consider their individual choices to be vital, but they are also in the grip of historical forces which affect their lives. The British empire, for good or ill, left a legacy across the world including round the Pacific Rim and this legacy, whether in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Burma, Singapore, China, the Pacific Islands, the Americas or Australasia still affects us. In the same way in the area of ethics and values the legacy of the past and the forces at work within culture have a great effect on where we are today.

Unless people understand where they have come from and the influences that shape their civilisation and culture they may not be able to understand who they are. If we do not understand our roots, we do not know who we are. Goethe is quoted as saying: 'Anyone who cannot draw on 3000 years of history is living from hand to mouth. It's the only thing that separates us from being a naked ape.'

The influences affecting the countries and cultures of the Pacific Rim are many and various and I do not have the space (nor the expertise) to explore them all. This is an exercise, which we each need to undertake within our own cultures and societies. Nevertheless it may be possible

to give some brief account of the global cultural forces that affect our societies. Western culture—again whether for good or ill—has had the greatest impact on the world because of the power of the media to expose the world community to Western ideas. We see this at work in China where the appetite for Western consumerism has taken hold in the last ten years and traditional Chinese values may be seen to be under threat. The power of brand names and the aspirations of the consumer combine to have an enormous effect on culture. The individual is increasingly seen as being paramount and the cult of the individual and personal freedom is central. A former British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, expressed this when she said: 'There is no such thing as society'—the individual reigns.

Several twentieth century thinkers and events shaped our common culture. At the beginning of the 20th century, Nietzsche's Zarathustra proclaimed 'God is dead' and, within a few years, the carnage of the First World War undermined any idea of absolute values. In art, art denied art with Dadaism subverting traditional ideas. In 1917, Marcel Duchamp painted the Mona Lisa with a moustache and the Berlin Dadaists, Raoul Hausman and Kurt Schwitters made art from refuse. Then came the Great Depression which had a devastating effect on the hopes that were beginning to rekindle after the War and this was followed by the Second World War which had a much greater effect on the Pacific Rim than had the First.

In the West, the nineteen sixties was an era of great change—protests against the injustice of the Vietnam war, the introduction of contraception and of relatively freely available abortion, enabled women to take charge of their reproduction whilst increased wealth and greater travel all undermined the old certainties. Attendance at churches declined and new ways of looking at ethics such as situation ethics and the political impact of liberation theology undermined the old certainties. Coupled with this was the arrival of post-modernism which was particularly linked to the French student riots of 1968 and the subversion of traditional reading of texts. The idea of any single reading of any text increasingly came to be rejected and all was held to depend on the reader's individual response to the text. No one text was given priority and the works of Shakespeare, the Bible, The Qu'ran and the Boston telephone directory were considered to be on the same level (indeed the students in the English department at Harvard demanded that the Boston telephone directory should be placed on the reading list with the works of Shakespeare on the basis that no text was of any more value than any other).

There is no one thing that post-modernism is. Postmodernism resists description. However there are some features of it that have had a tremendous effect on global culture including:

1. The denial of any absolute truth.
2. The idea that claims to absolute truth are an exercise in power which subvert the feminine and the indigenous by, for instance, the power of Western ideas subverting local cultures.
3. The importance of sexuality and gender and the recognition that much of world history has been written from a male perspective.
4. The denial of any meta-narrative.
5. The denial of any neutral reading of any text.

It is a mistake to associate all forms of post-modernism with relativism; nevertheless relativism is certainly a feature of some forms of post-modernism. Every perspective needs to be accepted and tolerated. *Relativism combined with tolerance have become new gods.* Young people are taught to be tolerant of different views, to value alternative perspectives and alternative opinions. They are asked their opinion about a whole range of matters and everyone is meant to

respect their opinion. In a multi-cultural world tolerance seems to be a very good thing, but I want to argue that it carries with it considerable dangers which I will explore later on.

So we have a western world which no longer believes in its own traditional values. The words are maintained but they no longer stand for anything. The meaning of the words have been eaten away and undermined by the post-modern tide and whilst slogans such as 'freedom', 'democracy' and 'justice' are proclaimed, there is little content to these:

- In the name of freedom, democracy has often been subverted by the U.S. and increasingly in Russia.
- In the name of justice, the world protests against Palestinian suicide bombers whilst too often remaining silent regarding the non-implementation of U.N. resolutions on the state of Israel—partly because of the importance of influential lobbying groups in the United States.
- In the name of freedom and justice the West—particularly the United States and the European Union—insist on free trade whilst at the same time radically subverting free trade by means of subsidies that prevent poor countries exporting many of their goods,
- Even the Kyoto protocol has not been signed because it is not in the self-interest of a small group of countries—including Australia—in spite of the clear threat that climate change provides to islands in the Pacific and to lower lying countries such as Bangladesh.

The idea of the West being accountable to any system of values, even their own, has increasingly been undermined. "Western values" are, I would argue, increasingly to be seen as being more closely associated with consumerism, the power of the successful (which means wealthy), the power of multi-nationals, individualism and self-interest than with genuine ideas of justice, truth or goodness. The idea of tolerance is subversive of a search for values and underneath the thinking of many Western academics and politicians is a post-modernism which denies any search for truth.

The glue that held western society together—traditionally family values, shared religion, shared moral ideas and shared nationalist assumptions—has increasingly been undermined. Individualism has combined with a decline in the importance of family and society and there is little that binds society together except, perhaps, the media and common cultural pastimes and heroes (whether these be football or movie stars) or, more than anything else, consumerism. Shopping has, for the first time in history, itself become a pastime and an aspiration. Appearance has taken the place of depth and any absolute values are widely derided—at least by the cultural elite.

Two competing themes are particular modern exports by the Western world:

6. A subversion of traditional western values such as justice, truth and goodness which originally derived from Greek philosophy but which have been undermined by post-modernism and relativism, and
7. An increase in globalisation with global brands carrying global values of consumerism, materialism, a subversion of traditional cultures and the fostering of aspiration towards individual success and autonomy.

Taken together these have had a corrosive effect on any ideas of values education and it is not surprising that, in many western countries, governments are left struggling to know what values education actually means. *When relativism and tolerance rule, what becomes of talk of values?*

Subverted “western values” are spread by the increasingly centralised power of the media (including radio, television and the internet) and these are becoming so ubiquitous and are so attractive that they are almost impossible to resist. If values are the glue that holds society together, then the glue has become so diluted that “society” has increasingly been undermined. Relativism dissolves the glue and we are left in a post-modern sea where “values” cease to have meaning.

This, then, is one side of the seesaw that has effected values education and these Western influences have profoundly affected many countries in the Pacific Rim. Different countries and cultures are at different places on the seesaw but at one end, stands the god of relativism supported by the god of tolerance which have dissolved the glue binding communities together. I call these gods, because gods cannot be challenged and the very idea of challenging tolerance will, to many, be unacceptable as the opposite of tolerance is seen as being “intolerant” and who would wish to advocate intolerance?

The other side of the seesaw—fundamentalism

Any reaction provokes a reaction—this is not only a basic principle of physics but also of sociology and cultural analysis. The rise of subverted or diluted western understandings of values has produced reactions which some would group under the banner of fundamentalism. *When truth is derided, when the search for meaning and wisdom becomes a dirty word, then one reaction is to turn away from the search and to seek refuge in certainty. Certainty provides the glue that can bring communities back together. Certainty is comforting, it is secure.* It enables individuals to find meaning and to identify with their own groups. It gives them strength and conviction and the feeling that they are invincible and that they alone have the truth. Once certainty is linked with religion, it opens the door to self-sacrifice in the knowledge that, even if in this life one faces persecution, a reward awaits after death. It was this conviction that motivated the early Christian martyrs who sang as they were led to their deaths in the Roman Coliseum as they were convinced that death for their faith would lead them straight to heaven.

We find fundamentalism at work in the West as much as in the East and certainly we find it round the Pacific Rim. We find it in major religious groups whether these are different Christian groups, Islamic, Jewish or Hindu groups. *We find it on the streets of Tel Aviv and Gaza City, in both Shia and Sunni Islam, in rural Afghanistan, in Hindu nationalism and some sections of the BJP in India, in the moral majority in the United States, in groups such as Opus Dei within the Catholic Church or in evangelical Anglican groups in Sydney.* The fundamentalists all too often harbour a righteous indignation about the world which they see as having subverted important values and which has left them adrift with nowhere to go except to retreat into their own certainties.

Fundamentalism flourishes wherever a community feels threatened and it provides a way of holding on to meaning and even to hope when a culture is in danger of being overwhelmed by external forces. Fundamentalism is not interested in argument or debate—it is secure in its own truth and sees this truth as being threatened by outside and alien forces which must be resisted at all costs. The impact of this on any idea of values education is obvious. Education will be seen by the fundamentalist as being about inculcating young people into their own certainties and seeking to keep them free from corrupting influences which may undermine their own beliefs.

Fundamentalism encourages a “we” and “they” attitude:

- We are right, *they* are wrong.

- *We* are virtuous, *they* are wicked.
- *We* have the truth; *they* are creatures of the lie.
- *We* are good, *they* are evil.

Where cultures are not under threat, dialogue becomes possible. Where cultures see themselves as oppressed then dialogue is impossible.

Some sections of United States society are increasingly fundamentalist with the *we* and *us* attitude clearly on the rise. After 9/11 there has been a dangerous increase in the idea that *we* are good and *they* are evil. *We* stand for freedom, democracy and the American way (including capitalism, low taxes and, in some quarters, with links to negative attitudes to homosexuality and abortion) and *they* stand for anyone who rejects *we*:

- In Russia after Beslan, *we* are the Russian people; *they* are those who stand against *us*—namely the Chechnyan and other minorities.
- In Israel, *we* are the righteous who have been promised this land by God and *they* are any who dare challenge this claim.
- In Afghanistan *we* are the Taliban with their assurance of the correct way of reading the Qu’ran and the “correct” understanding of the place of woman in society and *they* are the godless forces of the “great Satan”.

Anyone who dares to dissent, who dares to reject the attitudes of the *we* then becomes, by definition, a *they*.

The reaction is as obvious and as predictable as night following day. Those who are rejected retreat into their own fortress certainties, they on their own part emphasise the *we* and reject the *they*. The glue of certainty brings society back together; it provides mutual strength and support. *The language of hatred, the language of ‘they’, and of a “war against evil” are not far behind. Common ground proves hard to find.*

Yeats was right when he said ‘The worst are full of passionate intensity.’ He can be seen as commenting on one end of the seesaw—the passionate intensity of those who are so sure of their rightness that they cannot see the *they*, the human face of those who are different.

The other side of the seesaw to relativism and tolerance is, then, fundamentalism. My argument is that we cannot begin discussion on values education unless we understand these cultural movements and, once we do, we can begin to see the magnitude of the task we face.

Unless we are willing to look at the human face of those who are other, those who are different, those who are ‘not-we’, then we will either believe in nothing or only in our own certainties.

Both sides of the seesaw are perfectly understandable and I can sympathise with and understand those who say that:

1. On the one view, values education is about a broad, western, liberal approach to education which affirms tolerance, rejects any absolutes and exposes young people to a complex multiplicity of ideas. This can easily foster relativism and dilutes the glue which holds society together. Young people then sit outside any cultural or ethical framework. They become disinterested observers and their “objective” contemplation of the alternatives leaves them effectively adrift on a post-modern sea.
2. On the other side, values education is about affirming the value of our own culture by holding on to what we are certain is true and standing fast against the encroaching tide of

relativism. Society needs the glue of firm rules to bind it together. On this view, education should be about teaching about what is good and what is evil, about what is right and what is wrong, about who is good and who is bad, about what people can do and what they cannot. The aim should be to inculcate the young into our own certainties and to prevent them being corrupted by influences from the *they*. We find this attitude in many schools (including some here in Australia) where the emphasis is on educating people into “the truth”, into catechising them into the framework certainties of their own culture and thereby preventing any threatening influences undermining the transmitted certainty.

Can the centre hold

So where do we go? In our different societies we are caught between these competing global trends which, even if they have not affected us yet, are likely to do so in the future. One answer is to abandon values education—to say that this is not the business of a school at all and to leave this to parents and family. This, however, is to abdicate our responsibility and taking this route will certainly not combat the different swings of the pendulum as parents are as much influenced by the cultural forces as educators and, perhaps, may be less aware of them.

W. B. Yeats’ poem says that ‘the centre cannot hold’ and tells us that ‘mere anarchy is loosed among the world’. He was remarkably perceptive. ‘The best lack all conviction’ fits well with relativism—how can one have conviction when any idea of absolutes seems to have disappeared? Yeats says that ‘The worst are full of passionate intensity’—and we see this amongst the fundamentalists who are so sure of their own certainties that they refuse to engage in debate. So how can the Centre hold in the modern world?

I want to suggest that values education is about seeking to hold the seesaw in balance. It involves the attempt to hold onto the claim that there is an absolute distinction between good and evil between right and wrong between truth and falsity whilst avoiding slipping into fundamentalism. Trying to do this is very hard when it is so very easy to tip over. Both sides will seek to seduce us towards one end or the other. The seesaw swings all too easily and we begin running down one side and forget the effort to keep the balance. Where is the point of balance? It is between the forces of relativism that tell us we should tolerate all perspectives and that there are no absolutes and the forces that tell us that they have the truth and all we have to do it to obey it. Both are mistaken and both are dangerous.

The search for truth, for wisdom and for understanding matters—but it is hard and difficult to achieve. Post-modernists are right to warn us of the danger of truth being used as a weapon to subvert the indigenous and the feminine. We do need to be alert to the power of the media and to reject the imposition of so-called Western values. It is also right to be tolerant and to listen to others—but only if we are listening to others who are also engaged in a search for wisdom. Otherwise the relativist view will take us nowhere.

Stories are told of a Sufi mystic, Nasrudin, who lived in the 11th century at the beginning of a particularly rich period when Christians, Muslims and Jews—all influenced by the philosophy of Aristotle—sought wisdom and understanding about the nature of God and how life should be lived. In the first few hundred years after the death of the Prophet, Islamic philosophers were far ahead of their equivalents in the Christian West. The Holy Qu’ran exhorted Muslims to use reason and understanding and the Islamic philosophers took this search seriously.

Sufism is something that is lived and is a progressive and life-long journey. The fables and tales which contain Sufi teaching are meant to challenge the perceptions and understanding of those

who hear them. One set of these fables is the Nasrudin stories. Nasrudin probably did not exist, but the stories about him nevertheless disclose truths. One story is as follows. A king was complaining to Nasrudin that his subjects were untruthful. Nasrudin replied: 'Majesty, there is truth and truth. People must practice real truth before they can use relative truth. They always try the other way round. The result is that they take liberties with their man-made truth, because they know instinctively that it is only an invention.' The king thought that this was too complicated as he believed that something was either true or false and he decided to make people tell the truth and by so doing to instil in them the habit of truthfulness. He therefore set up a gallows at the entrance to his town and everyone entering had to answer a question as he came in. Nasrudin was the first to come in and the Captain of the guard said, 'Where are you going? Tell the truth—the alternative is death by hanging.' Nasrudin replied, 'I am going to be hung on the gallows.' 'I don't believe you,' said the captain. 'Then hang me,' said Nasrudin. The captain realised, of course, that if he hung him then he would have hung a truthful man.

Nasrudin was not denying truth. He was not a relativist—but neither was he willing to accept the simple fundamentalism of the king. He put his own life on the line to show the king his error.

What is good or bad often depends on individual or group criteria and a great deal depends on perspective—but that does not mean the categories of "the good" and "the bad" do not exist. The point is made by another story about Nasrudin. He was once invited to a bear hunt by a king who liked him to go on such hunts. Nasrudin was very frightened but he had to go. When he returned to his village in the evening, his friends asked him 'How did the hunt go?' 'Very well' replied Nasrudin. 'How many bears did you see?' asked his friends. 'None.' 'How could the hunt have gone marvellously then?' his friends asked. Nasrudin replied, 'If you are hunting bears, and when you are me, seeing no bears at all is a marvellous experience.'

Stories can often do more to develop values than philosophy or religion. Stories help us to see the human face of the other—they help us to identify with the humanity of those who are *they*. They force us to recognise that 'we' may be in error. At their best, stories can and should be subversive but they are rarely relativist. They affirm the importance of the distinction between right and wrong, good and evil but resist and undermine simplistic categories.

Plato, Aristotle and Confucius lived within 100 years of each other. Plato was concerned with the preservation of the soul—each individual needed to be a lover of their soul and to care for it. It was better to suffer harm than to inflict it as hurting others damaged one's soul most of all whilst if one was hurt this hurt could be absorbed. Plato was concerned with seeking to establish a just and fair society and, although he failed, he argued that philosophy should be rooted in civic action. Aristotle focussed on the search for what it was to live a fully human life and, again, relationships with others were vital to his understanding. Confucius, whilst more enigmatic, was concerned with "humanness" or conduct worthy of a man ("ren"—the word appears 105 times in the Analects) and with the right relationships in society and he argued for the need for individuals to practice justice in order that society should be just. The parallels are remarkable and similar parallels can be found amongst many other great classical thinkers. They were all concerned with truth, with justice, with right relationships in society—but they all thought there was something more fundamental than these and this is what I want to argue for in this paper.

Holding fast to the centre: A way forward

I have used in this lecture the image of a seesaw and I want to push this one stage further. *What is the pivot around which the seesaw dances?* What is the anchor point around which the wild gyrations take place? My suggestion is that it is a very old idea which is often derided

today—namely that we are all human beings, that we all share a common human nature. White or brown, yellow or black, disabled or healthy, intelligent or simple, millionaire or pauper we are all human beings. None of us are wombats, none of us are kangaroos. We are human beings. *There is something called being human and there is such a thing as a fulfilled human life.* This may be difficult to define but we can recognise it when we see it. We can see such a life in Gandhi, in Martin Luther King, in Jesus, in many of the great Sufi mystics, in King David, in Florence Nightingale, in Guru Nanak and in the Buddha or the Dalai Lama today. Defining what it is to be fully human may not be easy, it may not even be possible—but the search for what it is to be human and then the far more perilous task of seeking to live this vision is what values education at its best should be about. It is about a dance, sometimes with wild gyrations, but anchored on the vision that being fully human is of profound importance and it is not easily achieved.

If this insight is accepted, then it can provide a basis for values education in an apparently relativistic and certainly multi cultural and multi-faith world. We can all be committed to becoming fully human and also to helping our young people to take this quest seriously. Nation states need to recognise that economic success should not be their sole aim—helping their people to have the freedom to realise their potential is also important.

Of course there will be questions about what it means to be fully human and there will be differences of interpretation in different cultures, but there are also many core values held in common. In spite of appearances to the contrary, there are core spiritual values which the great world religious traditions share. Certainly their cognitive beliefs may differ, but underneath this difference there is a surprising unity about what it is to live a fulfilled life. The problems come when one tries to codify what this means in a single set of values—when one subjects the Buddha, Jesus or Muhammad's life to philosophic analysis. *St. Augustine said that we all know what time is but it is impossible to define it—similarly we can all recognise a good life but it may be impossible to define.*

Trying to show young people what it means to live a fulfilled human life is, I want to argue, the core of values education today. *This means challenging the increasingly prevalent culture that sees meaning in terms of what people own, their gender or even what they do rather than in what they are. The search for what it means to live this sort of life and then attempting to live this out is at the heart of the human journey.* It is something that may often come with the passage of the years and that is one reason why many traditional societies have valued the wisdom of older generations as older people have had time to come to an understanding of what a fulfilled human life means. They may develop the wisdom to see through the media and also through the simplistic certainties of their young brothers and sisters. The presence of death and the passage of the years can provide a wisdom which few other paths can approach.

Aristotle first emphasised the search for our common humanity and this gives rise to a broad understanding of moral behaviour. *There are ways of behaving that diminish us as human beings and other ways of living that enhance us and help us fulfil our potential.* This, I suggest, would be commonly accepted amongst almost all cultures. Defining these ways is, of course, more difficult but three examples may help:

1. In the field of international law, the idea of “crimes against humanity” is generally accepted. After the Second World War, Nazis were put on trial for “crimes against humanity”. Their defence was that they were simply obeying orders, that Germany was an internationally recognised state and they were obeying the orders of the lawful government. This, however, was rejected. Certain actions go against what it is to be human. The same applies today with individuals being called before the International Court at The Hague for genocide, rape

and murder in warfare—again we have the acceptance of crimes against humanity—actions that go against our common human nature.

2. The United Nations declaration of human rights accepts that all human beings share certain rights which are grounded in what it is to be human. These rights are held to be innate—they are not conferred. This is precisely why there is such universal anger when, for instance, Sadaam Hussein displayed and humiliated American pilots on television; when the U.S. government showed television pictures of the dead bodies of Saddam Hussein's sons against the provisions of the Geneva convention; when suicide bombers killed Australian civilians in Bali or when 600 men are imprisoned without trial at Camp X Ray in Cuba. If rights are innate, then they cannot be simply taken away by a State or, indeed, by individuals who are passionately convinced of the rightness of their own views.
3. In the field of sexual morality, many young Westerners feel that "anything goes". Sex is seen as being about pleasure and when pleasure is the highest good anything that brings pleasure is acceptable. The front cover of the British edition of Cosmopolitan four weeks ago had the headline: 'Forty ways to orgasm—are you woman enough this weekend?' Values education grounded in what it is to be human challenges this perspective. However instead of the challenge being seen as being by old fashioned people who the young perceive to be grounded in the past, it can be seen as being grounded in the idea that there is something called "Being Human" and that acting in ways which go against this common human nature diminishes us. Sex, when it is seen as just being about pleasure without being linked to intimacy, long-term commitment and the possibility of having children, can and will diminish us. Modern young people do not respond to having rules laid down for them—but they do respond once they can begin to understand that certain forms of behaviour go against our common human nature.

The advantage of the idea of a common human nature as the core to a values education program to increase multicultural and multi-faith understanding is that no one can deny that we are all human beings. Differences may, naturally, arise when we seek to define what this nature is and how it is to be fulfilled.

- Some will say that to become fully human means joining a particular religious tradition and only by doing this can one embark on the path to full humanity.
- Some will say that becoming fully human means acquiring material possessions or power (although it is interesting that when it is put in these crude terms this is a position with which almost no-one would identify).
- Some will say that becoming fully human is about being happy—this is an increasingly common perception amongst young people in the more affluent nations the world. Happiness is actually seen as the prime aim of life.
- Some will say that to become fully human means ceasing from desiring things as desire is the root of misery and it is desire that prevents a person from fulfilling his or her potential.

However wherever people are coming from, they can and should recognise their common humanity with others. They may well see others as denying what they consider is essential to the search for common humanness and, to this extent, others may be considered to be "lower down the ladder" than they are, others may not be realising the potential that they feel they have realised. However in this case the appropriate response is to seek to help others and not to undermine them.

The fundamentalists will deride the western liberals who have, they may claim, lost any connection to God or the transcendent and seek only self-interest, whilst the western liberals may deride the fundamentalists for remaining committed to what they regard as outmoded and

outdated ideas. However they should both equally see their responsibility to seek to help others to realise their potential and allowing them the freedom to do this. The search for what it is to be fully human and helping people to live this out is the cornerstone of good education.

I would suggest that the chief evil in the world today is not due to the suffering caused by natural disasters not is it moral evil such as perceived sexual sins. Instead it is the institutional evil embedded in our organisations, trade bodies, governments, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and, indeed, even in organisations such as UNESCO and the United Nations. Many of these pay lip service to the task of helping individuals to fulfil their potential, but often this amounts to little more than a cloak for fostering the influence of the powerful and the influential. The idea of our common human nature should encourage us to challenge institutional evil wherever it is found and to stand up for those whose human potential is restricted by injustice, poverty and oppression. Again this is something that almost every group would endorse in principle but once the commitment to others interferes with the self-interest of powerful groups, it is remarkable how rapidly the common humanity of all individuals is ignored. *Good values education needs, therefore, to foster a developing sense of our common humanity and to engage young and old in the question of what it means to live a fulfilled human life.*

This is an enterprise that, I suggest, many disciplines need to engage with including sociology, psychology, psychiatry, physiology, anthropology, philosophy and even theological reflection from different religions. It is an enterprise in which UNESCO is uniquely placed to provide a lead—bringing together a variety of interest groups to address this common question. The search for the nature of human fulfilment is a search that should preoccupy our schools and should be a legitimate matter of debate even between fundamentalists and relativists. Of course, the two ends of the seesaw will dismiss the question from their predictably clear positions:

1. The relativists will deny that there is any single way to human fulfilment.
2. The fundamentalists will assert that only they have the answer.

However both are wrong. Some ways of living clearly fulfil human potential in a way that others do not. Psychiatrists know this having studied human behaviour—sexual abuse, rape, torture and oppression cannot possibly be argued to foster human flourishing. At the most they may be regrettable means which some may argue foster a wider end or vision, but no one can hold that these are positive ends in themselves. We can recognise people who have developed their full potential in many cultures and from many backgrounds. They do not follow a single ethical system but they have achieved something which most of us can only aspire to – a rounded and committed human life.

Schools need to ask themselves what they do to foster the search for human wholeness and how they help their young people to fulfil their human potential. This, after all, is the aim of good education. *Good education is not just about producing economically effective 'units' that will be of service to their nation and economy. It is at least partly about helping people fulfil their potential.* Many schools in the West pay lip service to this, but many also do not cherish this vision and develop it. Indeed, the broader view of what it is to be human is all too often neglected entirely. Some might refer to this vision as part of our common spiritual nature—although I confess to being nervous of the word 'spiritual'. It is used in so many different ways and its meaning is unclear. Nevertheless I believe we can all understand what it is pointing towards—it is affirming the importance of a broader approach to education that reading, writing, mathematics and science often lacks. It reminds us that human beings have potentialities that

can be actualised if we will not turn our backs on them—but they can only be actualised when people know that they exist and are willing to take them seriously.

Values education cannot just be about teaching people which acts they should and should not do. It needs to be located in a broader educational setting and this setting, I am claiming, is part of the search for human wholeness and the development of human potential. This is, I have argued, something about which we can unite in spite of our cultural and faith differences. It is something that we can work at together in dialogue and it is something we can each seek to foster in our own countries. It is also, to repeat, something that UNESCO can play a central part in developing—if, of course, the leadership is there to confront the challenges that will come from the relativists and the fundamentalists.

The centre can hold. Yeats was wrong. But balancing on the see saw is challenging and demanding and can only be achieved if we are willing to commit energy, intellect and resources to ensuring that our young people realise that the search for wisdom about the human condition and the endeavour to live a fulfilled human life are the most important objectives of all and they are worth standing for in a world which increasingly does not recognise them.

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These issues are dealt with in more detail in Vardy, P. (2003). *Being human—fulfilling genetic and spiritual potential*. DLT, London and Vardy, P. (2003). *What is truth? Between fundamentalism and the postmodern*. John Hunt Publishing