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The National Curriculum A Critique

Edited by Chris Berg

With contributions from Richard Allsop, David Daintree,
Greg Melleuish, Julie Novak, Barry Spurr, and Augusto Zimmerman

Foundations of Western Civilisation Program

MONOGRAPHS ON WESTERN CIVILISATION 1

THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM:
A Critique

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Introduction

Chris Berg

The legacy of Western Civilisation is rich, complex and essential—the foundations on which Australia’s society and political system, our culture, and our history, have been built.

So why are the basics of Western Civilisation absent from the national curriculum?

That is the question raised by this short volume. The release of the federal government’s national curriculum gives us an opportunity to take stock of how Australia sees itself, its role in the world, and its position in the grand sweep of history—in other words, how it imagines itself not just a nation, but as part of a civilisation.

The twelfth century scholar Bernard of Chartres once described the work of his contemporaries as ‘standing on the shoulders of giants’—they could only see so far because of the work of the greats who had come before them. On this, the national curriculum couldn’t be more disappointing.

Western Civilisation as a discrete and coherent concept seems to be a relic of an earlier time. The notion of distinct courses in ‘Western Civilisation’ died out in the 1970s and 1980s, as schools and universities faced two pressures.

The first was specialisation. The splitting of the humanities into endless subcategories has profoundly shaped the nature of aca-

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demic research; it has had follow-on effect for teaching. Academics specialising in fifteenth century Russian history are deployed to teach undergraduate Russian history, but their specialisation leaves them with little capacity to teach the development of communism in its historical milieu from Plato to Proudhon, and how revolutionary socialism has related to the development of liberalism or Christian millennialism. The crimes of Stalin and Lenin were as much crimes against civilisation as they were peculiarly Russian. Specialisation makes it hard to explore that, and even harder to describe to students.

The second pressure was a reactionary one—an intellectual revolution within the humanities which began to look introspectively at the West and to critically appraise its apparent success.

The post-colonial revolution in the humanities had a legitimate target. Revisionism usually has something to revise. But the wholesale abandonment of, and then reaction against the legacy of three thousand years of moral and intellectual development has led the humanities further astray than the initially narrow brief of post-colonialism would have suggested.

In the attempt to redress the lack of balance about the civilisation of Europe, the academy started discarding all that came before it. By the late 1990s, Western Civilisation, if it was thought about at all, was synonymous with the word ‘privilege’—privilege of race, of geography, of gender, of class.

We could be aching back towards an academic synthesis. The recognition that specialisation left scholarship worse for wear has led to the growth of cross- and inter-disciplinary research. ‘World history’ has arisen as a discrete area of study. How long until that re-integration of academic research takes a further step back to look at civilisation in its entirety?

After the shrill 1990s, the excesses of post-colonial studies have been wound back—no doubt in part as an increasing understand-

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ing that the alternatives to Western Civilisation are either choosing to integrate themselves in the West, or displaying degrees of intolerance and illiberalism that are completely unjustifiable to even the most hard-headed post-colonial theoretician.

Most post-colonial or post-modern academics may be sceptical of the West, but they still retain a deep liberalism. There are few genuine moral relativists. There are few academics willing to mount an intellectual defence of, say, the stoning of adulterers in theocratic Iran. The moral and ethical judgements that a condemnation of stoning requires are, themselves, a legacy of Western Civilisation. Religious tolerance, human rights, and the subordination of state power to the protection of the individual have developed in the West. Liberalism, defined in the widest possible sense, is a European idea.

Yet as the contributors to this volume point out, the notion of a civilisation of liberalism and tolerance is almost entirely absent from the national curriculum.

The most recent synthesis of the tenets Western Civilisation was written by Professor Phillippe Nemo. In *What is the West*, Nemo explores the universality of Western culture—a collection of values and institutions which can be applied to diverse nations and cultures.¹

Nemo identifies five intellectual revolutions which provided the foundation for these universal values. The first revolution was Greek, and was, perhaps, the most remarkable. Developed human society had, until the Greek invention of democratic participation, been entirely hierarchical. The Greek *demos* assumed that all citizens were at least partially equal. To enforce this idea, Greek city-states were governed under the principles of the rule of law.

The Greeks also developed two other great ideas which resonate thousands of years later: the idea of science and critical reasoning, and the development of the academy.

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The next revolution Nemo identifies is Roman. In Roman law we start to see the traces of contemporary liberalism—a universal legal structure governing a diverse mass of cultures and belief systems. Roman philosophers clearly developed the concept of the individual, and the individual's rights under the law. Critical to this was the Roman conception of property rights as individual rights.

Nemo writes that 'with the invention of private law, the Romans invented the individual human person, one who is free, with an inner life and a unique destiny: in short, an ego. In this respect, Roman law is the wellspring of Western humanism.'

In his contribution to this volume, Augusto Zimmerman looks at the remarkably narrow conception of human rights in the national curriculum. This is a failure to recognise the long history of rights thinking. Instead, the curriculum implies that human rights sprouted up as a consequence of the development of the United Nations. That may be a fair assessment for lawyers—who are interested in how human rights have been codified—to make, but is nonsensical and ahistorical if we are talking about the conception of human rights and individual liberty.

Nemo's third revolution of the West is biblical. In 2010, the role Christianity—and religion more generally—has played in the development of our civilisation is rarely countenanced. But the history of Western Civilisation is inseparable from the history of Christianity. Christian theology has been both positive reinforcement and inspiration for the development of many of the concepts and ideas which we consider secular. Early Christian writers elevated reason to the highest level, believing that the nature and intent of God could be determined only through human reasoning. God, above all else, was logical. While faith buttressed the medieval thinkers and philosophers, only through the determined application of reason was that faith made meaningful.

In his piece, David Daintree asks why the prominence of

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religion in Australian and global history is minimised in the national curriculum. Religion and faith have been two of the most powerful motivators for action in history. Sometimes, as Daintree points out, this has been for the worse. But to focus myopically on the negative manifestations of faith is to obscure its role in forging the unambiguous goods of history—care for the poor, hospitals, schools and universities, and resistance to secular authority.

Daintree writes as a committed Christian. But one does not have to share faith to recognise the importance of Christianity's role in history. You cannot tell the story of Europe, or the story of capitalism, or indeed any pre-twentieth century story without coming to terms with the role of Christianity and the part religion played in the minds of men and women—not as merely a cipher for racism or sexism, as the national curriculum seems to imply, but as the dominant mode of thinking and moral code in two thousand years of Western history.

The next revolution was a revolution of government. The clash between the Papacy and the secular rulers of Western Europe was one of the most important clashes of the last three thousand years. The release of the Papacy from secular rule under Pope Gregory VII split power in continental Europe for nearly 700 years. The Vatican determined that secular kings were subordinate to its rule, rather than the reverse. Given that the Papacy could never exercise sovereignty over territory, the tension between the secular and holy rulers meant that European states were restrained from imposing the sort of proto-totalitarianism clearly evident in many non-Western states during this period. The ruthlessness of Niccolò Machiavelli's *Prince* is seemingly plain, but for the princes he addressed, the full control of a state and people was a dream, not a practicality.

The Papal revolution had other effects as well. Roman law and theological reasoning were integrated into statecraft and political economy. This political formulation provided a stable foundation

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for an explosion of religious and secular cultural developments and eventually led to the Italian Renaissance.

The final revolution Nemo identifies is the age of liberal democracies. From the eighteenth to the twentieth century, liberalism developed as an economic and philosophical doctrine which privileges the rights of individuals—and enables them to act upon those rights—and democracy developed as the maturation of ideals of nationhood, with its emphasis on political equality. This revolution, incomplete as it is around the world, casts its shadow most clearly upon contemporary public policy debate—the classical liberals who spearheaded the reform movements of the 1970s and 1980s work in the shadow of Richard Cobden, the nineteenth century opponent of the Corn Laws.

Richard Allsop, in his contribution, writes that Australia of the nineteenth century has an uncommon prominence in the development of liberal democracy. But in the national curriculum, Australian nineteenth century liberalism is an afterthought.

Nemo identifies a further ‘liberalism’—intellectual liberalism, which lauds the pluralism in ideas for its own sake. John Stuart Mill’s argument for free speech—that the truth of a proposition can only be determined in a contest of ideas—is the argument for the encouragement of plural thinking more generally. This final liberalism is the pinnacle achievement of Western Civilisation—the encouragement of competing views to forge a civilisational synthesis.

Nemo’s five revolutions are the foundations of the modern world. Our law, culture, governments, economic system, and rights all stem from these distinct yet intertwined revolutions. Australia, as part of Western Civilisation, has informed and been informed by these.

Yet they are all also virtually absent from the national curriculum as it is currently conceived. What does it say about a culture

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which rejects its own foundations? What does it say about a history profession which fails to study them?

The purpose of this short volume is not to impose an ideal curriculum—although the contributors would no doubt have ideas on how to do so. Neither is it to engage with the important and live debate over whether to have a national curriculum at all. The question of federalism and education policy is a critical one, but in this volume, we take the existence of a national curriculum as a given.

Instead, our purpose is to contrast the national curriculum with the foundations of Western Civilisation and ask what assumptions—ideological and cultural—can account for the difference. What a society teaches its children is a pathway into how it understands itself. And, of course, a guide to how future generations of that society will understand themselves.

In this, the contributors to this volume find the national curriculum distinctly lacking.

1 Phillippe Nemo, *What is the West*, 2005, (Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press)

1 History in the national curriculum: no focus, no story

Greg Melleuish

The decision to make history one of the 'four pillars' of primary and secondary education in Australia through its inclusion in the new Australian national curriculum has not encouraged the sort of debate and discussion that such a development deserves.¹ The discussion has been underwhelming. Nevertheless, there are important questions that cannot be ignored. These include the following. What exactly is the purpose of the study of history for those students who are undertaking it? Exactly what history should be taught? What should be put in and what should be left out?

These matters should not be taken lightly. The curriculum sets out to establish what every Australian child will be taught. Once put in place, it creates the framework that teachers will use for many years to come. Given the effort involved in putting it in place, it will be very hard to remove.

One reason for the lack of informed discussion is that the wider history profession has seemingly lost its way when it comes to understanding the nature of historical endeavour. It no longer has a sense that there is a body of knowledge which is common to all historians. The historical profession is divided and fragmented. Part of the problem has been the explosion of historical knowledge over the past fifty years and the ensuing fragmenting of the profession.

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In place of knowledge, many historians have come to emphasise method and skills as being of primary importance. It does not matter what is taught so long as students acquire the necessary generic skills that all historians should possess. Unfortunately, to be a good historian does not require much in the way of specialist skills. That is why there have been so many good amateur historians.

What should be taught is as much an issue for the modern university as it is for schools. There is nothing approaching a coherent curriculum in history at our universities. Students all too often fill up their history major with a strange collection of specialist options that must give them a very peculiar picture of the past. It is true that we cannot teach the history of everything; there is simply not enough time. The supermarket curriculum comes into being because no one is capable of deciding what students should know. By default, in Australian universities, the history curriculum becomes a hodge-podge of research specialisations. In an age in which research rules, this is what most academics want.

Fortunately, this sort of post-modern non-solution cannot be applied to schools. There has to be some sort of thinking done to set out a workable history curriculum, one that will provide knowledge of the past that is relevant for the students who live in our contemporary world. It is not an easy task, but it is not one that can be pushed to one side, or undertaken without much thought and discussion. There is a real risk that the curriculum will resemble the New South Wales Higher School Certificate history curriculum in which students study a collage of topics that do not have much relationship to each other. Hence in Ancient history it is possible to examine the early Roman Empire without having studied the late Republic, and to study Sparta but ignore Athens.

There would appear to be two imperatives for anyone devising a history curriculum for Australian students. The first is that students need to know something about the history of their own

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country. The second is that they need to know something about the history of the rest of the world. The tricky bit is working out what they should know in each case and how the history of Australia should fit with that of the rest of the world.

The key issue then for anyone seeking to design a history curriculum for Australian students is getting the balance right. As nothing quite like this type of curriculum has been tried before in this country, there should have been an informed public discussion involving a range of people regarding the shape that such a curriculum should take. No such debate took place.

Instead some very strange developments occurred.

- The planning of the curriculum was handed over to Stuart Macintyre, who has a background primarily in Australian history and the history of communism in Britain and Australia. At his side stood John Hirst, an Australian historian with some knowledge of European history.
- It was declared that the curriculum would take a 'world history approach'. It claimed that 'an understanding of world history will enhance students' appreciation of Australian history'. Such statements seemed to be saying that Australia's history could only be appreciated properly if it were placed within a global context. However, despite the initial involvement of world historians, it has become apparent that the curriculum designers do not have a clue as to what world history actually means.
- A number of cross-curriculum priorities were declared as informing the Australian curriculum as a whole, including English, mathematics, science and history. These are indigenous history and culture, sustainability, Asia, and Australia's engagement with Asia. This has significant consequences as it means that room for all of these three priorities are meant to be found in every curriculum. As they are priorities, if something needs to be cut, such a cut will come from somewhere else.

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- For some reason, the crucial principle of Australia's cultural heritage derived from Western Civilisation was not included. No priority has been accorded to the Western roots of Australia. It does not need to be emphasised, and should the curriculum become too 'crowded', it is a prime candidate for exclusion.

The curriculum lacks coherence. The incoherence ultimately derives from the fact that it does not know exactly what sort of story it wants to tell. When the curriculum was initially released it was described as being informed by the principles of world history. Yet at no stage did it set out exactly what it wanted students to get out of a global focus or even what it meant by 'world history'.

The primary school curriculum is overwhelmingly Australian in focus. Only in secondary school is there an attempt to bring together 'world history' and Australian history. My discussion in the rest of this chapter is limited to the history curriculum for Years 7, 8, 9 and 10.

For the secondary curriculum the situation has been complicated by the fact that it is divided into two sections: an overview, and what are described as 'depth studies'. Students are meant to be provided with a general summary of a period such as the Ancient World and then to conduct a more specialised study of particular aspects of this period.

Depth studies come out of two considerations. One is that teachers do not really like teaching chronological history. They seem to prefer teaching what is often described as themes and issues. The second consideration is that there is something educationally to be gained by allowing students to study certain aspects of the past in reasonable depth so that they can get a feel for what it was like to have lived in a particular society.

This still leaves the problem as how best to organise the study of history so that students can receive a relatively comprehensive

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picture of the past while keeping the amount of material under control. If there is no organising principle then what will be taught will either be arbitrary or based on some unacknowledged principle or prejudice. Again, we need to be asking exactly what it is we are trying to achieve. This is a very real and practical problem for anyone engaged in the teaching and study of history.

For teaching purposes, the idea of the significant past is the most appropriate organising principle for a curriculum. In the Australian context this means those aspects of the past of which Australians should be aware if they are to make a reasonable fist at understanding the world in which they live and thus be able to act as good citizens.

This does not translate immediately into a list of particular historical events. Rather it involves a number of elements:

- It involves some appreciation of how environmental factors have shaped the past, including changes in climate, the importance of food production, and the way in which disease has affected the way people live.
- It recognises that contingency is a very important element in history. Individual men and women do make a difference. If there had been no Alexander there would not have been a Hellenistic East. Individuals matter, and there is no pre-ordained path along which history must travel.
- It recognises the importance of culture and civilisation in the making of human history. Human beings in particular civilisations develop distinctive moral codes, religious beliefs and cultural practices. It is crucial that students appreciate the distinctive features of the traditions that have shaped the civilisation of which they are part. They should also be aware of what Marshall Hodgson calls the 'cultural patterning' of other civilisations.
- It also means that a special place has to be found for the history

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of Australia, including the history of indigenous Australians, in the curriculum.

If one starts with the idea of the significant past and follows it through with a few organising principles, such as the ones listed above, then it is possible to construct a curriculum that is both appropriate for Australian students, and which can set priorities that resolve the issue of the 'crowded' curriculum. It is also clear that, in the case of Australia, Western Civilisation must be a central organising principle of the curriculum. Australian students need to appreciate and understand the crucial cultural traditions that have shaped the society in which they live. As it currently stands there is no imperative for students to be taught about their own cultural traditions. However, there is an expectation that they will be taught about the influence that Asian traditions have had on their culture.

The current proposed curriculum is incoherent because it lacks any real organising principle. What this also means is that there has been an amazing lack of imagination in thinking through the sorts of problems that go with the creation of such an ambitious enterprise. The extraordinary range of history curriculum documents demonstrates that the old adage about Australians having a 'genius for bureaucracy' remains true in the twenty-first century. It also demonstrates that their love for bureaucracy means that their capacity for creative leadership remains stunted.

The document is, in part, driven by imperatives that are extrinsic to the study of history and which are essentially political in origin. In particular, this is the case with the Asia and Australia and sustainability priorities. There seems to be greater concern that the curriculum meets its political objectives than that it provides a good education in history.

A proper history curriculum will be derived from principles that are intrinsic to the study of history. As it lacks any underlying

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principle, the current curriculum has become the veritable ‘dog’s breakfast’. It has fallen prey to all sorts of appetites, as particular individuals and groups, some of them well-meaning, have attempted to shape it according to their particular interests. For example, it is clear that different people, or groups of people, wrote the different levels of the curriculum. There are idiosyncratic inclusions in parts of the curriculum that seem to reflect personal interests. There are also particular obsessions, such as the emphasis on the Industrial Revolution, that seem to reflect a materialist, need I say Marxist, view of history. And finally, there are parts of the curriculum that reflect political correctness, especially the emphasis on indigenous rights, women’s liberation and the environmental movement that dominate the most recent version of the Year 10 curriculum.

As the curriculum has been developed from the initial draft, the changes in it have been driven by a combination of the factors already discussed. These include the need to cut material, the need to include material that deals with the cross-cultural dimensions and the need to strengthen the various depth studies. The consequences have been as follows:

- The emphasis has switched from the overviews, which is to say the chronological flow of history, to the depth studies.
- The overviews have generally weakened. They do not provide, in any sense, an adequate ‘map of the past’ for students.
- The depth studies have become more narrow and, at times, esoteric. At times it is difficult to work out exactly why certain depth studies are there. For example, in one part of the Year 8 curriculum, classes will have the choice between studying Khymer civilisation, the expansion of the Polynesians across the Pacific, or Shogunate Japan. What is the purpose of these three options for students in terms of relating them to a past that is significant for them? In Year 8 it is also possible that students could do a sequence of depth studies beginning with

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the Ottoman Empire followed by one on Polynesian expansion to be capped off with a study of the Spanish conquest of the Americas. What is the logic of such a sequence?

- Choice has been further limited as schools will not be allowed to develop their own depth studies.

The outcome of these developments has been the creation of a curriculum that is fragmented and eclectic but which nonetheless meets the political demands placed on it by the government. It will be 'teachable' in the sense that it will consist primarily of a series of discrete, but largely unconnected, units.

It is equally true to say that it will not provide students with much of a sense of their heritage from Western Civilisation. Primarily this is because Western Civilisation has not been specified as an area about which students should have knowledge. Hence matters dealing with Western Civilisation appear only incidentally in the curriculum.

The Year 7 curriculum is concerned with the Ancient World. Topic 2 deals with the Mediterranean World. Although there is provision for an overview of the development of the whole Mediterranean, students must do a depth study of either Rome, Greece or Egypt. While they may acquire some vague sense of Graeco-Roman civilisation, at best they will receive relatively detailed knowledge of either Greece or Rome. There is no provision for them to appreciate the significance of that civilisation.

For Year 8 students the situation becomes somewhat bizarre. In the overview, such topics as the collapse of the Roman Empire and the development of feudalism are listed. In Topic 1, however, the Islamic World and the Western World are listed together as a single entity. This means that a primary focus is the relationship between Islam and the West, rather than on the West itself. In the depth studies, students choose amongst the Vikings, Medieval Christendom, the Ottoman Empire and Renaissance Italy. This

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means that, at best, students may receive an introduction either to the Renaissance or the world of medieval Europe. At worst they will miss studying over one thousand years of the development of Western Civilisation. The only other appearance of Europe and the West in Year 8 appears in depth studies on either the Black Death or the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

In fact, it will be possible for a student to have completed Year 7 and Year 8 History and have not come into contact with much more than a superficial account of Europe and Western Civilisation. They could, however, have been introduced to Ancient Egypt, Ancient China, the Vikings, the Polynesian expansion across the Pacific, and Mongol expansion. I have no idea how this eccentric collection of topics could possibly be said to constitute a 'significant past' for any student living in twenty-first century Australia. It is a travesty of the study of history that reflects an inability to come to grips with what a history curriculum should be doing to educate Australian children.

Having failed to provide any foundation in the history of Western Civilisation, of the civilisation that forms the basis of the society of which the students are part, in Year 9 the curriculum moves to the 'Making of the Modern World'. It is at this stage that the study of Australian history is introduced. Students are now introduced to European imperialism and the Industrial Revolution as the setting for the study of Australia.

They must choose amongst three depth studies: the Industrial Revolution, 'movement of peoples' or 'progressive ideas and movements'. It would appear that there is a Marxist subtext to these studies. Imperialism and the movement of peoples somehow flow out of the development of the Industrial Revolution. In the ideas and movements depth study, socialism, capitalism, imperialism, nationalism, Darwinism and Chartism are included; liberalism and conservatism are excluded. Perhaps 'capitalism' is meant to

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cover liberalism. At the same time these ideas are linked to both the Industrial Revolution and certain social groups such as ‘workers, entrepreneurs, land owners and religious groups’. One might be being cynical here, but in the section of the curriculum where the principles of Western Civilisation can be seen to be linked to Australia, we get a quasi-Marxist view *and* the exclusion of the most important modern political philosophy, liberalism.

Of course, the ideas and movements study is only an option and may turn out not to be very popular. The other depth studies are comparisons of Asia and Australia, including a comparison of a city in Australia and one in Asia, and World War I. I cannot see how the Asia and Australia depth study could possibly be construed as contributing to the significant past of our students, and should be replaced by something else, preferably something that helps Australian students to understand their cultural heritage, perhaps a comparison of nineteenth century Australia and America.

All of this brings us to the disaster that is Year 10. After studying three years of history, students deserve much better than is served up to them in their final year of compulsory historical study. One would expect, in a curriculum that describes itself as world history, some sort of summing up of where the human journey has reached. Instead, the curriculum collapses into a mixture of political correctness and social studies.

Students have to study either World War II or the Vietnam War as their first depth study. It is, however, the final two depth studies that are the most disappointing. Here would appear to be a great opportunity to sum up both the passage of human history and the impact of Western Civilisation on the modern world. Instead in the second depth study, ‘rights and freedoms’, students are given the choice of studying ‘Civil rights and freedoms’, which has an indigenous focus, or examining ‘Women’s liberation’. Surely there is room for more than this in the study of rights and freedoms,

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including the importance of liberalism as the defining political philosophy of our age. Here surely is an opportunity to look at the tradition of freedom and democracy that we have inherited as part of our Western heritage.

The final depth study is even more disappointing. Under the heading of the Globalising World students must choose between 'Popular culture' and the 'Environmental movement'. This is the only time that culture appears in the curriculum. And what does it encompass? AC-DC and Kylie Minogue. This is how human history of the past ten thousand years reaches its climax. This is the ultimate expression of Western Civilisation. To which we can add the environmental movement, or all the things that are wrong with modern civilisation, or why we should love 'Gaia'.

This is a missed opportunity to sum up the history of human beings, to provide students with a sense of how they are the inheritors of a great, if sometimes flawed, civilisation. This curriculum is a hodge-podge driven by a variety of motives, but which misses out on the most important one of all: to provide students with an opportunity to explore their significant past and the civilisation that has helped to create the world in which they live.

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- 1 My discussion in this essay is based on the original version of the History curriculum that was put up at the ACARA website. However, since that time the curriculum has undergone revision and I have seen two revisions of the curriculum, the latest made available to participants at an ACARA revision workshop on 20 August 2010.

2 The end of Australian history?

Richard Allsop

History was once a staple subject in the latter years of secondary school. Not anymore.

In Victoria in 1972, a whopping 42 per cent of Year 12 students studied Australian history, while a further 16 per cent studied some other history subject. By 1999, the figure for Australian history had slumped to 5 per cent, while the figure for other histories had done comparatively well by only halving to 8 per cent. Of course, Victoria along with every other state, except New South Wales, had seen history disappear as a stand-alone subject in the early years of secondary school, subsumed within the amorphous catch-all, Studies in Society and the Environment (SOSE). As one book considering the teaching of history put it in 2000, 'as only one strand of one subject in an increasingly crowded school curriculum, the systematic study of history in Years 7-10 has disappeared in most schools'.¹

So anyone who appreciates the value of history can only be pleased that the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has a mandate to include it as one of the compulsory subjects to Year 10, along with English, mathematics and science. However, history will need to justify its place. Already, geography teachers have queried whether history merits this elevation.

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The Australian recently reported that in a letter to then Education Minister, Simon Crean, geographers pointed out that traditionally the two disciplines had received equal billing in the curriculum, but now history was getting priority, with geography only being compulsory until Year 8. Clearly, the challenge for history is to justify this status.

A key criterion for whether it has been a success will come as students approach the end of Year 10 and consider their elective subjects for Year 11. Will they have enjoyed history enough up to then to give serious consideration to continuing it, and will what is offered for the next two years entice them further? Anyone who loves history knows that the past is a fascinating story, and the most profound reason to keep pursuing it is to gain more knowledge. Yet, a failure to appreciate the love of knowledge has been one of the history profession's major failings.

Many historians have ascribed the decline in status of their subject area in both later secondary school, and in universities, as being due to utilitarianism—students wanting to do practical subjects. While this has no doubt contributed, there seem to be two more fundamental candidates that can claim responsibility for the decline in students' interest in history as a subject.

First, there has been a constant focus on method rather than substance; on developing skills rather than imparting knowledge. Second, the scraps of knowledge which, almost inadvertently, have been imparted have tended to present the past as dull and miserable, rather than a fascinating, place. Little wonder that young people, eager to learn and eager for excitement have tended to look elsewhere when they get the chance.

The combined result of these features has been a piecemeal syllabus where nothing that is taught one year has been built on with either more breadth or depth the following year, and where the morsels of teaching are provided without any unifying coherence. A

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much better approach, and one which the new national curriculum only goes a small way to addressing, is one which provides a coherent focus on imparting knowledge. Given that the most significant influence on our modern world is Western Civilisation, it is the obvious candidate for the coherent theme. And, if properly taught, it will mean students both knowing more and wanting more.

But why do they currently want less? One of the best insights into what was actually happening in history classrooms was provided by Anna Clark in her 2008 book, *History's Children: History Wars in the Classroom*. Clark went out into the field and recorded the views of students about the history, in particular Australian history, they have been taught. She conducted focus groups with 182 students (in groups of five and six), from Years Nine to Twelve, at 34 schools located in every state and territory; with a reasonable mix of government and non-government, metropolitan and rural, plus some teachers and bureaucrats. She faithfully recorded a litany of complaints, many of which disagreed with her own preconceptions.

Clark had an unshakable assumption that learning facts is inherently dull. Interestingly, most of the anti-facts comments she reported from the classroom came from teachers, not students. Teachers argued that it is hard to teach facts and dates 'on a Friday afternoon in a class of noisy, tired teenagers', as if teaching a more nebulous curriculum would be easier. Yet there were Tahlia in outer Melbourne and Edie in Central Australia who both wanted to learn more about Prime Ministers, while Colin, a Year 12 student in Perth, said 'I like textbooks because the information's there and you just learn it'. Clark at least acknowledged the existence of such children and commented that 'there's no doubt these students need to be catered for—they feel much more comfortable with a concrete, content-oriented history lesson'. Unsurprisingly, the education establishment was aghast at any moves towards a content-rich

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curriculum. The Board of Studies NSW head, Jenny Lawless, told Clark that learning facts was 'a very lower order skill'. Instead, she wanted students 'to actually engage in history' as part of what Clark refers to as 'historical literacy'. Yet, it is never quite defined what that means to the typical adolescent and, just maybe, ensuring that children know that the Great War started in 1914 and ended in 1918 might be a more tangible outcome.

However, it would be a mistake to link all the negative aspects of history teaching with the educational fads and post-modernist ideology of the past few decades. Some unpleasant features of school history teaching, such as poring over documents, predate that. One of Britain's leading historians, David Starkey, has argued that far too much emphasis has been placed on the process of discovery about historical events, rather than the events themselves. He has argued that the study of original documents and the search for evidence should not come until university level. As he argued:

Teachers use the discovery method to teach when the Norman Conquest was. We know when it was. What's the point in having a teacher if not to tell the students what the facts are.¹

Nobody would argue that at university, or to some extent Years 11 and 12, those who have elected to do history should be able to do far more than rote learn facts. However, in trying to develop analytic skills, there is a risk that students learn little actual history, and it is hard to be historically literate if one does not know much about the basic facts of what went on in the past. People regularly talk about entering a 'new Dark Age', a pretty meaningless concept if one does not know anything about the last one. The Dark Ages, like Classical Greece, Republican and Imperial Rome, the spread of Christianity, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and the threats posed by Fascism and Communism in

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the twentieth century are some of the key markers that any student needs to know about to make sense of the modern world. It is vital that students have some mental timeline of how all these major events of the past 2,500 years fit together.

Apart from simply learning some basic facts, a move away from the discovery method would also free up some valuable time for a renewed understanding that history is also as a literary endeavour. On this point, ACARA itself seems to have recognised that secondary sources have some value:

From Edward Gibbon to Geoffrey Blainey, writers of history provide models of literary distinction that engage students and enhance their appreciation of prose. Students should be exposed to secondary sources that exemplify these qualities, and opportunities should be taken to include such nonfiction texts in the English curriculum.

Yet, despite these words, reading the great historians at any length seems to remain an undervalued part of the draft national curriculum.

As well as the problems with the focus on skills and discovery, Clark's study showed that students were not only dissatisfied with how they were taught, but with the content as well. On the subject of Anzacs, Clark was surprised that students showed 'such passion when talking about the topic', and when they explained their overwhelming boredom with indigenous history 'to be honest, their views came as a bit of a surprise'. Students disliked indigenous history and federation, as both kept reappearing at different year levels, had repetitive and vague content, and lacked the drama and international significance that makes war such an engaging topic for teenagers.

Clark's book, like much recent commentary on the teaching of history in Australia, focused on the nation's own history. Indeed, for the duration of Australia's history wars, both sides have tended to

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place too great a focus on the ideological content of what is taught about Australia, rather than considering the even more fundamental question of what proportion of school history should actually be about Australia. This was certainly a failing when the Howard Government placed the teaching of history on the agenda with its 2006 History Summit.

In an Australia Day eve address to the National Press Club in 2006, Prime Minister Howard exhorted a 'coalition of the willing' to promote changes to the teaching of history, which he said was neglected in schools and too often questioned or repudiated the nation's achievements. So we got the History Summit, in the lead-up to which then-Education Minister Julie Bishop said: 'Australian history should be a critical part of the school curriculum, it should at least be a stand-alone subject, and compulsory to say Year 10. I think we should have a great deal of pride in our nation's history, and to ensure we have more informed citizens, they need to have a greater understanding of our nation's past.'

There were obvious problems with that position. Clearly, Australian students needed a broader diet than just their own national history. As Greg Melleuish wrote in 2008, 'students need to be able to understand and appreciate societies and cultures that do not form part of their cultural inheritance, as well as those that do.' And if they lack that knowledge they will not even be able to understand Australian history 'if that is the only history they know'.³ Melleuish contrasted Australia with the United States where there has long been a 'willingness to embrace first Western Civilisation and then world history'. Yet, ironically, even some of the world historians themselves have become defensive of their turf and assert that it too is a specialty. Maybe, as well as all history undergraduates learning it, all academic history staff should have to teach it.

And, as with many other areas of public policy, the Howard Government's top-down and centralised model was only going to

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make it easier for future centralisers to undermine state autonomy. In principle, with curricula, there should be a move towards greater devolution, not just to states, but to individual schools. This could lead to greater innovation and the variety of outcomes could give a far clearer indication of what type of history will both attract students and produce positive outcomes. However, for the time being at least, that horse has bolted, so we must consider the national curriculum we have and ensure that it is as good as possible. Is it sufficiently big picture to be both important and interesting?

In recent decades, history courses at senior secondary and university level have seemed almost purposefully designed to be the opposite. I know of a number of people who have thought that they would like to do some history subjects at university but, having perused the course guide, could not find a single subject of interest. One of the striking features of many Australian university history department subjects is their narrowness. 'Witches and witch hunting in Europe', 'Memory and violence in Ireland' or 'Witness: War and the Australian media' may well be interesting and worthwhile subjects, but too much of such fare in students' diets will leave them short of many intellectual nutrients. Some context is required to make sense of the witches, the Irish violence, or what got a run in the *Argus* in 1942.

Too much of the content appears to be premised on the basis that the only important aspect of history is finding out who was oppressed, whether this was due to class, race or gender, and casting moral judgement on the oppressor, with bonus points if it can be shown that the oppressor also despoiled the environment. Instead, people have flocked to amateur history where they can ask the interesting questions. People are fascinated to study genealogy and are especially delighted if they can find something interesting about an ancestor. Working-class great-great-grandmother had affair with wealthy man is interesting; working class great-great-grandmother

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oppressed due to class and gender is somewhat less so. The other problem with the victim-centric view is that it can only depress our children, as leading Australian historian, John Hirst, has pointed out:

The old history, for all its faults, held up heroes and heroines to schoolchildren. It said to them 'Aim high. Captain Cook was the son of a poor farmer' and so on. But what view of their own potential do students get these days when they're taught that so much is determined by race, gender, class and ethnicity?⁴

Occasionally, universities do attempt to provide a bit more of the big picture. At Monash University, the Arts Academic Language and Learning Unit has developed a History of Ideas program to provide 'an overview of 2,500 years of Western thought, the evolution of Western society and the development of the Western academy'. Unsurprisingly, the creator of the subject felt the need to almost apologise in advance by stressing that 'a major qualification to the entire program is awareness of the risk of retelling a hegemonic grand narrative about the superiority of Western Civilisation, its history, its achievements and culture of its academic inquiry'. However refreshingly, the blurb did also recognise the 'equal importance' of avoiding 'the temptation of presenting a perspective on a history of ideas that suggests the West is the worst'.

In previous generations, it may have been possible to assume that university history students had already acquired some basic working knowledge of Western Civilisation to which more detail in a narrower field, or comparative studies with other civilisations, could be added.

The need for what might almost be considered remedial historical education at tertiary level was recognised by Hirst, who for years taught what could almost be called a remedial history

of Europe from 500 BC to 1800 AD. In 2009 he published the content of these lectures as a book, *The Shortest History of Europe*, identifying three early factors that meant Europe was the favourite to conquer the world—classical learning, Christianity and German warrior culture. Looked at another way, his course was asking why Australia is more like the countries of Europe and North America than it is like the countries of Asia or Africa. And further, why, as globalisation proceeds, the countries of Asia and Africa are becoming more like Europe and North America than the other way round.

It would seem a good idea to bring some of Hirst's history into the senior secondary school curriculum. In fact, as nobody is suggesting that those doing history at undergraduate level need have done history at Years 11 and 12, as they would with maths, science or English, it is vital that they have learnt enough actual history by the end of Year 10 to have some appreciation of a broad span of world history.

As well as setting out the compulsory curriculum up to and including Year 10, ACARA has also developed draft national curricula for two subjects across Years 11 and 12—Ancient history and Modern history. ACARA has acknowledged that 'other senior secondary courses might continue to be offered by individual jurisdictions', but it does seem a pity to not have a third option to deal with the not unimportant period between the fourth century and the eighteenth century. This gap only tends to reinforce the impression created by much of the K-10 curriculum that history is something one dips into almost at random, rather than building up a systematic body of accumulated knowledge.

Looking at the Modern history curriculum, it certainly has some interesting looking units, which, combined with good teaching, could ensure students have a rewarding two years at the end of secondary schooling. On the other hand, there is also enough

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scope for an ideologically committed teacher to provide a seriously distorted view of modern history.

There are clearly places where the balance is seriously flawed. In the study of oppressed and disadvantaged people there does not appear to be any scope for considering the candidates for the most oppressed people in modern history—those who suffered under Hitler, Stalin and Mao—but, of course there is room for those who suffered racism or sexism in Western democracies. Speaking of Mao, the unit on China oddly stops in 1976, when surely the events of 1978 deserve inclusion to provide some explanation of how China has changed so dramatically. There appears to be little on the vital role of technology and capitalism in raising living standards worldwide. Nor does there appear to be much scope for considering how Christianity defined Western Civilisation for so long, or finding out about the great cultural landmarks of that civilisation.

Similarly, with Australian history, key aspects of exceptionalism are ignored. The syllabus does not seem to focus on the fact that by the end of the nineteenth century, Australia was the most prosperous country on earth, or how the Australian Settlement defined twentieth century Australia. Votes for women are there, but there is nothing about the other ways in which Australia was a leader in other aspects of democratic reform such as extending the franchise, the secret ballot etc. However, of course, to really explain the significance of these reforms some knowledge of British History from the Magna Carta, via the revolutions of the seventeenth century to the Chartists would be required, and that is missing from both K-10 and 11-12 curricula. And on Australian politics, how can any syllabus justify including the formation of the ALP, but not of any other political party?

Another way in which Australia was a world leader in the nineteenth century was in the development of spectator sport. In a recent interview, an AFL coach was blissfully unaware that several

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Melbourne clubs were founded earlier than any major British or European soccer club, and a bit of teaching on that topic might have the bonus benefit of helping retain the attention of the noisy and tired teenagers on the Friday afternoon.

Just as it could do in K-10, Western Civilisation could provide the unifying theme for Years 11-12. While in some ways an improvement on the recent past of history teaching in this country, the draft national curriculum for the senior secondary years is really more a missed opportunity than a big step forward. Students will still leave Year 12 with less historical knowledge than they deserve to have gained from the time they have invested. In addition, there is a fair chance that the knowledge they have gained may have been ideologically slanted.

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- 1 Stuart Macintyre and Peter McPhee, 'Max Crawford's School of History' proceedings of a symposium held at the University of Melbourne, 14 December 1998
 - 2 Alexandra Fread, 'This really is no way to teach history, boys' *The Times*, 9 October 2006
 - 3 Greg Melleuish, 'The past is many places' *The Australian*, 17 October 2008
 - 4 Quoted in Michael Duffy, 'Past Masters' *Independent Monthly*, October 1993

3 Human rights and law in the national curriculum

Augusto Zimmermann

The Commonwealth has prepared a new national curriculum that is expected to be taught by teachers next year. The curriculum, covering English, maths, science and history, is available on the web for public consultation before all state and territory independent standards are abolished. It covers students from kindergarten to Year 10 and its introduction is justified on the basis that Australia needs one single curriculum for all students, rather than the plurality of arrangements that exist at the moment.

In history, the proposed curriculum has been designed by the historian Professor Stuart Macintyre. Focused heavily on the Aboriginal history of Australia, the national curriculum places Aboriginal and Asian ways of seeing the world into almost every subject.

However, the proposed curriculum fails to recognise the impact of Western Civilisation in shaping Australia's cultural, legal, economic and political development. Rather than explicitly acknowledging that this is predominantly a Western nation, in terms of language, legal and political institutions, and history, the document goes rather to define Australia in terms of a 'diversity of values and principles'. Accordingly, there is no mention in this curriculum of basic concepts such as separation of powers and the Westminster

system of government. It makes only a brief reference to parliament and none to some of the most significant events in Western history, including the Magna Carta and the English Bill of Rights.

The proposed curriculum, in the Year 10 syllabus, appears to claim that the struggle for human rights and freedoms would have started only with the creation of the United Nations. Indeed, there is not a single reference to the struggles for rights and freedoms prior to the advent of that international organisation, such as that which occurred during the 1688 Glorious Revolution, and afterwards by American revolutionaries in the eighteenth century. For these revolutionaries the whole purpose of acknowledging human rights was to protect the citizen against excessive government power. A constant refrain demonstrated by the enumeration of 'inalienable rights' was the preoccupation with ensuring the philosophical justification for civil resistance against arbitrary abuses of the government.

The proposed curriculum fails to acknowledge any of these facts. As such, the students will certainly not be able to consider that the UN's 1949 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is actually based on the Western legal tradition of rights and freedoms, in that our most fundamental rights are not regarded as government-conferred, but government-recognised. Law Professor Ngaire Naffine explains that 'the Universal Declaration reflects the natural law view that rights inhere naturally in human beings: rights are not legal constructs as the strict Legalists insist. They are not the product of law, they are not posited into being by law, but rather precede law and indwell in human beings as a natural property.'¹ Whatever we make of these historical arguments, any proper teaching of history would have to ask students to identify these philosophical underpinnings.

The proposed curriculum asks the students to consider the role of the United Nations in protecting human rights. One doubts

whether they will also learn that, ultimately, this international organisation is notoriously corrupt, and that it has developed a tradition of shamefully delaying to respond to human rights violations. Rather, United Nations Security Council countries such as China and Russia have constantly used their own veto power to protect human rights abusers. They have prevented this organisation from doing anything substantial about genocidal policies such as the one currently undertaken by the Islamic government of Sudan. Of course, this is only a mere repetition of what took place during the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, where more than 800,000 people were brutally assassinated. There the United Nations also stood by and allowed all that to happen.² Surely, any decent curriculum would require students to reflect on how the United Nations Security Council's inactions have cost the lives of many millions over the last six decades or so.

For many years the absolute failure of the United Nations to protect human rights was epitomised by its now infamous Commission on Human Rights (CHR). As the premier UN human rights body, the CHR was charged with holding 'public meetings to review the human rights performance of States, [developing] news standards, and [enhancing] human rights around the world'.³ And yet, not only has this commission completely failed to address some of the most appalling instances of human rights violation, but it was used by their very abusers to actually block any criticism.⁴ Indeed, countries with appalling human rights records such as China, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Zimbabwe were often elected and re-elected to that UN body, with Libya, another notorious human rights abuser, even serving as Chairman of this Commission in 2003.⁵

After a long period of negotiations and deliberations, the UN General Assembly decided to replace the CHR with a new Human Rights Council (HRC) in March 2006. The UN General Assembly

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then elected countries such as Algeria, China, Cuba, Russia, and Saudi Arabia as the first members of the HRC.⁶ In the 2010 election, Libya and six other human rights abusers (Angola, Malaysia, Thailand, Uganda, Mauritania, and Qatar) were also elected to the HRC. As a result, this new UN body has become just another platform for human rights abusers to deflect any criticism rather than being held to account.⁷

Surely, any proper study on 'the struggle for rights and freedoms' must address these facts. And yet, one wonders whether the Australian students will ever be informed about such things. In fact, as it currently stands, this proposed curriculum definitely does help them to comprehend that the United Nations, apart from some rare exceptions, has never fulfilled its original mandate of protecting and advancing human rights in the world. After all, the great majority of its member states have no interest in these 'struggles for rights and freedoms'.⁸ That more often than not the United Nations has completely failed to protect basic human rights is something that every student in Australia should know.

Despite all this extraordinary bias, Professor Macintyre has defended his national history curriculum as 'balanced and impartial'.⁹ Of course, anyone reading such a document will be in no doubt that this is not balanced, and that it teaches a politically-correct view of history and Australia's place in the world. 'Of course, the teaching of the history of Australia requires us to teach the history of the first Australians, our indigenous people', the then Education Minister Julia Gillard said.¹⁰ This is a good thing. But how about teaching also how the values of Western Civilisation, particularly individual rights and the rule of law, made Australia into one of the world's most peaceful, successful, tolerant, and prosperous democracies?

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- 1 Ngairé Naffine, *Law's Meaning of Life: Philosophy, Religion, Darwin and the Legal Person*, Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2009, p. 102. Elaborated under the auspices of Eleanor Roosevelt and her commission, when Roosevelt, an avowed Christian, summed up the attitude of the framers, she argued that this was 'based on the spiritual fact that man must have freedom in which to develop his full stature and through common effort to raise the level of human dignity' 'Statement by Mrs Franklin D Roosevelt', Department of State Bulletin (December 1948) 751, quoted by Ngairé Naffine, *Law's Meaning of Life: Philosophy, Religion, Darwin and the Legal Person*, Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2009, p. 103.
- 2 John R. Bolton, 'Does the United Nations Advance the Cause of Freedom?', Heritage Foundation, Lecture No.1047, September 6, 2007.
- 3 United Nations, 'UN in Brief: What the UN Does for Justice, Human Rights and International Law', September 1, 2006, available at: www.un.org/Overview/uninbrief/chapter3_humanrights.html
- 4 See Brett D. Schaefer, 'The United Nations Human Rights Council: Repeating Past Mistakes', Heritage Foundation, Lecture No.964, September 19, 2006, available at: <http://www.heritage.org/research/lecture/the-united-nations-human-rights-council-repeating-past-mistakes>
- 5 Reporters Without Borders; Reporters Without Borders Suspended for One Year from UN Commission on Human Rights. United Nations, 24 July 2003, available at: http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=7619
- 6 Only 24 out of the 47 Council members were ranked as 'free' by Freedom House in its 2006 worldwide survey of political rights and civil liberties.—Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2006: Selected Data from Freedom House's Annual Global Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties, September 1, 2006, available at: www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/pdf/Charts2006.pdf
- 7 Indeed, the hope that this new UN Human Rights Council could improve the disastrous record of this international organisation in holding human rights abusers to account has definitely not been fulfilled. During its very first year alone, the new UN Human Rights Council, among other things, failed to adopt a single resolution or decision condemning human rights abuses in 19 of the 20 most repressive human rights situations as identified by Freedom House in 2007, refused to censure the government of Sudan for its active role in the genocide in Darfur; passed nine one-sided resolutions strongly condemning Israel for 'violations of

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human rights and breaches of international humanitarian law' but ignored provocations by Hezbollah. See: Brett D. Schaefer, 'The United Nations Human Rights Council: Repeating Past Mistakes', Heritage Foundations, Lecture No.968, September 6, 2006. See also: Brett D. Schaefer, 'The United Nations Human Rights Council: A Disastrous First Year, Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder No.2038, June 1, 2007. See also: Freedom House, *The Worst of the Worst: The World's Most Repressive Societies, 2007* (New York: Freedom House, 2007)

- 8 In its 2010 worldwide survey, Freedom House ranked the majority of United Nations member states as not 'free' or 'partly free' in terms of political rights and civil liberties.—Freedom House, '2010 Freedom in the World: Combined Average Ratings—Independent Countries', available at: [http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw10/CombinedAverageRatings\(IndependentCountries\)FIW2010.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw10/CombinedAverageRatings(IndependentCountries)FIW2010.pdf)
- 9 Kevin Donnelly, 'Dumbed-down Australian History Curriculum', News Weekly, Melbourne, 1 May 2010, available at: http://www.newsweekly.com.au/articles/2010may01_s.html
- 10 Samantha Hawley and David Mark, 'Draft National Curriculum Unveiled', ABC News, March 1, 2010, available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/03/01/2832548.htm>

4 The national curriculum for English: between the idea and reality

Barry Spurr

The idea that there should be a national curriculum in Australia for the discipline of English, with an aspiration to uniformity of experience in its study, from kindergarten to Year 12—as opposed to the present situation of different curricula in each State—makes sense. But we have not ventured very far into the ‘Introduction’ to *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English* before we encounter this imperative:

In developing the national English curriculum those features of present-day Australia that matter to all Australians need to be considered—a view of our nation as culturally and linguistically diverse, democratic, evolving, with a history of accomplishments, and struggles, and a commitment to equity and openness.

What this platitudinous, philosophically-vacuous, evidentially-unsubstantiated feel-good rhapsody has to do with the development of a curriculum for the discipline of English is anybody’s guess. On what grounds (for instance) is it asserted that this grab bag of priorities ‘matter[s] to all Australians’? But, more importantly, how and why should it be the purpose of a curriculum in English to engage them?

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Before the details of the proposed national curriculum even begin to appear, it has been sabotaged. The academic study of English language and literature, which is the discipline of 'English' (the word, 'discipline', part of the oppressive discourse of the moribund patriarchy, is proscribed today), has been transmuted into a reflection and agent of social change, with reference to various meaningless *nostra* such as 'openness'. It is a lingo very familiar to anyone who has scrutinised syllabus documents in English (such as the NSW HSC curriculum) in recent decades. Alarming, this clunky material is written by (one supposes) senior professionals—in 'Education', at least, if not in 'English'—and addressed to the same. Such is the intellectual poverty of the discourse that now dominates consideration of syllabus and curriculum proposals in English studies, especially in the secondary sector—and, now, nationwide.

'By their fruits, ye shall know them'. For a generation, such ill-conceived conceptions of English have produced, even amongst the highest-achieving matriculants who elect, furthermore, to continue English studies at university, students who are scarcely literate, could not give an elementary account of the grammatical structure of a sentence (and do not know when or why they are writing ungrammatically), cannot punctuate to save themselves; are unconfident in oral expression and discussion; have next to no knowledge of literary or linguistic history, and (in literary studies, specifically) have been encouraged to view all texts through the prism of their own juvenile, inevitably unformed experience, with reference to various ideologically-approved abstractions such as 'change'. Description and assessment of prescribed texts must be undertaken by stretching them on the Procrustean bed of such pre-ordained concepts, with their value-added implications.

In teaching undergraduates in English these days, far too much time is spent undoing the damage that has been done at school and introducing them to what should have been taught there: how to

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write correctly, and to think and argue logically and intelligently about texts, in the texts' contexts, rather than within the student's personal context or that of ephemeral and parochial contemporaneity, or some approved ideological concept. I am talking about the most gifted and committed products of state systems which this national curriculum, so it appears, will perpetuate and standardise across the country. Never, in my third of a century of encountering students from high school English study, have they been so inadequately prepared for English as a university subject or so embittered in reflection on the mess of pottage which has been served up to them in the name of 'English' at school. What is happening (or not happening) for those in the school English classroom of less focused and talented ability in the subject—the vast majority—is awful to contemplate.

We are told that the 'national English curriculum will begin with accessible, appropriate and engaging texts related to young students' daily lives'.¹ Such vocabulary is cranked out effortlessly and superficially soothingly, until you give it a moment's scrutiny. What, for example, does 'appropriate' mean; by what measure is it going to be determined, and by whom? One would be interested to learn of some examples of 'inappropriate' material and the standards by which it is excluded. Some of the most wonderful writing in English has nothing, in any obvious sense, to do with 'young students' daily lives' and is valued by them precisely because it doesn't. These are texts which stimulate the imagination and take us to other worlds, beyond our experience.

It is rather more than appropriate, indeed it is essential, for any curriculum in English that is remotely respectable, intellectually and pedagogically, to include a study of the stories of the Bible (and in the language of the Authorised Version), at various points of increasing scope and detail through a child's school career in English. Any reading of literature in English without at least an introduction

to and acquaintance with this text proceeds in ignorance of the foundational document of English language and literature from the Early Modern period until at least the 1950s. Not only is the Bible not mentioned anywhere in the national curriculum papers, you could just imagine the outcry if it were suggested that even modest selections from it should be mandated for study.

In the 'Literature' section, it is ambitiously declared that the 'national English curriculum will develop in all students an awareness of, interest in, and respect for the literary traditions and expressions of other nations in the Asia-Pacific region.'

This is supposed to be a curriculum designed for the study of English, with all that entails, historically and culturally—and particularly in terms of Australia's linguistic and literary origins in the language and culture of England and the British Isles, at large (however much those origins and that influence are now regretted and regarded as something to be ashamed of and discarded). What is insistently affirmed here is that students studying what continues, inconveniently, to be called 'English' in Australia, should be introduced to the literary traditions of such as the Philippines. Why? These ideas are promulgated as if they were self-evident truths and attainable outcomes. If one had world enough and time, perhaps, they could be justified, in some rarefied postgraduate setting, once English language and literature had been mastered (a lifetime's quest in itself).

The curriculum, in these clauses and their demands, would make students run before they can even crawl. In an already too-crowded school curriculum, in the time available for the study of English, this elaboration and multiplication separates the discipline from its acknowledged sources (a sufficiently formidable body of language and literature in itself)—deliberately, of course, so that those sources can be de-canonised and their authority undermined. How can the place of Australia's literary tradition be understood

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without knowledge of the older tradition of English literature which nurtured it and which, in various ways, it has developed, adapted and subverted?

A simple example may be taken from the title of Patrick White's masterpiece, *The Tree of Man*. White has borrowed this from the poem, 'On Wenlock Edge', by A.E. Housman, the English classical scholar. Various themes and imagery of White's text resonate with Housman's poetry at large, as do aspects of the two men's lives and beliefs, and this indebtedness is signaled in the novel's title. Reading the novel without the context of Housman, is to read it imperfectly. Then, Tim Winton's prose is imbued with the language and imagery of the Bible, very familiar to him from an evangelical upbringing. To read his work without some knowledge of that text is to read ignorantly. Such examples could be multiplied a thousandfold in Australian literature. But Patrick White, our greatest novelist and Nobel laureate, makes no appearance in the suggested text lists of the new Australian national curriculum, nor does Tim Winton.

The curriculum document's strategy of obfuscation mandated by a catalogue of imperatives is deliberately designed to shore up the now-longstanding disconnection of English from its disciplinary moorings and continue to recruit it to the service of politically-correct cultural studies, as indicated by the reference in clause 2.2 to 'struggles' which 'matter to all Australians' and with which English must, somehow or other, engage. Which 'struggles', precisely, are being dimly alluded to? Not (one suspects) the struggle (and intellectual excitement, which it eventually produces) to come to terms with the history of the English language and of English literature and at least a selection of its seminal texts in close study and analysis—which would be struggles worth considering in this context and the mastery of which could actually contribute something worthwhile to our generally degenerating culture in its global (not merely Asian-Pacific) context.

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The now time-honoured, mind-numbing pap of such documents leaves fundamental questions of this kind unanswered. What passes today for educational theory and thought has been recently denounced as the 'asphyxiating ... post-modern stupor in education' in an editorial on the educational revolution which the national curriculum is supposed to be facilitating (when it is simply offering more of the same).² It is taken for granted, here, that an English curriculum should be at the service of social and cultural preoccupations and, of course, that the 'right' response to these concerns will be assumed, in whatever half-baked form they are served up in the classroom.

Reviewing the curriculum, the Australian Council of TESOL Associations commends the English component for its emphasis on 'developing ... sociocultural understanding'.³ I would want to be able to commend it for its aspiration to teaching students the discipline of English language and literature.

As the jargon proliferates, we are then told that 'the curriculum needs to be developed with a futures orientation.'

Initially reading this, you might think that it must be an approving reference to trading on the Stock Exchange, that wicked instrument of capitalist greed. But, no, of course not. It is the current cant for referring to what was once regarded, in the singular, as the future. Singularity challenges the post-modern mind as it requires definition. Pluralities are 'in'. 'Learnings' is a favourite one; 'understandings' is another. These asinine multipliers are designed to diminish and obscure—'futures', like 'learnings' meaning to suggest that there is not one future, or one learning, or any fixed point of reference at all; let alone, a discipline, but a wondrous, endless array of possibilities. 'My future and my learning are different from yours, and equally valid because they are mine' is part of the spirit of this nonsense. 'Everybody has won, and all must have prizes', as a master of absurdity expressed it.⁴

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The affectation is of liberality of thought, through the multiplication of varieties. In fact, in implicitly stigmatising any precise outcome—this or that future goal for a curriculum (developing an acquaintance, for example, with the several periods of English poetry, from the Renaissance, without which any reading of poetry in English from any age is being conducted in a vacuum of ignorance) and this or that learning undertaken if one may be said to have studied English to matriculation (grammar, etymology, essay structure, referencing and annotation, and so on)—such prescriptions are as proscriptive as any canonical orthodoxy. And they have the added disadvantage, when an academic discipline such as English is under consideration, of being pedagogically and intellectually worthless. An empty generosity is proposed, bloated with ramifying detail and long on windy rhetoric, an obesity of the mind: short on nourishing, intellectually-bracing substance. It is the educational equivalent of fast food.

Apart from the vagueness of the plurality of ‘futures’, why should this orientation be mandated for the curriculum in English, specifically, at all? English, as a discipline and a language and a literature, has a long past, like the profound human experiences it embodies and celebrates, and can only be understood in the context of that past. A powerful argument can be advanced for the study of English language and literature (particularly when it is being maturely conducted, in school education, in the senior years of high school) in terms of its historical settings and its reflections and expressions of the past, in its various periods. This is especially necessary when the study of modern European history is in such radical decline, as it has been for more than a generation, in schools.

The ‘historical sense’ is vital for any informed reading of literature and understanding of the development of language. Many students now come to the university lacking even a rudimentary appreciation of what historical development might mean and its

impact on reading and writing, or the humble recognition that other ages did not interpret the world as we did and—*mirabile dictu*—may even have something to teach our splendid contemporary Western culture and its alluring ‘futures’ about what is of value in human life, individually and collectively. But the authors of these imperatives want to discard any past orientation, the foundations and history of the discipline, because everything about the past of a discipline, as of society, with its tendency to being authoritative and canonical, is oppressive. All must be ‘oriented’ to the brave new world of infinite polysemy of ‘futures’, ‘openness’ and new ‘learnings’. Moreover, the sheer hard work of interesting students in these daunting matters of mastery of the discipline can be neatly dispensed with on these facile principles.

‘Weasel words’ in which, as George Orwell wrote, ‘every... phrase anaesthetises a portion of one’s brain’, punctuate the document, as phrase upon phrase sends the philosophical (or the ordinary commonsensical) mind reeling.⁵ ‘Young Australians’ developing identities’ are amongst those concerns ‘for which the English curriculum takes a major responsibility’. Why? Does Physics, for example, take such a responsibility?⁶ What (if anything) does such a phrase mean? How does—and why should—a curriculum in English take into account young peoples’ (allegedly) developing identities? What are the implications for this in practical, classroom-teaching and syllabus-content terms?

In a brilliant essay, ‘Youth Culture’s Lament: Pop culture’s noise and glamour try in vain to fill a gaping void’, English philosopher Roger Scruton laments the impact on young people’s so-called identities, individually and communally, of the destruction of ‘high culture’ (as he is brave enough to call it in a Western world where junk culture, the degeneration of a debased popular culture, is the only ‘culture’ that is not rebuked as ‘elitist’). The young have been betrayed by their elders who have failed to sustain the values of

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civilisation and educate them in its traditions, preferring, instead, to affirm the ‘gaping void’ of modern youth’s cultural domain:

The high culture of our civilization was a vivid reminder that youth is not enough, that we become fully human only in time ... Our high culture aimed to capture the attention of its adepts: it addressed the most intense of human interests and required a reverential silence if its message was to be absorbed. This is true of the picture gallery and the concert hall; it is also true of the written and the spoken word.⁷

And that high cultural ‘written and spoken word’ is accessed through the discipline of English language and literature, wherein the study of time-honoured, seminal texts, with accompanying historically-based language study, should take its prominent place in any English curriculum worthy of the name.

In the lists of suggested texts we see, baldly, the dismantling of the high culture of English literature, in its most important component, the study of poetry. There are four lists, for the different levels and kinds of English study proposed (Essential English, English, English as an Additional Language, Literature). In all of these, there are just three poets—Blake, Keats and Dickinson—prior to the twentieth century and most of the poets suggested are twentieth-century Australians, although the greatest of these, Les Murray, is notable for his absence; as is the most important and influential of all twentieth-century poets (and poet-critics) writing in English, T.S. Eliot.

In reviewing text lists in Year 12 syllabi for a generation, I have never encountered such an impoverished menu of poets suggested for study. The whole brilliant, wondrous world of poetry in English, from the sixteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century, has been eliminated. Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, Jonson, Herbert, Milton, Marvell, Dryden, Pope, Gray (for example) are

nowhere to be seen, and while there are Blake, Keats and Dickinson from the entire nineteenth century, their presence highlights the absence of the greater Wordsworth, Coleridge and Tennyson. In the twentieth century, so many great names are absent that the list would be endless. This is cultural philistinism, indeed barbarism on a grand scale—the dismantling and degeneration of a culture. It is the equivalent of studying Greek without Homer, Latin without Virgil, Italian without Dante, German without Goethe. There is room in this curriculum, in the ‘Multimodal/digital’ unit, for something called ‘Poetry: The Dead Billy Collins Animated Poem’, yet if you were to suggest that Milton must be studied too, you would be lambasted (as I have been, when I made this suggestion elsewhere) as a ‘dinosaur’.

‘Between the idea / and the reality’, wrote Eliot in *The Hollow Men*, ‘falls the shadow’—his metaphor, of biblical provenance, for death. The good idea (and ideal) of a national curriculum in English has been aborted in the reality of the curriculum documents, which would kill off the discipline and replace it with vapid theoretical aspirations and selections of texts, determined, not by literary value and significance, as testified by the ages and the sages, but by a series of ideologically-approved principles derived from the dim discourse of cultural and educational studies.

What must be recognised, finally, is that all of this talk of the national curriculum, of pursuing the ‘education revolution’ and the ongoing debate about what should and should not be in the Australian school curriculum is so much whistling in the wind as long as there are not teachers (with an equal representation of both sexes) of the highest academic attainments going into our school system, at all levels, with not only outstanding tertiary qualifications in real disciplines (beyond ‘Education’), but with a dedicated vocation for teaching. This is never going to happen, in any significant degree, while the pay and conditions of teachers—given the

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crucial importance of their role in any enlightened society—are as out of kilter with that high competence and inspiration as they are, and where the esteem in which the profession is held is so low as it currently is. In a country, such as contemporary Australia, in which most of the people regard watching other people playing sport as the most rewarding of life's pastimes and in which a has-been rock singer is appointed the federal minister for schools and youth at the same time as the Ministry of Education is abolished, the socio-cultural conditions for this radical reappraisal and revaluation of the importance of education and of its providers, the teachers, and especially of English, which should be its cornerstone, are not propitious.

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- 1 Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2010, *Shape of the Australian Curriculum; English*, Clause 5.3.4, available at: http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/Australian_Curriculum_-_English.pdf
 - 2 'Now to take the education revolution to a new stage', *The Australian*, 18 August, 2010, 13.
 - 3 'A love of literature', *Education Review*, August 2010, 15.
 - 4 Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, Chapter III.
 - 5 'Weasel Words' is Don Watson's phrase, from his books *Death Sentence* and *Watson's Dictionary of Weasel Words* where the title refers to the murdering of thought by such as the obfuscating jargon of the modern-day thought-police and educational ward-bosses. The phrase from Orwell comes from his 'Politics and the English Language' (1946) where he argues that misuse and manipulation of language is the sign of flawed thought. It is worth noting that both Watson and Orwell are of 'the Left'.
 - 6 The science curriculum is also being severely criticised. Margaret Watts, the president of the Science Teachers' Association said that the national science curriculum for students 'did not fulfil basic requirements and should not be released'. Anna Patty, 'New Curriculum too hard, sci-

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- ence teacher claim', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11-12 September, 2010, available at: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/orwell46.htm>
- 7 Roger Scruton, 'Youth Culture's Lament', *City Journal*, Autumn, 1998. Available at http://www.city-journal.org/html/8_4_youth_cultures.html.

5 Religion, Christianity and curriculum

David Daintree

The draft national curriculum for history opened an exciting prospect. Here was a chance, I thought, to defend the honour of Christianity amidst the cut and thrust of educational theory, pitting myself against the intricate arguments of those who would deny, or at least downplay, the greatness of the influence of Christianity in the unravelling of the great events of the ages.

Yet the compilers of the draft curriculum have chosen the simplest strategy of all: deliberate, pointed, tendentious and outrageous silence.

In its 20 pages, the draft Ancient history curriculum mentions religion twice. There is no reference to Christianity anywhere in the document. Now that is perhaps understandable in Ancient history (if one is prepared to leave unexamined authorities such as Josephus, Tacitus and Pliny the Younger in the old world and Gibbon in the new), so let us move on.

The draft Modern history curriculum is 30 pages long. Surely, here we may expect that Christianity and the other major monotheistic faiths will enjoy a higher profile? Not so. Christianity is simply never mentioned—at least not explicitly. The word religion appears twice, the first occurrence in the context of Indian history, and the second in the context of Asian and African decolonisation. However,

the precise phrase in which it is found, discloses, I think, the agenda of the compilers: 'the effect of racism, religion and European cultures'. Christianity is never mentioned, but here, surely, is an oblique mention of Christianity and a judgement upon it at the same time. This is an example of tendentious silence.

Let us now look at the K-10 document on history. Here are 29 pages, five references to religion, one mention of Christendom, and one use of the word Christian. All but two of the seven appear in a cluster in the section on the Middle Ages. Beyond that, there is nothing.

Roger Scruton took the word 'oikophobia' and gave it a new meaning. Oikophobia literally means fear of one's own home, but Scruton nicely adapted it to mean 'the repudiation of inheritance and home', the contemptuous rejection of everything that one's parents and grandparents respected, fed by the vanity of a new and supposedly enlightened way of looking at the world.¹ W.S. Gilbert must have had people of that mentality in mind when he spoke of

...the idiot who praises, with enthusiastic tone,
All centuries but this, and every country but his own.²

Nowhere is oikophobia more rampant than in matters of religion, and the name of Christianity is particularly odious to those oikophobes for whom the hope of a multinational and God-free world stands in the place of the dream of a promised land. For such people, Christianity has brought more misery than relief, more gloom than joy, more war than peace, more hatred than love.

And—let us be honest—they can produce evidence to support all those opinions. They can point to the massacres of the Crusades, the use of torture and connivance at capital punishment by the Inquisition, the ruthless eradication of the Albigensians, the Thirty Years War, apparent indifference (in some places) to slavery, the treatment of the Jews throughout European history, the fighting in

Northern Ireland, the brutish behaviour of certain clergy towards children. Rightly can critics of the Church list abuses such as these as examples of the failure of the rule of love.

But against that—if they are honest—they will have to acknowledge that all the evil deeds done by men professing themselves Christian have been counter-balanced by all the good things that have been done in the name of Christ. The systematic care of the poor, the relief of prisoners, the establishment of hospitals, schools and universities, the self-sacrificing saintliness of many clergy, active resistance to the bullying of civil authorities, the amelioration and ultimately the prohibition of slavery, and the improvement of the lot of women (yes, that too)—all these things have emerged within a society that has been predominantly Christian. Even today, in the shadow land of the post-Christian era, there are many who insist on calling themselves Christians still who have abandoned the faith but maintain a firm commitment to what they rightly regard as the ‘Christian ethic’. Amnesty International is a good example of precisely that: though founded by a committed Christian, it is now a secular organisation driven and motivated by that same ethic.

Those of us who live in the twenty-first century, inheritors as we are of two millennia of Christian thinking, can easily forget that concepts such as modesty, humility, mercy, pity, love for one’s neighbour and humanity in warfare have not always held such a potent place in the human temperament. You won’t find them in Homer, though perhaps you’ll see the dawning of a new and more enlightened sense of humanity and of the brotherhood of man in Sophocles, Virgil, Cicero and Seneca. But once Christianity bursts through into our world and sheds a new kind of light upon it, a light which has affected our vision even if we cannot see or will not acknowledge it, we hear St Paul (whose very name raises the hackles of many modern men and women who have never read him) proclaim an astonishing idea. Had anybody before his time

ever soared as high as to make a claim like this?

In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female³

Yet the draft curriculum in history avoids all of this. It is almost completely silent on the whole matter of Christianity. It chooses to ignore a world-wide religious movement that has marched with civilisation for two thousand years, infusing it with a morality that has shaped the thinking of the whole of society, including the minds of those who lost the faith but clung to the moral view. This omission is not just careless, it is staggeringly inept and profoundly dishonest. Such a silence may be justifiable on some vague ground of political correctness, but it is dreadful history.

Let us begin by looking more closely at the one real ball the national curriculum has bowled: ‘the effect of racism, religion and European cultures’. It is perfectly clear from the context—African and Asian decolonisation—that the religion referred to here is none other than Christianity.

In some circles it has long been axiomatic that Christian missionaries have been guilty of a wide range of offences against humanity, of which I offer the following selection:

- introducing a sense of guilt into innocent sexual relationships
- heartlessly suppressing native cultures of great richness and value
- abusing, sexually and otherwise, the women and children of ‘heathen’ tribes
- imposing a chauvinistic sense of European superiority
- introducing alcoholism, venereal disease and other destructive maladies
- expelling kindly pagan religions and replacing them with something harsher and less forgiving
- spreading warfare and hatred instead of love

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- planning, attempting or even practising genocide
- promoting the view that coloured people are not fully human

To anybody who takes the trouble to inform himself about the true nature of missionary activity, these charges range from the partially plausible to the utterly absurd: there may be an element of truth in some such claims, but taken together they constitute a colossal and preposterous fabrication. Yet there is a significant number of people in the world today who believe all this and who are seriously angry about it.

How does one answer them? Not, in the scope of this chapter, by producing all the contrary evidence, all the instances of good men and women sacrificing their lives and comforts to bring peace and love, nurturing and tenderness, kindness and healing, to societies that were riven village from village by a dark and superstitious paganism. Nor by homing in on the many failures of paganism—the maiming and abuse of women and children, ritual sacrifice, the mechanistic morality of taboos—for to do that will inevitably invoke charges of racism.

The only answer is to insist upon free and open argument. The history curriculum, if it is to have any credibility at all, must deal firmly with the issues it now timidly hints at, not leaving it to teachers to flesh out the arguments, but boldly stating the case for and against Christian missions.

What would an honest and inclusive curriculum look like? Firstly, it would recognise the enormous influence of religion in the world since late antiquity. Moreover, being an Australian curriculum, intended for students in Australian schools, it would not pretend to the possibly laudable but utterly impossible task of giving all the world's cultures and religions equal coverage, but will acknowledge that, like it or loath it, Christianity has been the dominant faith and moral mentor for our nation since white settlement began, that many indigenous people have embraced it too,

and that the more recent waves of settlers—including Muslims and Hindus—have scarcely been unaffected by it.

The curriculum would take all this into consideration and it will prescribe a teaching framework in which the credibility of Christianity and its proponents can be assessed. It would fairly ask the question, presenting the arguments for and against, whether Lucretius was right when he said ‘*Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*’ (‘religion has been responsible for so much evil’).⁴

It would be good to see our society facing honestly up to the implications of its own heritage, mature enough to recognise the good alongside the bad, and wise enough to see that amidst the imperfections of any human organisation there is much to take pride in. But a secular society cannot reasonably be expected to progress past the point of according justice to both sides of an argument.

For believers, though, the reality is that the incarnation of Christ was and is the greatest event in human history, and that this greatness is not simply a matter of degree, but it is a kind of an absolute and ultimate truth by which alone the significance of all other events must be judged. If we are wrong, then as St Paul said ‘We are of all men most to be pitied’ but that is an option that we do not contemplate.⁵ Many unbelievers cannot but be angered by such assurance, and we should not be surprised or disappointed by a savage response to such claims. Even numerous elements within the nominal Christian community can react with as much anger to expressions of confident faith.

The Azaria Chamberlain case was emblematic of the rift between faithful and believing religious communities and the secular majority. Lindy Chamberlain was not, by some accounts, a particularly personable or easy woman to deal with. She was apparently not warm or empathetic in manner. But her great offence, an offence which juries and a majority of the general public could neither forgive nor understand, was her faith in the resurrection and

eternal life of her baby. Her calm acceptance of her loss was to many observers proof if not of her guilt then certainly of her insanity. It is said that in pre-Glasnost Russia, Christian and other religious believers were sometimes committed to psychiatric institutions. If this take on the Chamberlain case is right, much the same has happened here. Richard Dawkins and others are now saying openly what many have long believed: Christianity in the world's eyes is perverted lunacy.

But putting to one side the lamentable truth that Christianity and 'the World' will never fully understand each other, at least in terms of the spiritual realities which to us are life itself and to others are mere folly, let us return to our primary demand, that a reasonable and acceptable national curriculum should mandate the measured and proportionate teaching of the history of religion in the material world, and that an ideal Australian curriculum would be particularly strong on its treatment of Christianity.

That curriculum would boldly examine the sorts of offences alleged against missionaries as set out above. No true believer would object to the refining fire of academic enquiry being applied to the charges, for we know that the facts can bear examination. If evil deeds are exposed they will rightly be reviled by decent men and women, but we must insist that much good was done and that that too deserves due recognition.

Take for example the first of the charges I proposed above: that the missionaries introduced a sense of sexual shame and guilt to innocent and simple children of nature. Writing before the last World War, Evelyn Waugh wrote as follows in one of his travel diaries:

That is another complaint of propagandists, that the Christian missionaries teach the natives to be ashamed of their bodies and, by distributing petticoats, deprive them of all the moral and hygienic advantages of nudism. There may be some truth in this legend somewhere. I have read accounts of

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the activities of American Baptists in the South Seas that seem to support it, but as far as my personal experience goes I have found the reverse to be true. I have talked to Dutch, French, German and English missionaries, Protestant and Catholic, in widely different parts of the world and found them either indifferent or mildly opposed to the clothing of their converts. If they give them clothes, it is because they know it is the most welcome present they can offer.⁶

Allowing for his cantankerous and provocative style, note that Waugh concedes the point that some missionaries probably were over-zealous in the matter of clothing their charges, but it is abundantly clear, even allowing for the author's typical hyperbole, that there is another side to the story that an honest enquirer should scrutinise before coming to any conclusion.

Now most of us would probably agree that the matter of clothing unsophisticated native peoples is a relatively light-weight issue compared to the next example I shall introduce, the painful, delicate, sensitive case of the Stolen Generations. Here we are dealing with the rawest of wounds, and any position one takes will cause distress, either to the indigenous communities themselves or (and here I move beyond the allowed limits of political correctness) to that small army of missionaries, social workers, nurses and magistrates who can no longer defend themselves (for they are almost all dead), who strove to protect Aboriginal children according to the accepted principles of their day—flawed though some of those principles might have been—and whose memory is now covered in shame.

Without due discernment the Australian government apologised on behalf of the Australian people for every instance in which an indigenous child was taken into care during that targeted period. I have no doubt that some of these acts were unjust and wrong, and, in so far as they were, I condemn them too. But equally I do not doubt that many were justifiable then on grounds of humanity and

decency, and would be justifiable now were we so bold as to examine them. The Australian government has been guilty of doing some very bad—and very wicked—history.

St. Augustine, looking back on his conversion years later in the *Confessions*, accuses himself of having railed against Christianity without taking the trouble to understand it, of having imputed to it beliefs that believers never held:

I was ashamed that for so many years I had yelped, not against the Catholic faith, but against fables of human imagination. I had in fact been rash and wicked in condemning, as an accuser, things that I ought to have taught myself to understand.⁷

Christians should not shrink from the possibility of a curriculum that does what Augustine failed to do, that faces them fair and square, encourages enquiry and asks questions fearlessly.

Never before in their history have Christians been faced with indifference. They have adapted successfully to persecution, sometimes life-threatening, sometimes less immediately severe; they have become used to hatred and revulsion; they have withstood mockery and satire. But the Church even now is struggling to understand how to cope with perhaps the most subtly dangerous threat of all—silent apathy.

Many of those most bitterly opposed to Christianity have perhaps sensed that we are on the ropes, utterly nonplussed by this apathy, and are determined to continue to wage that kind of war of attrition in the hope that we shall simply and finally melt away. My suspicion is that some of the framers of the curriculum are driven by such a plan, perhaps consciously, perhaps by instinct.

Many other people of good will, non- or anti-Christian in their orientation, are willing enough to face us on the field of debate and controversy. Such people may indeed admire and respect aspects of Christianity, while rejecting all or most of its metaphysical te-

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nets. In many such men and women, I think I can see—excuse the presumption—the characteristics of the unconverted Augustine: all too often they bark against a faith they have not troubled (or have not been able, through the scandal of our failings and our own poor example) to understand.

Clearly it is the best interest of the Christian religion boldly and confidently to face the challenge of those who would with equal confidence contest the veracity and integrity of our claims. To take the battle vigorously to the critic's gates, to emerge thus from the slough of indifference that now threatens to swallow us, is our best hope.

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- 1 Roger Scruton, *A Political Philosophy*, 2007, (London: Continuum International Publishing Group) pp. 23-5
 - 2 W.S. Gilbert, *The Mikado*, Act I
 - 3 Galatians 3:28 New International Version
 - 4 Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, I, 101
 - 5 1 Corinthians 15:14-19
 - 6 Evelyn Waugh, *Ninety-Two Days: a Journey in Guiana and Brazil*, 1934, 1985 (London: Penguin), p. 123
 - 7 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 6:3 (translated DD)

6 Capitalism in the curriculum

Julie Novak

Historical narratives are typically dominated by portrayals of politics—the realm of collective action either within or between nation states. These include the actions of prominent statesmen in decision making and leadership roles, and their contributions toward events such as territorial conquests, wars, revolutions and other assorted upheavals.

As important as these political events may be, it may be plausibly argued that economic phenomena—such as the emergence of private markets, the role of entrepreneurship and impacts of technological development—have exerted a relatively greater impact on Australian and global events in the past.

In the Australian context, at least, this is a view shared by no less an authority than historian Geoffrey Blainey, who stated in a recent book that ‘I think economic events, especially technology, were more influential than political events.’¹

While the level of material living standards enjoyed today is clearly affected by political institutions and social norms, it is imperative that school history curricula appropriately incorporate the unquestioned contribution of economic changes to events that have affected human welfare.

The proposed draft modern history curriculum chiefly relates

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to ‘studies of significant events, movements, individuals and groups that have shaped nation states and the modern world’ from the late eighteenth century to the end of the twentieth century, with a view to develop ‘students’ understanding of the relationship between past actions and present day consequences and how the modern past is represented and debated.’²

Within this, the curriculum is structured into four broad units. Unit 1 is designed as a compulsory introductory unit to the study of Modern history, while the ‘more conceptually and cognitively demanding’ Units 2 (events, movements, individuals and groups) and 3 (revolution, conflict and peace) are choices available for schools and students. Unit 4, with a focus on Australia’s relationship with Asia, is a compulsory unit.

In addition, there are three cross-curriculum perspectives imposed upon the history curriculum:

- indigenous history and culture: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s histories, their struggles for recognition and equality, and the legacy of those struggles
- sustainability: the importance of environmental history, including the demographic and environmental consequences of growth
- Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia: the history of Australian engagement with Asia, and the ways in which the relationship has changed over time.

The extent to which economic issues are considered in the draft curriculum varies across the Units.

The draft curriculum suggests case studies be undertaken in Unit 1, allowing for an intensive investigation by students into selected historical events and issues.

One of these concerns ‘the nature of industry and technology at the turn of the twentieth century (e.g. forms of production,

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urbanisation, technological innovations, public health and living standards) and the distribution of benefits.’

An alternative Unit 1 case study asks students to investigate ‘the ideas that shaped the modern era in the late nineteenth century (e.g. Darwinism, liberalism, socialism, capitalism, nationalism)’, while another considers the economic and other consequences of World War I.

The Unit 2 elective on nation states and national identity provides an option to investigate the development of Australian identity from the late nineteenth century. Some of the issues during the interwar period to be explored include:

- party politics and competing policies on protection, arbitration, and White Australia
- the events and consequences of the Great Depression
- the responses of government, including ‘the susso’ (largely in kind sustenance welfare provisions), capital works programs and the Premiers’ Plan
- the experiences of the unemployed, business owners, farmers, charity workers, women and children.

Consideration is also given to some economic issues related to World War II, including wartime government controls such as the control of the labour force and rationing.

The elective on recognition and equality considers a range of economic questions affecting particular groups within society, such as women and indigenous people. It also refers to the economic effect of sanctions in ending South African apartheid, and improvements in the socio-economic status of African Americans as a consequence of the 1960s US civil rights movement.

The Unit 3 elective on international tensions and conflicts encompasses issues such as the growing economic weakness of the Soviet economy during the Cold War and the 1980s Glasnost and

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Perestroika reform movements, ‘economic exploitation’ of Asian and African countries during the colonial era, post colonial issues concerning economic development, poverty and unemployment, and the impact of globalisation.

The final Unit 3 elective on revolutionary movements in the US, France, Russia and China considers the economic circumstances which contributed to political upheaval in each country. In addition, the draft curriculum focuses on ‘the changes and continuities that the revolution brought about in the structure of government, the organisation of society, and its values, and the distribution of wealth and conditions of everyday life.’

The final unit of the draft curriculum—on the relationship between Australia and Asian nations during the twentieth century—considers the role of economic ties with Indonesia, Vietnam, China and Japan as well as specific issues such as the post-war economic redevelopment of Japan and Vietnam, and the consequences of China’s increasing economic openness.

The draft curriculum places a heavy emphasis on political events and social movements at the expense of economic developments that have immeasurably improved living standards.

Arguably the central concern of economic history is to illuminate for the student the nature of, and factors that have contributed to, economic development as experienced over the long time span of human existence.

An examination of historical estimates of the amount of goods and services produced (adjusted for population size) shows an explosion of economic growth worldwide since the Industrial Revolution during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. On a global basis, GDP per capita rose slowly over time to \$870 in 1870 to later jump to a record \$7,614 in 2008.

Decomposing this data by region, it can be seen that Western Europe and her colonial offshoots (Australia, Canada, New Zealand,

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United States) experienced a substantial increase in income per person. From 1870 to 2008 GDP per capita in Western Europe rose by a factor of 11, while the Western offshoots experienced an even stronger increase in GDP per capita (by a factor of 13).

As described by economic historian Gregory Clark, the Industrial Revolution in these regions ‘changed forever the possibilities for material consumption,’ for the benefit of those living today.³ For Australia, as part of the family of Western offshoots, the rise in the level of output per person has been no less spectacular. GDP per capita increased from \$3,273 in 1870 to \$25,301 in 2008, an eight-fold increase.

Indeed, from 1860 to the early 1880s, Australia was the richest country in the world on an income per head basis. As stated by economist Wolfgang Kasper, ‘[d]uring the 19th century, this huge, harsh continent was developed by amazingly few people with great energy and speed thanks to ample, though not easily extracted, natural resources, the influx of entrepreneurs, workers, capital and—very importantly—the liberal institutions of Victorian Britain.’⁴

The significant degree of wealth creation exhibited by Western economies is a legacy of the contribution of the market mechanism that enables individuals to engage and interact with each other to produce, exchange and consume resources.

In particular, the contributions of enterprising individuals, such as Henry Ford (motor car) and Bill Gates (computing), in introducing innovations and new technologies into the market system over successive generations has allowed ‘this generation of human beings ... [to have] ... access to more calories, watts, lumen hours, square feet, gigabytes, megahertz, light years, nanometers, bushels per acre, miles per gallon, food miles, air miles, and of course dollars than any that went before.’⁵

Despite continuing debate within the economics profession,

there appears to be an emerging sense of understanding that the quality of policy institutions supporting market activities, by millions of individuals engaging in voluntary exchange, are central ingredients in determining the observed historic economic patterns of ever greater prosperity.

This view of the importance of institutions is neatly summarised by James D. Gwartney, Randall G. Holcombe, and Robert A. Lawson:

secure property rights, enforcement of contracts, and the operation of a court system to resolve disputes provide the foundation for the smooth operation of a market economy ... A stable monetary regime can also facilitate the operation of markets and business planning across time periods. In addition, government provision of some public goods, such as roads and national defense to protect the citizenry from intrusions by foreigners, may also promote economic growth.⁶

Some economists and philosophers have also emphasised the importance of social attitudes and cultural norms in supporting markets, entrepreneurship and technological development. For example, Deirdre McCloskey recently stated that more approving attitudes towards business enterprises and wealth creation has been a key determinant of significantly improved economic conditions from the Enlightenment era onwards.⁷

By contrast, the draft modern history curriculum appears to view Australian and world history primarily through the lens of the state, with frequently destabilising relations between governments, non-government institutions, and social and ethnic groups, all shaping political outcomes.

The extent to which economic issues are recognised as playing a contribution to historical developments appears to be largely negative, with actions by governments, liberation movements or

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'freedom fighters' needed to ameliorate the worst outcomes of inherently destabilising or exploitative markets.

The terms 'market' or 'entrepreneur' do not appear in the draft curriculum, while issues such as 'economic exploitation' of Western colonies, the 'distribution of benefits' of industrial and technological changes, and government responses to the Great Depression are canvassed.

Such framing of economic events appears to be conducive to a negative portrayal of the historical contribution of markets to modern life, which in turn is consistent with widely held anti-market biases, as described by economist Bryan Caplan, that tend to undersell the beneficial outcomes associated with markets.⁸

The development of voluntary exchange relations through free markets tends to promote peace between trading nations. This is due to the commercial obligation of entrepreneurs to serve other people (customers), the role of commerce cultivating interdependence between trading partners, and the need for market participants to possess at least a minimum level of cross-cultural communication and understanding.

The British statesman Richard Cobden stated in the nineteenth century that '[t]he progress of freedom depends more upon the maintenance of peace and the spread of commerce and the diffusion of education than upon the labour of Cabinets and Foreign Offices.'⁹

British pacifist Norman Angell suggested that economic development not only renders war to be unprofitable, but globalisation makes it easier to acquire goods and services through mutually beneficial trade rather than by pillage and conquest.¹⁰

Recent empirical studies have confirmed the existence of a 'peace dividend' associated with freer markets over the long run.

Erich Weede summarises a host of studies illustrating that democracies rarely fight each other, and that bilateral trade reduces

the risk of war between countries.¹¹ This may be due to factors such as the desire to avoid the disruptive effects of war on trade. Erik A. Gartzke found that the least economically free states were about 14 times as conflict prone as the most free.¹² Similar findings have been made elsewhere.¹³

The 2005 edition of the Human Security Report reported a 40 per cent reduction in the number of armed conflicts around the world since the end of the Cold War. There had also been a marked reduction in the number of battle-related deaths per armed conflict (from 38,000 in 1950 to 600 in 2002).¹⁴

With its emphasis on conflicts and tensions, including in the Middle East, as a source of historical discontinuities, the draft curriculum overlooks the positive contribution of the gradual spread of free markets during the latter part of the twentieth century, including through globalisation, in reducing incentives to engage in wars and other armed conflicts.

The draft curriculum is likely to promote a Keynesian interpretation of the origins, nature and impact of the Great Depression.

The emergence of the global financial crisis in late 2008 revived notions, drawn from popular perceptions of the Great Depression, that market economies are inherently destabilising and therefore government policy responses including fiscal stimulus are necessary to restore private sector activity.

It is apparent from the draft curriculum that the Australian experience of the Great Depression may be used to again portray markets as fundamentally unstable by their nature. The draft refers to the ‘events and consequences’ of the Depression, including government responses to increase expenditure on welfare and public works as well as coverage of the experiences of the unemployed, business owners, farmers, charity workers, women and children.

While the draft does refer to the role of the 1931 Premiers’ Plan—which included the reduction of all ‘adjustable’ government

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spending by 20 per cent on 1929-30 levels; reductions in interest rates; and scope for devaluation of the dollar to reduce costs—modern Australian political rhetoric has tended to characterise this response to the Great Depression as negligible at best, and disastrous at worst.

However Australia enjoyed a relatively speedy recovery from the Great Depression due to the implementation of the Premiers' Plan (as well as the removal of the gold standard).¹⁵ While the national economic transition from the Great Depression was far from painless, our economic performance led to no less a figure than John Maynard Keynes to write in the *Melbourne Herald* in 1932 that the Plan 'saved the economic structure of Australia.'

An understanding of economic trends and events as they unfolded is indispensable for understanding the emergence of, and indeed the future prospects for, the Western world.

As noted above, the unprecedented wealth generation throughout modern history is the by-product of millions of transacting individuals striving to attain value for customers, complemented by institutions guaranteeing private property rights and according market participants the freedom and respect to display their entrepreneurial flair.

A history curriculum which accords insufficient attention to our accumulated economic achievements, and its underpinning sources, risks the prospect of future Australians being unable to appreciate their economic past, unable to comprehend the economy of today, and unable to capitalise on the exciting economic opportunities that lie ahead.

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