
Our dire need for moral education, and a possible way to provide in this need

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Abstract

South Africa, and several other countries around the globe seem increasingly to suffer from a breakdown in the moral behaviour of their people. The central theoretical argument of this paper is that this tendency could be somewhat assuaged by exposing the young people in school to a more concerted programme of moral values education. A toxic pedagogical approach, however, should not be allowed to get a foothold in the education system via such a moral education programme. After examining possible alternatives to toxic ethical/moral education, it is suggested that a purposeful moral education programme be designed for South African schools, but that a Biblically grounded programme be specifically developed for, and presented in Christian independent schools. Elements of the latter programme might be useful also in secular (state, public) schools.

Opsomming

Suid-Afrika, soos soveel ander lande ter wêreld, skyn te worstel met die probleem van morele verval in die bevolking. Die kernbetoog van dié artikel is dat hierdie probleem tot 'n mate teengewerk kan word deur die jongmense op skool al bloot te stel aan 'n meer doelgerigte en pasgemaakte morele waardes-program. In die proses moet voorkom word dat 'n nadelige pedagogiese benadering in die program vastrapplek kry. Na ontleding van moontlike alternatiewe tot toksiese etiese en morele opvoeding en onderwys word aan die hand gedoen dat 'n doelgerigte morele onderwysprogram vir alle Suid-Afrikaanse skole ontwerp word, maar dat 'n Bybelbegronde morele onderwysprogram spesiaal voorberei word vir, en aangebied word in Christelike onafhanklike skole. Sekere dele van laasgenoemde program kan bes moontlik ook bruikbaar wees in sekulêre (staat-, openbare) skole.

1. Introduction, problem statement and purpose

Recent events in South Africa have underscored the fact that the young citizens of this country, and of other countries similarly afflicted, such as Venezuela and Honduras (World Population Review, 2022), are in dire need of a dedicated programme of moral education in their schools. In the week of 12 to 16 July 2021, South Africa and its people staggered under not only the onslaught of an intensified third wave of the COVID-19-pandemic, but also under a groundswell of looting and destruction of property, in part allegedly ascribable to political support of a previous President of South Africa who began a jail term for contempt of the highest court in the country, the Constitutional Court. 354 people lost their lives during these violent clashes, many killed by vigilante groups protecting their properties against the looting, breaking and entry, and arson committed by the mob (Afrika, Sokupe & Gumbi, 2021). In some circles, the looting, arson and destruction of property in the course of these events were ascribed to poverty as well (Prince, 2022:1), but commentators such as Van Niekerk (2021: 8) are in doubt whether poverty and hunger could be the reason for the looting of liquor stores, and the destruction of motorcar and bike dealers' stock and of an herbicide factory (Van Niekerk, 2021:8). More than 3 200 people were arrested for causing the unrest, a number of them for instigating the violence, some for opportunistic looting and others for committing crimes such as

arson, grievous bodily harm and murder (The World News, 2022).

At the same time, the Zondo Commission was hearing evidence of widespread corruption, crime, and state capture in South Africa, and an inquest was being held to determine whether anyone could be held culpably responsible for the deaths of 144 former Life-Esidumeni patients, and for the disappearance of many others. Ordinary South Africans are being discomfited on a daily basis by faction fighting in the ruling party, taxi violence on the streets (drive-by killings of taxi and bus drivers, turf battles and random violence), and, according to Louw-Carstens (2022:1), by careless, drunk and even reckless driving. Traffic rules are routinely flouted, and many lives lost in the process. Towards the end of July 2021, Transnet reported that the computer network managing the business at South African harbours had been hacked. Every day, around 116 women are raped, and around 50 people are murdered in South Africa. Four out of every ten women suffer from domestic violence. According to Ndlela (2020), South Africa's general crime rate seems to suggest that its people lack moral integrity, and are in dire need of moral education (Ndlela, 2020). Amnesty International (2021, no page number) summarised as follows the situation in which South Africa found itself in 2021:

... past acts of violence, including the killing of foreign nationals during xenophobic violence have gone unpunished, leading to an entrenched culture of impunity. South African authorities cannot pretend to be surprised by the proportions this violence has reached. Entrenched impunity for past acts of violence has undermined the rule of law and resulted in a vicious cycle of violence.

South Africa as a country suffers from deep ethnic differences (Johnson, 2019:66, 189), socio-economic disparities, and a high unemployment rate (Central Intelligence Agency, 2022), a lack of social capital and cohesiveness that finds expression in infrastructural damage to schools (Damons, 2021), and a lack of safety, also in schools (Bhana, Singh & Msibi, 2021).

The moral problems that South Africa currently have to deal with seems to run much deeper than political strife, support of an ex-president of the country, hunger, uncaring behaviour towards others, crime or opportunism. According to a Pastoral Letter of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (2016: 1), racism and racial divisions, the social trauma resulting from the "violence of centuries of colonialism and the violent decades of apartheid", the link between race, power and privilege, and economic inequalities in society could be seen as underlying reasons for the unrest that we have experienced in 2021. South Africa is not the only country suffering from such a breakdown in ethics and morality. Countries such as Venezuela, Papua New

Guinea, Afghanistan, Honduras, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, El Salvador, Brazil and Jamaica are known for their exorbitant rates of crime, violence and lack of civil safety (World Population Review, 2022). American ethicist Ben Mitchell (2013:15) concluded a decade ago: “We live in a tragically flawed world where we are confronted daily with moral failures”. Another American ethicist, Susan Liautaud (2021:2) recently concurred: “Our world is one in which ethical errors (and successes) are amplified. Misconduct spreads more widely and unpredictably, embeds itself more stubbornly, and entangles more individuals and institutions than ever before”. The violence, general crime and immoral behaviour as briefly outlined above cause one to suspect that (a) those responsible for such deeds have not developed consciences that would have made them think twice before committing the deeds, and (b) if (a) is correct, they had not received adequate moral education and schooling to help their consciences to develop optimally.

The purpose of this paper is to outline a possible way forward for South Africans to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be a morally integrated and responsible person, someone able to care for, and feel compassion for others and their plight. (I composed the paper well aware of the fact that not many of those who actually need knowledge of and insight into the principles outlined and discussed in this paper will be in a position to read it; I am hoping, nevertheless, that influential people who do read this paper will take the responsibility to convey its fundamental gist to those in their surroundings who might benefit from gaining insight into these principles).

2. Clarification of the concept “moral education”

At root, the good is known by a kind of intuition (Baggini, 2020:161). Olthuis’s (2012:4/7) view dovetails with Baggini’s when he contends that people by nature possess an “intuitive sensorium”; all their senses are involved in finding their way through the world, operating beneath their conscious awareness, as it were. This is part of the process that he refers to as “world-viewing”. The conscience, according to Vorster (2017:163), is that inner spiritual function of the human being by means of which he or she – while standing before God – knows together with God and their own inner spirit that something ought to be done in a particular manner, with no alternative. It is the faculty that God has given human beings for determining good and evil. In the end (see the discussion of the “eye” below), conscience must be informed by God’s revelation, lest it be ignorant, immature and even “seared” (Frame,

2008:122; 1 Tim. 4:2).

Dependence on an unformed and un(der)developed “intuitive sensorium” is not sufficient for peaceful co-existence in the modern world. Proper moral and values education is required to hone this sensorium. Moral education ideally leads to the development of a person’s conscience, that is the knowledge and realisation within the inner self that a deed is essentially good or bad. The metaphor of the eye in Matthew 6:22 seems to be relevant here. Jesus uses the metaphor of the eye as the lamp of the body to show that one’s personal orientation could affect your calling to be light in this world. The “evil eye” (Hebrew for “being jealous, diseased or defective”) is focused on earthly values such as envy and covetousness. The “good eye” (the simple, uncompounded eye – the perfect eye) refers to the generous sharing that only those can enjoy who are totally devoted to God. “Darkness” in this sense is a metaphor for sin and unhappiness, and light for a joyous and virtuous life. Jesus extended the meaning of the metaphor of the sound eye by pointing out that people should pursue the supreme moral good with the “good eye”, that is with simplicity of intention and purity of affection (Clarke, 1967:779). Good deeds imply a life of discipleship. Believers follow Jesus; they are the “great light”, the light of the world (Mt. 5:14). This means that they have been made responsible for the well-being of the entire created order, including that of their fellow human beings (Gangte, 2018:55). The development of the “good eye” and the assuming of responsibility to become and be the “light of the world” do not come naturally. A young person needs dedicated guidance (education, that is forming, guiding and equipping) to develop both.

The development of the intuition, and thereby the development of moral conscience occurs in a moral context: at parental knee, in school, in church, and in national celebrations. The mastering of virtues presupposes a society (Frame, 2008: 62-63). School experience, as Cox, Basopé, Castillo, Miranda and Bonhomme (2014: 8) correctly remarked, is the place where young people are explicitly prepared for communal living, with others close (in the form of bonding social capital) and afar (in the form of bridging social capital). What the school should attempt to convey to the upcoming generation is the society’s vision of itself (both the real, and the desired or the imagined), and hence also about the envisaged communal living and its constituent notions and values. Moral and values education, as Kopp and Mandl (2018:124) concluded, promotes peaceful living.

Before committing a deed, a person should be able to come to the most adequate decision according to his or her conscience. It is, therefore, necessary to carefully attend to what good (and bad), as well as right (and

wrong) are (Lioutaud, 2021:223). Proper moral education helps the young person to develop good moral vision (Baggini, 2020:162); it contributes to the young people's wellbeing and to social cohesion (Nguyen, 2018:12).

3. Moral education in South African schools

The criminal deeds perpetrated in South Africa during July 2021, and all the other moral shortcomings mentioned in the first section of this paper could arguably – and in part – be blamed on the inadequacy of the moral and values education currently on offer in South African schools – with its resultant negative effect on conscience development (Vorster, 2017:162). Other factors might, of course, also play a role in the current display of immoral behaviour in South Africa. Ndlela (2020) writes in this regard:

Why does South Africa have consistently high levels of crime? There is no single satisfactory answer to this question, but rather a number of explanations which help to explain the high levels of crime plaguing the country. Such explanations consider the impact on levels of serious crime of the country's ongoing political and socio-economic transition, the connection between the country's violent past and contemporary criminal behavior, the impact of the proliferation of firearms, the growth in organized crime, changes in the demographic composition of the country, and the consequences of a poorly performing criminal justice system.

A perusal of the subject Life Orientation in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2011) reveals that insufficient attention is currently being paid to the matter of moral and values education. The aim of Life Orientation as a subject raises high hopes that learners will be morally equipped for their lives later in the real world after school:

.... study of the self in relation to others and to society. It addresses skills, knowledge, and value about the self, the environment, responsible citizenship, a healthy and productive life, social engagement, recreation and physical activity, careers and career choices. These include opportunities to engage in the development and practice of a variety of life skills to solve problems, to make informed decisions and choices and to take appropriate actions to live meaningfully and successfully in a rapidly changing society. It not only focuses on knowledge, but also emphasizes the importance of the application of skills and values in real-life situations, participation in physical activity, community organisations and initiatives (Department of Basic Education, 2011, section 7).

The Life Orientation curriculum for Grades 10 to 12, that is for learners in the last phase of their school life, consists of six study areas which are all

relevant to the moral development of the young people: development of the self in society, social and environmental responsibility, democracy and human rights, careers and career choices, study skills, and physical education. In the overview of the topics covered by these six study areas, the words “moral”, “morality”, “moral development” or “conscience” do not appear, however. The word “ethics” appears once, in the sub-area “Democracy and human rights” for Grade 10. Although many of the aspects discussed in the various topics arguably pertain to morality and moral development, no specific mention is made of moral or conscience development or principled thinking as such. Some of the aspects with strong ethical-moral under- and overtones are: power relations, the value of participation, decision-making, achievement of life goals, relations and their influence on wellbeing, gender roles, healthy lifestyle choices, conflict resolution, social issues, responsibility to participate in civic life, environmental issues, community service, safe and healthy living, a personal mission statement for life, diversity, discrimination, human rights and violence, ethical traditions, biases and unfair practices in sport, democracy, religions and belief systems in a diverse society, responsible citizenship, ideologies, beliefs and worldviews, opportunities, lifelong learning, personal expectations, the demands of the world of work, commitment to decision-taking, plans for life after school, time management, goal setting, and safety issues.

The omission of a section or sections that deal pertinently with the moral development and awareness (conscience development; the attainment of a moral compass) could possibly be ascribed to a background assumption on the part of the curriculum designers, namely that the teachers responsible for teaching Life Orientation in schools already possessed the required knowledge of, and insight into morality, ethics, moral development and conscience formation, and hence required no further special guidelines in this regard. The same background assumption might have been at work in the compilation of the book *Life Orientation for South African Teachers* (Nel, 2018) based on the curriculum. Like the curriculum, the book does not contain a special section or a chapter to help Life Orientation teachers gain insight into what moral development as such entails. It mentions ethics and morality only in passing. In the *Foreword* to Nel (2018:vi) for instance, RJ Balfour states: “...it is to the development of the modern citizen – as a creative, aware, innovative, responsible, ethical, well-adjusted ... and complete human being – that this book aspires”. Two pages in the book are devoted to a discussion of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development (Jordaan, 2018:88-89), and some ideas are shared for a code of conduct regarding (inter-)personal development (Nel & Payne-Van Staden, 2018:210).

Understandably, because of the religious diversity of the learners and of the teaching corps in South African schools, neither the Curriculum (Department of Basic Education, 2011) nor Nel (2018) were written from a mainstream religious and life- and worldview orientation. To have done so, would have made both less useful for the South African public (state) school context. Both, therefore, were written from a secular-humanist perspective. This sounds a call to the independent (private) school sector in South Africa to add a number of perspectives and corrections from their respective mainstream religious vantage points¹. The fact that these two publications might have been rooted in the background assumption that a secular-humanistic approach, and not an obviously religious (for instance, Christian / Biblical) norm and value system, will best serve the purpose of schools in the public domain does not mean, however, that they are religiously and life-conceptually neutral. According to Van der Walt (2007:228, 234), secularism can be regarded as an alternative religion and/or worldview in its own right. The curriculum (Department of Basic Education, 2011) and the book edited by Nel (2018) both embody a set of basic pre-theoretical (philosophical, religious, life- and worldview) and theoretical (scientific) assumptions (Strauss, 2009: 59). In essence, this means that the young people of South Africa, particularly those in the public school system, are being taught their life skills and orientation from a specific life-view perspective, in this case, a secular humanistic perspective.

4. The foundations of moral education – the risks associated with toxic religion

The last statement in the previous section gives us cause to reflect on the foundational structure of the moral education that we would wish learners to be exposed to. One option that educators have in the past resorted to is an ultra-conservative form of (Christian) religion referred to as “toxic religion”. A computer search based on the key words “toxic religion” yielded around 12.5 million hits. According to the raft of sources available on this topic, the meaning of the term “toxic religion” can range from an ultra-conservative religious stance, “bad” theology, harmful religion, religious beliefs that hurt the believer, spiritual abuse of the believer, to religious addiction. The essential features of this type of religion can be observed in Jesus’s condemnation thereof (Mt. 23: 1-36; 25:39-16:12; Mark 8: 10-26; Luke 11: 37-63; 18:9-

1 Most of the publications referred to in this paper provide such perspectives from a reformed/reformational/Scriptural/Biblical perspective. Educationists operating on the basis of other mainstream religions also proffer similar corrections. Nuraan Davids’ (2018) ethical enunciation of Islamic philosophy of education is an example of such an alternative view.

14). This form of religion could be fundamentalistic, formalistic, hypocritical, biblicistic, absolutist, indoctrinating or self-centred, or even all of these combined. In order not to complicate the discussion hereafter by venturing into a technical discussion of this phenomenon, I will restrict myself to how Potgieter (2015) and Human and Liebenberg (2001) described it, and why they viewed it as an unacceptable foundation for the moral education of the young. (A detailed discussion and critique of toxic religion can be found in Van der Walt [2021:19-30]).

In his paper, Potgieter (2015), and in theirs, Human and Liebenberg (2001) take up arms against toxic education. Toxic education is a form of education that in principle cannot be regarded as reformatory (Biblical, Scriptural) because, as Potgieter (2015) as well as Human and Liebenberg (2001) have shown, it is a form of education centred on absolutes, and is opted for by educators that “do not know how to live with the life of uncertainty, (and hence) believe that the way to curb relativism is by improving the rules” (Human & Liebenberg, 2001:23). Potgieter (2015: 189-192) gives a graphic portrayal of such deterministic, absolutist, apodictic, authoritarian, dominant and indoctrinating education. It is, according to him, education with the “central theme of authoritarianism, educational abandonment, moral decay, ethical isolation and eventual normative distortion”, education intent on controlling “not only the (learners’) learnedly (and subsequent public) conduct, but also their minds and thoughts”. It is education that is morally restrictive and deprives young people from the freedom to develop their own moral insights.

He describes the ensuing indoctrination of the young person in the following terms:

Nescient followers in every successive generation – precisely because of the way in which they understand and apply ethics and morals in their own lives – wilfully and uncritically seem to surrender to what they believe to be the ultimate and untouchable promise of all ethics and morals: ‘If you adhere to us, you are guaranteed to live a meaningful, flourishing and fulfilling life’. [Education or schooling practice is regarded] as a kind of disciplined, skilful, and cooperative obedience to a particular normative system, or systems, as brought about and conceptualised by people in that community (Potgieter, 2015:190).

The reformatory answer to the question on which world-view moral education should be based is that it should be firmly rooted in a balanced, non-toxic reformatory pedagogical vantage point, and that decisions about the moral education of young people should be taken by people possessing the required competence for doing so (Van der Zee, 2011:73). Such people

(educators) conform to informal criteria such as their relatively greater maturity, their longer life-experience, their moral integrity, their ability to demonstrate an attitude of caring and compassion with the young (Koonce, 2018: 105; Noddings, 2003: 24), their having the interests of young people and of the surrounding society at heart, their more mature judgement of conditions and character, their membership of a non-toxic religious community, their ability to set a good example, and their possession of a balanced world- and lifeview. They also comply with formal criteria, such as relevant training as educators, their professional authority (as educators — teachers, and as curriculum designers) (cf. Bisschoff & Van der Kooy, 2020:5), and the required knowledge, skills and experience to be regarded as competent educators (Dyer, 2002:8-10). Such educators are intent on showing, with the Biblical light at their disposal (see discussion of the “eye as the light of the body” above), the young people the best moral way ahead, while all the time respecting the freedom of the young to pick their own moral way into the future. Competent educators steer clear of the toxic education that Potgieter (2015) as well as Human and Liebenberg (2001) caution against. The phrase “moral *indoctrination* of young people” should not appear in the educator’s moral vocabulary.

5. How the excesses of toxic moral education can be circumvented

It is no wonder that people become disillusioned by the results of the toxic moral education described in the previous section. According to Potgieter (2015: 195), examples of strife and violence in South Africa and elsewhere have motivated many teachers, parents, pupils and education administrators to distrust the promises and claims (regarding the “good life”) made by those who sit behind the normative systems that they have been educated to support and defend. He (Potgieter, 2015:199-200) suggests that to avoid such moral education (indoctrination of the young person) we should resort to a pedagogy of discernment, that is, a pedagogy that would help a person to discern between acceptable morals and the nature of the normative systems in which they are embedded.

To discern is to see or recognize clearly, to recognize or perceive differences. Discernment, as in a pedagogy of discernment, presupposes the presence and subsequent application of a norm structure on the basis of which choices and decisions can be made. Since young people (children) are still immature in varying degrees and have no innate store of norms or state of

awareness (intuition) regarding what is morally good or bad, right or wrong, they unavoidably depend on the guidance of more mature people in their surroundings such as their educators at home, in school and in church, for guidance towards insight (discernment) into the norms that might impact on real life situations. In doing so, their educators help them gain access to the real world, and finally to appear and function in that world as mature subjects (Pols, 2012:120).

Reformatory education furthermore places a high premium on the freedom of the individual, including that of a young person or a child (John 8:36; Gal 5:1-15; 1 Pet 2:16). Interventions that impair or curb the freedom of the young person are per definition toxic and hence not worthy of the name "education". The pedagogical guidance extended to the young person should therefore always be open-ended in that it allows the latter to freely act upon the guidance and advice, and to be willing to bear the consequences of his or her decision-making. Such well-meant guidance should continue for as long as the young person seems to be in need of it or requests it, but should gradually taper off as the young person matures, and enters the world as a discerning, responsible and morally integrated adult.

Both an ethics of caring and compassion (Phil 2:4), and of virtues (Gal 5:22) play key roles in the course of this guidance. The educator concerns him- or herself with the young person because of caring and compassion, and in the process exemplifies the virtues that the young person might consider adopting as he or she progresses on the path to maturity (Mitchell, 2013: 58-59). A significant part of virtue education, as part of moral education, is to help the young person to reflect the "attitude of the image of Christ" (Vorster, 2017: 160; Ph. 2:5). In this process, the intuitive sensorium of young people will hopefully develop to the extent that they will develop a mature conscience as their moral compass.

6. Coming full circle

I stated at the end of Section 1 above that the purpose of this paper is to outline a possible way forward for South Africans to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be a morally integrated and responsible person, someone able to care for, and feel compassion for others and their plight. In this section, we come full circle by proffering a possible way forward. The outline thereof commences, on the basis of the preceding discussion, with what could be regarded as a few morally undesirable options open to educators, and then moves on to a more acceptable alternative.

Let us first consider a few undesirable options.

First, the immorality prevailing in South Africa and other countries similarly afflicted by violence and immoral behaviour should not be compounded by imposing any brand of toxic moral education on their young people. Toxic moral education, a form of indoctrination, leads to moral slavery (Bower, 2005:279), and does not equip the younger generation to take their own decisions and make their own choices about how they wish to conduct themselves. Another problem with toxic moral education is that it tends to perpetuate itself by coercing upcoming generations into adopting the toxic principles and values of the previous generation. My first conclusion, therefore, is that the present generation of educators should examine their own background assumptions, their values and principles, and also their method of helping the younger generation to understand how to conduct themselves in ways that attest to their freedom as responsible agents, and to the advantage of their communities. They have to be guided and assisted, as Liautaud (2021:163) puts it, to “achieve their most authentic self in work and life”. Genuineness, trustworthiness, dependability and being true to oneself are important aspects of personal authenticity and integrity. They have to learn how to do framing, that is, how to use their own priority set of principles as a guide for their decisions that signal to the world how they operate (Liautaud, 2021:86).

Second, morality in South Africa and elsewhere will gain very little from a *laissez faire* attitude, that is, the attitude that unless we can really turn the tide of immorality, we should rather do nothing. This attitude leads to carelessness and indifference. Grayling’s (2010: 19) advice in this regard is for everyone to do their “moral utmost”, to make every effort to improve the situation.

Third, South Africa and other similarly morally afflicted societies will not gain much from an attitude of *aporia* in response to toxic moral education. Human and Liebenberg (2001) opted for an attitude of *aporia* as their response to the form of toxic education that they objected to. The literal meaning of *aporia* is “an irresolvable, internal contradiction or logical disjunction” in a text or an argument (Hughes-Warrington, 2012:317). It is, as Hughes-Warrington (2012:317) concluded, “a deeply unsettling” attitude. Following Plato, Human and Liebenberg (2001:21-23) interpret *aporia* to mean “a moment of embarrassment, a moment of not knowing, a moment (of realising that one) does not know – literally, ... not to know the way forward – ... without a way.” As far as morality and ethics are concerned, they aver, the idea of *aporia* relates to the metaphor of life as a journey. Within this metaphor, according

to them, it follows that an *aporia* occurs when one no longer has a sense of moral direction. It happens every time someone has a difficult moral decision to make and there is no clear and definite way out.

Aporia, I would argue, is not a helpful mechanism to help South Africans and other morally afflicted societies out of the moral morass in which they currently find themselves. They are in need of well-planned moral education in their schools to help them formulate for themselves the principles in terms of which they can signal to the world who they are as morally responsible individuals, and how they can be expected to respond to morally questionable situations.

Fourth, South Africa and its morally afflicted counterparts elsewhere in the world will also not benefit much from a relativistic attitude. Relativism comes down to regarding all knowledge and values to be historically conditioned and hence to be culturally and life-conceptually relative, and therefore that people should believe and live by whatever subjectively “feels right” for them. In doing so, they feel that they should refrain from seriously assessing and criticising anything that anybody else might have chosen to believe, feel or do. In the end, everything is relative, they say. Some moral beliefs may personally feel right, but no moral belief can rationally claim to be really true, because that implies criticising or discounting others’ moral beliefs (Mitchell, 2018:16). This attitude is not helpful for addressing the moral collapse of a society since it provides no firm basis for any particular conviction or direction by which to guide personal life. According to Naugle (2012:84), relativism can even be regarded as synonymous with antinomianism, the idea of being against or without law, of people who seek to live autonomously (to be their own law).

A more acceptable alternative ...

We could go on listing negative attitudes and approaches to the moral quandary that South Africa and other countries are currently struggling with but, as indicated, none of these approaches is really helpful to ameliorate the problem. Let us then, finally, turn to what could be helpful. One solution, as far as I can see at this junction in the history of South Africa, is to amend the Life Orientation curriculum (for the final three years of schooling) to create space for a condensed though impactful course in Moral Education. Without making the course too specialised or technical, it could cover important topics regarding our duty to comply with the principles of our national Constitution (command ethics), to caring and feeling compassion for others (ethics of care), to our moral duties to others and in the world (deontology), our duty to do justice to others (ethics of justice), our obligations to our own

and other communities in our country (ethics of community; social ethics), to how to be critical of the actions of others in a constructive manner (ethics of critique; cf. Rom 5:14), to the virtues that we should ideally display as mature and responsible citizens (virtue ethics), how we could contribute to a peaceful *modus vivendi* in our country (teleological ethics), how we should be prepared to reap what we have sown, live with the consequences of our decisions and choices (consequentialism), how we could contribute to our own happiness and also that of others (utilitarianism), and how we could deal with the challenges of particular situations (situationism).

It is not necessary to belabour the point that the list above is intended for teaching moral education in public (state) schools where discussions of all these ethical approaches from a particularistic religious standpoint such as a reformational perspective would not be allowed or be unwelcome due to the religious diversity of the learners and the teaching staff. Each of the branches of ethics mentioned in that list could, however, be more meaningful and impactful if teachers had been allowed to present them from a Scriptural (Biblical) viewpoint (cf. Diedericks, 2020). Command ethics, for instance, should not be restricted to the values encapsulated in the Constitution of the country but should ideally also include the Divine commands as encapsulated in the Bible as the inscripturated Word of God (2 Tim 3:16). Virtue ethics, to take another example, should ideally not be restricted to secular-humanistic values, but also those mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23. Each of the branches of ethics mentioned in the previous paragraph could be amplified in this manner (Rom 14:19; Col 3:16a). Teachers in independent or private Christian schools have the calling, duty and luxury of doing so. Christian teachers in public or state schools should, however, do whatever would be admissible in this regard in their particular schools. South African teachers have the freedom under the Constitution to adapt their teaching according to the ethos of the school they are working in.

7. A final word

The following mix of metaphors comes to mind regarding the state of morality in South Africa and in many other parts of the world. Many of these countries are already on a moral slippery slope; it might be too late to intervene effectively, to turn the tide of immorality. It might be too late to intensify the process of moral sandbagging; the dyke has already broken in many places, and the waters of immorality, violence and crime are already pouring

through. We nevertheless should do whatever is in our power to reinvigorate the process of moral regeneration in South Africa. That is our moral duty as Christian educators.

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