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# CACE

entre for applied Christian ethics

## NEWSLETTER

Vol 9 No 1 May 2004

# Ethics as Apologetics

## Editorial

This is my last say (apart from our Homosexuality Conference on June 26) as CACE Director before I move to the Director's position of Macquarie Christian Studies Institute (MCSI). MCSI offers courses and conferences in Christian worldview, spirituality and professional development for undergrad and postgrad credit at Macquarie University and cross-credit elsewhere. It is an innovative continuation, development and specialization of the work I've been doing at CACE. I'm really looking forward to a new challenge but sad to leave Ridley and CACE.

It has been an exciting time since I took on the role as CACE Director in mid-1997 that has, I believe, been graced by God. Our aims of raising the level of ethical literacy among and drawing upon the ethical expertise of Christian professionals and church members and raising the level of awareness of Christian ethical perspectives in the public arena and media have been largely fulfilled. I want to thank Graham Cole for his vision in setting up CACE, and my colleague Lindsay Wilson and former colleague Andrew Sloane as faculty fellows of CACE and Andrew Malone for computer help in getting *BriefCACE* out. The CACE Board have been enthusiastic supporters in

the last two years. The plan is to continue CACE with a part-time appointment being advertised. Your continued supportive attendance, prayer and giving is commended for CACE, especially with the loss of General Synod seed funding for *BriefCACE* (see the form for giving on back page). The task of engaging our society ethically is an enormous one that needs all hands to the pump.

One of the big issues in church and society at the moment is that of homosexuality—marriage and ordination. Our conference on this hot potato will be my (but not CACE's) swansong and is advertised on the back page. Our content for this issue is appropriately a review of CACE's philosophy and practice based on an address I gave at an excellent CASE (note the 'S': Centre for Apologetic Scholarship and Education) conference on apologetics at the Uni of NSW in February which will be published next year with the conference proceedings. Thanks to Director Greg Clarke for permission to use.

Gordon Preece  
Director, CACE



# Ethics as Apologetics

Rev Dr Gordon Preece  
Director, CACE

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## Introduction: Ethics as Apologetics & Ridley's Centre for Applied Christian Ethics

Let me begin with a word about my title. Ethics is Apologetics in our more postmodern or 'most modern' times (David Tacey) by contrast with my more 'modern' days at Sydney University Evangelical Union in the 70s. Then the big issues were Paul E. Little's 'seven basic questions' from his *How to Give Away Your Faith*—including 'What about the heathen', 'Why do the innocent suffer?', 'How can miracles be possible?', 'Isn't the Bible full of errors?', 'Isn't Christian experience only psychological?' and 'Won't a good moral life get me to heaven?' Our apologetic texts were F. F. Bruce's *Are the NT Documents Reliable?* demonstrating the NT's historical reliability compared to other ancient texts or Josh McDowell's *Evidence Demanding a Verdict* proving the Bible's authority from its almost mathematical prophetic accuracy or Frank Morrison's *Who Moved the Stone* using legal proofs, as in a court-case, for the bodily resurrection of Jesus. These questions are not irrelevant today, particularly for the more modernist faculties—science, economics, engineering etc. Yet in the more postmodern humanities it seems to me the big questions are ethical ones, coming from more general postmodern presuppositions—either a milder perspectivalist approach—that's your socially and gender conditioned perspective—or a more vicious relativist view—there is and can be no truth towering above the linguistic power-plays of perspectives. Both see Christianity as discriminatory and violating the trend towards the democratising and equalising of all human and other relationships that Tony Blair's sociological guru Anthony Giddens depicts in *Runaway World* and that Peter Singer argues for in his antagonism to speciesism (i.e. a preference for humanity over other species). So Christianity is seen as discriminatory against and damaging to women, gays, Aborigines, non-western cultures, the environment, especially animals, the dying wanting euthanasia, Superman wanting a miraculous cure from embryonic stem cells, etc. (Much of this is ironically based on a rather absolutist and anachronistic, modernist, Whiggish, progressive reading of history.)

It was in this emerging postmodern context that Ridley's Centre for Applied Christian Ethics (CACE) was set up in 1996 as Ridley's face to the university (we have a residential university college), media, professions and world. CACE has largely addressed these kinds of ethical issues and their presuppositions as symptomatic of the postmodern search for spirituality and its common lapsing into idolatry. We've done so working from a biblical and broadly Kuyperian Reformed world-view and apologetic shared by Graham Cole, Andrew Sloane and myself. Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch Prime Minister at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was in some ways postmodern before postmodernity in demonstrating the non-value neutrality of every area of human knowledge and in its affirmation of a form of (creation-based) pluralism for different spheres of society—economics, art, the church, family etc. This is somewhat different to the broadly Princetonian Hodge-Warfield Scottish common sense evidentialist apologetics I was taught at EU and Moore College and practised in the 70s, but it's a friendly difference, remembering that it was B. B. Warfield who invited his friend Kuyper to give his famous Princeton Seminary Lectures on *What is Calvinism*.

CACE has engaged in ethics as apologetics in a non-partisan way through our own conferences and monthly ethical emails (*BriefCACE*) on such issues and everywhere we could get a hearing. We speak to and write for the Christian and non-Christian left or right, whether in *Zadok Perspectives*, evangelical and liberal Anglican, Baptist, and Uniting churches, *Arena* magazine and its conferences, the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), in *The Age*, *ABC* or *Herald Sun*. We've tried to evade the captivity to one particular public and aspect of media of many church ethical-social revolutionary (not revolutionary!) statements which have tended to literally apologise to that particular public (whether suburban family values advocates [burbos] on the part of fundamentalists or inner-city sexual expressivists or 'bobos' [bourgeoise bohemians] on the part of liberals). Sadly they both simultaneously alienate others (including many Christians, thus subverting our distinctive reconciling



polity by advocating particular, divisive, empirically debatable policies) and diminish the chances of those ‘others’ hearing the gospel as a gracious word. This applies to business people alienated by liberal-left churches or gays alienated by either real or apparent homophobia from some fundamentalists. We have sought to create a public space and discourse that cuts across the dividing lines between left and right without lapsing into a mediocre Anglican *via media*. The middle of the road is, after all, where there are lots of head-on collisions and dead animals.

CACE has practiced ethics as apologetics by firstly (changing the order of the title) following the method of the master-apologist Paul the Apostle at Athens in Acts 17. Second, we will examine how we applied this method in our book *Rethinking Peter Singer*, and thirdly we will look at how we used philosopher Mary Midgely’s thought to critique Singer.

## I. Paul (the Apostle)

By asking WWPD or ‘What Would Paul Do?’ from Acts 17 I hope to show the biblical basis for our approach. I have 3 C’s for what Paul does—Contextualisation, Connection, and Correction.

### 1. Contextualisation—*Know Your Idols*

Unlike Guy Sebastian, Paul is commonly seen as having failed his audition for Athenian Idol before the court of the Areopagus. Paul was alone in Athens, having just been chased out of Berea in Northern Greece. He was waiting there for his companions Timothy and Silas to catch up to him. But never one to let the grass grow under his feet as far as the gospel was concerned, he toured Athens, like we did on a recent Ridley Study Tour.

In v16 we’re told Paul was deeply moved or distressed as he saw their idols. Literally, in the Greek, he was in paroxysms. I think we’ve lost some of that. On the Ridley Study Tour we were sometimes like theological tourists. As we looked at the Temple of Zeus or Jupiter and admired the Parthenon or Temple of the Virgins and the fount of the western intellectual and democratic tradition and much that is good and beautiful, we were tempted to forget that much of it is founded on idolatry and injustice, especially slavery. But Paul doesn’t just dismiss the Greeks or destroy their monuments like the Taliban with the giant Buddhas. He studies them, he takes time to look around, he listens to and quotes their poets. He uses their rhetorical method, but he uses it, as we’ll see, to pull the rug out from under them. He shows the contradictions in their vaunted logic, the gaping cracks in their spiritual and intellectual foundations. He’s an

intellectual and spiritual iconoclast. He knows their idols, in order to blow them away.

In v18 Paul then dialogues or reasons in the synagogue and agora or marketplace with whoever passed by. The latter like Socrates had done. Here was a new Socrates, according to Luke, arguing with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who had subsidised teaching chairs in Athens. The materialist Epicureans put pleasure first, especially the pleasures of intellectual companionship, of tranquillity, free from passion and superstition, like the gods they made in their image, unmoved by the human plight. As Diogenes summed them up in 200AD ‘Nothing to fear in God, nothing to feel in death, good [pleasure] can be attained; Evil [pain] can be endured’. Sound familiar? At a crude popular level just read the *Epicure* section of the *Tuesday Age* to see how many Melbournians worship what they eat. At a therapeutic level its naturalism corresponds to ‘death guru’ Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’ five stages of death, ending in acceptance. Philosophically it also sounds a lot like the Australian philosopher Peter Singer’s naturalistic utilitarian credo.

The Stoics were pantheists and rationalists. God is the fiery spirit or rational principle running through the whole of nature worshipped in the temple of Thesion. They were a bit like Greek Greens. They were highly principled and ethical. They believed that when you die you just drop back into the ocean of divine being. Morally they believed in suicide. Again, there are analogies with Singer who wants to return us to pre-Christian pagan philosophy and its practices of suicide, euthanasia and infanticide that Christianity’s sanctity of life ethic ended.

Paul didn’t have much success with the philosophers. They wondered what this little sparrow picking up and dropping seeds, what this gossipier about foreign gods had to say. But they didn’t understand his strange talk about Jesus’ resurrection and thought he was talking about two new gods, maybe a male and female pair, Jesus and Anastasia (resurrection). Further, this description of Paul wasn’t just derogatory. It was dangerous. The charge of being a peddler of foreign or strange divinities made of Paul had led to the demise and death of Socrates.

Once again, par for the course in Acts (cf. 16:19, 18:17), Paul is arrested and taken, possibly to Mars Hill but more likely to a hall where the council of thirty (and possibly some philosophers v33) charged with keeping moral and spiritual order met. He’s probably not facing a full trial, yet, just an initial hearing. The majority are hardly noble truth seekers, they just want to check out anything that’s new, though some may be open. As such Paul’s speech is a great model for apologetics or defending the faith in a hostile and pluralistic environment where tolerance is totalitarian.



## 2. Connection—Finding Cultural and Spiritual Contact Points

The beginning of Paul's apology or defence lawyer's speech leads us to the *second point*—Connection. 'Only Connect' as novelist E. M. Forster says and David Claydon formerly of CMS and now the Lausanne Movement makes the title and main principle of his book on mission. It's the first principle of Greek rhetoric and, I'd argue, of Paul's apologetic. Establish *ethos*—some sense of shared authority, on common ground. Only then give *logos* or content, in this case correcting content, then conclude with *pathos*—a heartfelt appeal, in this case an indirect one. Paul is insinuating his way into their world of gods, before giving them the Word that it's God the Creator's world and that he's shown that by raising Jesus from the dead, who'll come back and judge the judges unless they repent and turn from idols to the living God (as the Thessalonians did according to 1 Thess 1:9–10).

In v22 Paul begins like a good Greek speechmaker with a benevolent introduction apparently praising their proverbial piety. That's a lesson for us in our volatile post 9/11 and 12/10 climate. A few days after September 11 I heard Paul Blackham of the evangelical bastion All Souls Langham Place (John Stott's former church) speak at Ridley on Acts 17. He emphasised Paul's passionate anger against idolatry and proceeded to say that Paul stood up at the Areopagus and said 'men of Athens I see you are very *superstitious*,' not the usual translation—very *religious*. And Blackham's first move when talking with Muslims is to talk about the Trinity. And he's also now defending a literal six-day creation. He's courageous—he confronts and corrects first. But untimely courage, courage in excess, is foolhardy.

The Greek term *deisidaimonesterous* used can mean both superstitious and religious—depending on context. The context is that Paul's up before the court of the Areopagus who will decide whether this new religion is a valid religion or a strange and foreign superstition itself. No doubt Paul sees them as superstitious or idolatrous in v16. But is that his first word to them? If it was it would be his *only* word—he wouldn't get a hearing. Like Blackham and the confrontational approach he'd only confirm the post 9/11 critique by Peter Singer and others who want to burn George W. Bush and any idea of burning bushes or revelational religions—a valid critique of Bush and idolatrous patriotism, but not of revelational religion. Their secularism has no room for a truly public pluralism.

Having apparently praised their piety, Paul goes on in v28 to quote their own poets to make a contact point for the biblical view of creation, to establish a temporary foothold, note not a permanent foundation, for a biblical worldview. He doesn't quote the law and prophetic 'proofs' as with Jews or as second century apologist Justin Martyr and

the modern fundamentalist apologist Josh McDowell does with Gentiles or six day creationists do with their wooden literalism. Paul doesn't begin with the Bible to the Gentiles in Acts 17, he starts thin with general revelation and then thickens up theologically. What he says is the tip of an invisible iceberg of biblical theology or worldview—from creation to resurrection with which he reframes their poets insights just as the wisdom literature reframes pagan wisdom. He begins with creation in v24, something we evangelicals with our poor creation theology have been uncomfortable with. Paul would be quoting our ecological thinkers, Singer, Bob Brown's Greens and others looking for points of connection. He would certainly quote the songs of Midnight Oil's Peter Garrett, who is also a Christian and ecological activist. When I talk about sexuality and homosexuality I talk about sexual ecology—a more postmodern way of talking about the natural or created order. And I'm glad gay activist Gabriel Rutello has done the same in his book *Sexual Ecology*. We have to connect—not to pursue short-term relevance, but because this is the nature of created reality.

Paul quotes poets and songwriters. If he were here today he would not only quote Les Murray the great Australian Christian poet, but perhaps Les Murray one of our great multicultural and pop cultural figures of the World Game fame. He might quote all three Paul Kellys—the political writer, singer and footballer. He'd quote U2's 'I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For' to illustrate true seeking. He'd quote the half Christian, half Rastafarian lyrics of Ben Harper. He'd quote Nick Cave's stoical and seemingly deistic 'I Don't Believe in an Interventionist God' and *Lord of the Rings*, *The Matrix* and *Harry Potter* to name the more obvious. He'd quote Jim Carrey's *Bruce Almighty* on a God who answers prayer his way—it's made by a Catholic producer. He'd find much in the poignant portrait of *Monster* to ruminate on—is anyone an utterly unforgivable monster?

In this way Paul connects with the Agora, the marketplace, which was more than just our economic fundamentalist master narrative of the market—there was politics, poetry, philosophy, religion, law, economics, all mixed in together. It was a marketplace of ideas and Paul was determined for Christian ideas to connect with it and 'take every thought captive to Christ' (2 Cor 10:5). This is what CACE has tried to do using ethics as apologetics and what CASE and Macquarie Christian Studies Institute in Sydney seek to do in their own distinctive ways. We need like Paul to connect with the wider marketplace, the arts, sciences, politics and the like, not trying to create our own boutique, niche markets. It's not that hard, we don't have to create the connection. God has literally created it as Genesis and the Wisdom literature that undergirds Paul's approach here show.

Paul connects with their God-given seeking (v27) but not



necessarily in the ‘seeker service’ way. He goes to them, not expecting them to come to him. Church growth expert Eddie Gibbs says churches will need to make the transition from an invitational seeker service strategy to one of dispersal, with a sustained commitment to infiltrating each segment of this fragmenting world. This happens most readily through Christians already dispersed through their professions, workplaces, universities, etc seek to do.

### 3. Correction—*Shrinking Idols Down to Size*

Thirdly Paul also corrects which liberals generally don’t. They don’t like to correct ‘religion’s cultured despisers’ as Schleiermacher called them in 19<sup>th</sup> century Berlin. Paul says in v23 that he’s seen their altar to an ‘unknown god’. They’re ignorant of this God, though God has mercifully overlooked their idolatrous ignorance in the past until now, the time of revelation, repentance and judgment vv30–31. They’re searching but in the wrong place and in the wrong way, making gods with human hands (cf. Rom 1:18–32). Calvin said the human heart is an ‘idol factory’ though he didn’t deny the insights of pagan philosophers (like Seneca’s *De Clementia*, his first work) and rulers, seeing God’s Spirit being active in the polis (Rom 13) and cosmos (Ps 104) as well as the *ekklesia*. But he said their insights were like lightning flashes in a dark sky. There’s some light but not enough light to find a lot. Their insights provide *ad hoc* connections for apologetics, but not a permanent foundation to build a belief-system on. We need the spectacles or lens of the resurrected Christ, the Spirit and Scripture as Calvin says.

In an *Age Opinion* piece on gambling at the height of the Kennett Government’s idolatrous and iniquitous obsession with promoting Crown Casino, I deliberately used a Pauline apologetic approach also picking up on Calvin’s observation that the human heart is an idol factory. I described how in ancient and modern cities monuments expressed what was most important in the city, what people worship. I built on Tim Costello’s noting the hundreds of signs in Melbourne pointing to Crown Casino but few to cathedrals or other landmarks. Disproportion is always a sign of idolatry and a violation of created boundaries. I ended with ‘Chartres has its cathedral, Sydney its Opera House (& Bridge) what does Melbourne have? Its Casino?’ I was tempted to then do the full Areopagus thing with Paul but left it there with a question (a bit like Jesus or Socrates) for another day. Ethical problems like gambling should not be treated moralistically. They are apologetic or pre-evangelistic issues symptomatic of idolatrous distortions of the created order or ecology of relationships.

Paul then reveals this ‘unknown God’ to them v23. He’s not made with hands like idols v24. He’s the Creator who

creates out of nothing and needs nothing and gives everything v25. And he’s therefore raised a man, Jesus from the dead and has appointed him to judge when he returns v31. It’s a strong correction to idolatry, and death. But it’s at the end, not the beginning. He surveys the context, connects, then corrects. Paul subtly insinuates a biblical worldview into their cultural context. He doesn’t even give them an explicit or full-blown Christology first up, just Jesus the man who’s been resurrected and who’ll come to judge. But he’s establishing a worldview in which Christ can make sense and not be shrunk down into some born again experience that doesn’t change our worldview and way of life in the world.

But did he succeed? Some, like William Barclay, think he failed dismally and changed his strategy in Corinth and preached the cross. No—Paul knows people in a pluralistic pre- or post-modern world won’t swallow a worldview whole like an elephant. It has to be eaten one bite at a time. That’s what Paul helps them do. In a hostile, mocking, but occasionally seeking pluralistic context, much like our own, Paul wasn’t trying to instantly convert people, he was seeking a second hearing. And he got that from some of his hearers who wanted to hear more, and two of them were converted, Dionysius, one of the judges of Athenian Idol, who realised he would one day be judged, and one woman, Damarus, who found a new status in Christ, ‘and a number of others’ (17:34). I see our work with CACE as establishing a first hearing, which we’ve been able to do with many more non-Christians than the average evangelist whose work is mainly involved on the fringes of the church. Ethics enables us to plunge further into our culture to gain a first hearing, some will then come to hear a full version of the gospel and be converted.

## II. Peter (Singer)

How does Paul’s approach at Athens relate to CACE’s approach in a book that I edited entitled *Rethinking Peter Singer*? Andrew Cameron reviewed it very helpfully in the late lamented *Kategoria*’s second-last issue. Andrew highlighted a difference between my mediating ‘rational common ground’ approach based on connecting with those with some semblance of the Sanctity of Life ethic left and the approach of Nigel M. de S. Cameron in the US who in debate with Singer said (contrary to most bio-ethicists) that they were agreed that there was a great unbridgeable gap between a Christian image of God based anthropology and derived Sanctity of Life ethic and Singer’s views. Singer has said the same about John Paul II appreciating the massive difference between their worldviews—Sanctity of Life vs. Quality of Life, Ten Old Commandments vs. Singer’s Five New Commandments, religious absolutes vs. secular utilitarian reason etc. Andrew contrasted this with my self-confessed approach to having



‘an each way bet’. He quotes me saying:

I will claim not that *only* a Christian view can support the sanctity of human life, persons and relationships, but that it *best* supports it. Though Christians advocate a specifically Christian narrative ethic, we need not see this as necessarily in total opposition to a rational ethic based on universally recognizable principles, rules and virtues. Rather, the two can work in tandem, as they often do in Scripture, given that God is Creator as well as Redeemer... Fortunately many, on seeing how high the stakes are, such as the sacrifice of young and old, intuitively reject them, though not necessarily knowing why.

I think I could have clarified my view by italicising ‘total’ in ‘total opposition to a rational ethic’—it is still often substantial. My aim was not primarily to rationally convince Singer by using common intuitions (though I pray so and he said it was a fair and non-polemical representation of his views) because I agree with Andrew that Singer will see intuitions about sacredness of life as mistaken, and won’t budge. But I wrote in a form of pastoral apologetic to emotionally and rationally convince those concerned ecologists and others influenced by him, but ignorant of his more extreme pro-infanticide etc. views, like the young man I mention in the preface, saved from drugs and suicide by reading Singer. I aimed to show them that a Christian world or ecological view provides a more holistic, humane, non-reductionist and consistent basis for concern for the world and humanity given its intrinsic value, ultimately to God.

**Singer himself could not euthanase his mother Cora who was suffering from Alzheimers.**

**Singer’s theoretical abstraction is symptomatic of his blindness to the basic relational nature of human life and morality and to those intuitions that reflect it.**

It’s those people that I, like Paul, want to get a second hearing from, when I can be more specific about the ‘different and unanticipated rational ground’ of Christian special revelation Andrew refers to, that characterises Nigel Cameron’s and Paul Blackham’s corrective approach to the first apologetic hearing. While sympathetic to their approach to apologetics, I think it’s a case of premature proclamation, which doesn’t lead to an appropriate consummation. In the Singer book we moved into proclamation mode more

through Graham Cole’s and Lindsay Wilson’s more explicitly biblical chapters 3 and 4 respectively on Singer’s caricature of Christianity and his critique of it as speciesist, although I acknowledged the need for another book to do this more explicitly on the last page. Towards the end of chapter 1 I use a biblical and Reformed presuppositionalist critique to argue against Singer’s rationalistic exclusion of Christian reasons from secular public debate. On postmodern grounds of non-value and linguistic neutrality I critique Singer as the last Enlightenment or modern man who believes in pure, universal secular rationality as the solution to all the world’s problems and who seeks intolerantly to ban religious reasons from the naked public square as non-secular and sectarian. To make public room for this process we also challenged Singer’s rationalist secularism and his exclusion of religious reason from public space.

In seeking to both connect and correct I work with what I think is both a biblical and Reformed tension between a creation based ontology accessible in part through common grace, divine providence, general revelation and God’s Creative Word and Spirit and a Reformed antithesis based epistemology emphasising total depravity, non-value neutrality and the necessity of special or supernatural / redemptive revelation and grace. In general I use common grace/revelation to connect, special grace/revelation to correct, like, I hope I’ve shown, Paul does in Acts 17. The connection is not so much with Singer, though, as with his critics’ or ignorant sympathizers God-given intuitions. While we commend Singer’s relative consistency to his principles (e.g. his vegetarianism, plastic shoes, simple lifestyle and concern for the poor, animal liberation activism), and wish Christians were as committed and consistent, we argue that his consequentialist reasoning which reduces humanity and even animals and the environment as means towards the end of rational persons’ preferences as largely wrong.

### III. Mary (Midgely)

Thirdly, my bet each way involves using an *ad hoc apologetic* to connect with a range of ‘co-belligerent’ non-Christian, mainly female philosophers’ arguments, such as UK scientist-philosopher Mary Midgely (though Jenny Teichman, Margaret Sommerville, Nel Noddings and others also feature). I connect with remnants of creation-based and socially formed intuitions or Midgely’s ‘Yuk Factor’ which she uses against aspects of cross-species genetic engineering and Mad Cow disease and against Singer’s more extreme anti-speciesist views favoring infanticide and bestiality, cloned sets of headless spare parts etc. I also use Raimon Gaita of the Australian Catholic University’s notion of the ‘morally



unthinkable' or taboo in order to correct Singer. Let me quote from chapter 1:

This chapter aims to show that some of Peter Singer's key ideas are unthinkable and unlivable, being based on a reductionistic model of humanity, rationality and morality. We argue that infanticide or bestiality should not even be thought about or countenanced. Our inbuilt 'yuk factor', though not infallible, is not irrational either, and should be respected. We also argue that Singer's rarified rationalism of almost total impartiality is impossible to live out and thus fails his basic test of the practicality of ethics. Singer himself could not euthanase his mother Cora who was suffering from Alzheimers. Singer's theoretical abstraction is symptomatic of his blindness to the basic relational nature of human life and morality and to those intuitions that reflect it. Singer reduces the rich tapestry of relationships to a few threads of an allegedly transcendent reason. Yet he is not without compassion or emotion, just inconsistent in his application of it, more to animals than to human unborns or new borns.

I mentioned 'remnants' of God-given creation-based intuitions above because as Rom 1:20ff says, people suppress or hold down the truth of God's general revelation by not thinking thankfully or worshipfully, but worshipping the creature not the Creator (1:25, cf. Acts 17:24ff). Nonetheless, Paul seems to see enough of this general moral revelation getting through to Gentile consciences in Rom 2:14–15 for them to at least be held morally accountable and to shame the pride of the Jewish receivers of special revelation. Of course the suppressing can take place morally as well as spiritually—one person's Yuk is another person's Yum. But created and cultural reality restrains relativism. It is impossible to be consistently relativist. And many of the non-chattering classes who cannot abstract to the level of Singer's abstract preference utility or equality of consideration for rational persons' preferences formula are relatively more in touch with created reality.

Of course, intuitions are far from infallible and need social shaping, evaluation and reinforcement by good Christian reasons where in touch with created reality. They are not a foundation for a system, they are *ad hoc* contact points that need to be reframed within a biblical creation, fall, redemption theology and view much as Paul does with the Epicureans and Stoic philosophers and poets at Athens.

Singer works from universal abstract principles, which are a projection of a democratic, majoritarian and apparently equalitarian principle of liberal polity. For Singer the priority of rational persons' autonomous choices, and an Epicurean view of human nature as primarily pleasure seeking, pain

avoiding (though they prioritised higher pleasures such as rational friendship shared over food) is a way of suppressing our God-given and socially preserved intuitions (in the Sanctity of Life ethic) about the irreducible worth of and alien dignity of individuals made in the image of God. The best moral pedagogy and apology works from our particular creaturely limitations or moral, relational and vocational responsibilities, to universal responsibilities, in an expanding circle, e.g. from concern for our kids to concern for others' kids starving or bombed on the other side of the world. We move from thick cultural communities and particular practices to thin universal principles.

**This pattern of connecting with ethical issues symptomatic of society's confused spiritual search and then correcting its idolatry is typical of the way CACE has sought to operate under my directorship.**

Drawing on these particular moral responsibilities we also used a kind of Schaefferian apologetic using Singer's own consequentialism to push it through to the logical and practical consequences of its position in terms of limited voluntary euthanasia leading to unlimited voluntary euthanasia once you accept the autonomy principle and involuntary euthanasia once you accept his utilitarian principle of maximizing society's pleasure over pain which trumps his liberal autonomy principle. But I think Schaeffer is too modernist in primarily showing up logical inconsistency. I prefer to push views to the point of showing their unlivability—that they cannot be consistently lived out. Most specifically, Singer's refusal to euthanase his un-self-conscious dying mother is a point of inconsistency and an e.g. of the practical unlivability of his abstract utilitarian theory that really required him to put the money spent on her care to better uses for the sake of society's total pleasure over pain. It's not a knockdown argument, and Singer can work his way around it, but it has considerable appeal to our common intuitions.

So I did have a bet both ways, but I think it's a biblical bet, based on my reading of Acts 17, both connecting in an *ad hoc* way with certain popular remnants of general revelation and cultural convention based intuitions to critique Singer, but also correcting Singer's 'secular' rationalism from a more biblical and Reformed theological critique of any alleged value neutrality. This pattern of connecting with ethical issues symptomatic of society's confused spiritual search and then correcting its idolatry is typical of the way CACE has sought to operate under my directorship.



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# CACE COMING EVENTS

## Homosexuality & the Church: More than a Single Issue or Two

A forum sponsored by Ridley College Centre for Applied Christian Ethics (CACE)  
& New Cranmer Society for 2005 publication by ATF Press.

### Speakers:

Scripture: **Graham Cole & Ray Cleary**

Tradition: **Gordon Preece & Muriel Porter**

Science: **David Clarke**

Experience: **Peter Sherlock & Debra Hirsch**

Theological Synthesis: **Charles Sherlock & Brian Edgar**

Each speaker has 20 minutes with time for questions.

### Saturday June 26, 2004:

1:30–6:30pm (registration @ 1:15pm)

Stanway Alpha Theatre, Ridley College

160 The Avenue, Parkville

Cost \$25, Concessions \$15

RSVP & pay by card to Beryl by June 21

e: [b.barter@ridley.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:b.barter@ridley.unimelb.edu.au)

p: 03 92074800

### Farewell to Gordon:

Following the forum, a dinner will be held to farewell Rev Dr Gordon Preece as CACE Director, prior to his move to Sydney as Director of the Macquarie Christian Studies Institute. Guest speaker at the dinner will be former Ridley College Principal, Rev Dr Graham Cole.

in a Christian context in Melbourne, and to wish him well in his new role.

Details are as follows:

Saturday June 26, 7:00pm

Paragon Cafe, 651 Rathdowne Street  
North Carlton

This is a great opportunity to thank Gordon for his significant contribution in establishing CACE as a leading forum for dialogue on ethical issues

A fixed-price menu (\$40) with limited choice will be offered. Numbers are limited. Bookings and enquiries to Beryl (details above).

“Please help us to train people to minister Christ by Bible & Spirit, life & example, prayer & leadership; serving here in Australia & throughout the world.”

Peter Adam  
Principal

**Here is my donation to Ridley College. Please use it to help:** *(tick one)*

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|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Donation       | <input type="checkbox"/> Ridley University College | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Centre for Applied Christian Ethics</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Training for Ordinands | <input type="checkbox"/> The Ridley Society        | <input type="checkbox"/> Centre for Youth & Children’s Ministry     |

(in Block Letters)..... Title Christian Name Surname

Address .....

Suburb..... State..... Postcode.....

Enclosed is my cheque/money order made payable to **Ridley College** for \$.....

OR please charge \$..... to my:

- Bankcard    Mastercard    Visacard

Name of Card Holder: .....

Account No:

□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
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Exp Date: ...../..... Signature: .....

**All gifts are tax deductible.**