‚Us and them‘

Thinking beyond the Security Ethic

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1. Introduction

In the following article, we will argue that encounters between religious worldviews (understood to include atheistic and agnostic positions) are a fact of our current era, and that their successful negotiation is crucial for civic well-being and therefore for the common good.[1] In our current context,[2] however, whilst tolerance is part of the dominant social discourse, such encounters are typically characterised by defensiveness, lack of authentic dialogue, and at times physical action and violence.[3] Using Darcia Narvaez's *Triune Ethics Theory* (TET)[4], we will argue that encounters characterised by these features align with the security ethic, which is orientated towards a 'fight or flight' mentality, and to developing ideological systems that prize exclusivity, self-preservation, and status enhancement, frequently drawing clear lines between 'us' and 'them' and, in more provocative language, the 'saved' and the 'damned.'

TET provides clues for shifting the nature of interreligious encounters towards what Narvaez

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1 *Habermas, Jürgen*: Notes on a post-secular society. In: New Perspective Quarterly 25 (2008) 17–19; *Castelli, Mike*: Faith dialogue as pedagogy for a post secular religious education. In: Journal of Beliefs & Values. Studies in Religion & Education 33 (2012) 207–216; *Armstrong, Karen*: The battle for God. Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, London 2001; *Bouma, Gary / Halafoff, Anna*: Multifaith education and social inclusion in Australia. In: Journal of Religious Education 57 (2009) 17–25.

2 For the purposes of this article, the 'current context' refers largely to the Western world, with a particular focus on our own geographical location – Australia. As has been noted elsewhere (e.g. Ruthven, 2007), trends in Australia reflect those in other Western developed nations as well. Nevertheless, the themes of inter-religious encounter that we develop throughout are also features in the East and the Developing World, and so the implications of this article may well extend further than its current context.

3 *Aldridge, Alan*: Religion in the contemporary world. A sociological introduction, Cambridge ²2007; *Gearon, Liam*: The securitization of religion in education. In: *van der Zee, Theo / Lovat, Terence* (Eds.): New perspectives on religious and spiritual education, Münster 2012, 215–234; *McCarthy, Karen*: Interfaith encounters in America, New Brunswick 2007; *Monsma, Stephen / Soper, Christopher*: The Challenge of Pluralism. Church and state in five democracies, Lanham 2009; *Pratt, Douglas*: The challenge of Islam. Encounters in interfaith dialogue, Aldershot 2005.

4 *Narvaez, Darcia*: Triune ethics. The neurobiological roots of our multiple moralities. In: New Ideas in Psychology 26 (2008a) 95–119; *ibid.*: Human flourishing and moral development. Cognitive and neurobiological perspectives of virtue development. In: *Nucci, Larry / Narvaez, Darcia* (Eds.): Handbook of moral and character education, Hoboken 2008b, 310–327; *ibid.*: Neurobiology and moral mindset. In: *Heinrichs, Karen / Oser, Fritz / Lovat, Terence* (Eds.): Handbook of moral motivation. Theories, models, applications, Rotterdam 2013, 323–342.

refers to as the engagement and imagination ethics. These are characterised by their capacity to enhance empathy emotionally and cognitively with other persons, and are ultimately far better positioned to promote authentic civic discourse.[5] Building on this suggestion, as well as evidence from the field of values education,[6] we propose that providing spaces characterised by the features of trust, care and mutual responsibility, especially in the school context, for dialogue between religious worldviews[7] is crucial for pursuing the common good.

2. *The inevitability of dialogue in the current context*

It is widely recognised that our current context is characterised by an 'increased mingling' of cultures and worldviews, spurred on by the rapid advancement of globalisation over the past three decades.[8] At this point in time, we encounter more cultural and religious 'others' than we might have been able to in the past – whether this be virtually through the internet or television or, what is becoming increasingly the norm, in the contexts of our classrooms, workplaces, and social circles. The largely failed predictions of secularist prophets in the 1960s are seen in claims that the age of secularisation meant the coming of a time wherein "The gods of traditional religions live on as private fetishes or the patron of congenial groups, but play no role whatever in the public life of the secular metropolis".[9] In fact, however, religion and religious worldviews in the early twenty-first century are alive, well, and operative in the current context, for better or for worse.[10] This has led some to define the time in which we live as 'post-secular', a context within which secularism itself is seen as only one option among many and in which religion continues to have an influence, albeit in a less overt but arguably more powerful way than has been the case in the past.[11]

To add to this mix, our time has seen the rise of the 'militant' atheist movement, as well as various 'militant' religious fundamentalisms in the

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5 *Mudge, Peter / Fleming, Dan / Lovat, Terence*: The potential impact of the neurosciences on religious and spiritual education. Ramifying from the impact on values education. In: Journal of Beliefs and Values (in press).

6 *Lovat, Terence*: Synergies and balance between values education and quality teaching. Educational Philosophy and Theory 42 (2010) 489–500; *ibid.*: Values education and holistic learning. Updated research perspectives. In: International Journal of Educational Research 50 (2011) 148–152; *Lovat, Terence* u.a.: Addressing issues of religious difference through values education. An Islam instance. In: Cambridge Journal of Education 40 (2010a) 213–227; *ibid.:* Values education as holistic development for all sectors. Researching for effective pedagogy. In: Oxford Review of Education 36 (2010b) 1–17; *ibid.*: Values pedagogy and student achievement. Contemporary research evidence, Dordrecht 2011; *Nucci, Larry / Narvaez, Darcia:* Handbook of moral and character education, New York 2008.

7 See *Castelli* 2012 [Fn. 1].

8 *Kitching, Gavin*: Globalism and globalisation. In: *Mitcham, Carl* (Ed.): Encyclopedia of science, technology and ethics, Detroit 2005, 874–877; *Bouma/ Halafoff* 2009 [Fn. 1]; *Talbi, Mohamed*: Unavoidable dialogue in a pluralist world. A personal account. In: Encounters. Journal of Inter-cultural Perspectives 1 (1995) 56–69; *ibid.*: Universalité du Coran, Arles 2002.

9 *Cox, Harvey*: The Secular City. The Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective, Princeton 1965, 120.

10 *Bouma / Halafoff* 2009 [Fn. 1]; *Monsma / Soper* 2009 [Fn. 3]; *Aldridge* 2007 [Fn 3].

11 E.g. *Boeve, Lieven*: Religious education in a post-secular and post-Christian context. In: Journal of Beliefs and Values. Studies in Religion & Education 33 (2012) 143–156; *Agamben, Giorgio*: The kingdom and the glory. For a theological genealogy of economy and government, Palo Alto 2011; *Habermas* 2008 [Fn. 1].

major religious traditions which are now present as particularly provocative dialogue-partners. The new atheism movement has argued forcefully that the progress of humankind impels the eradication of primitive, childish, and dangerous religious beliefs.[12] Meanwhile, religious fundamentalism tends to be characterised by a literal interpretation of sacred texts which frequently provide justification for exclusionary practices and beliefs, as well as, in extreme cases, violence.[13] All of the above is influenced by, and influences, the three features of the current time that Boeve notes in the following way:

- *Detraditionalisation* – "the process by which traditions, religious as well as other traditions (gender, family, professional context), no longer naturally transfer from one generation to another".[14] This means both that traditions may be lost but, at the same time, that our engagement with them may become more reflexive given that their place and role is no longer as obvious as it was in the past.
- *Individualisation* – "the structural given that identity is no longer assigned, but that it should be actively taken on in increasing measure (i.e. constructed)."[15] Note that this differs from individualism which proffers that an individual's preference acts as an absolute norm, ethical, epistemological, or otherwise.
- *Pluralisation* – this "implies that each identity is structurally challenged to conceive of itself in relation to difference and otherness – especially to the effect of other truth claims on its own claim."[16]

In view of this, Boeve argues that a situation requiring dialogue arises, and not simply dialogue between individuals situated on a spectrum between the two extremes of religiousness and secularity. What emerges, instead, is "a plural field of multiple positions, which are related to each other, which possibly influence each other, learn from each other, question each other, conflict, even repudiate and fight".[17] As such, dialogue is inevitable, but the nature of that dialogue remains negotiable, and this is particularly the case when one finds one's self in the lag time between a social situation arising and the capacity for public discourse catching up.[18]

3. The nature of inter-religious dialogue in the current context

The complexity of the current context, and the plurality of religious (or otherwise) worldviews that one encounters therein, makes it a particularly challenging one for dialogue. Mike Castelli provides the following helpful window into a Middle High School classroom which typifies, we argue, the nature of inter-religious dialogue today:

The scene is a Year 9 religious education lesson, involving pupils aged 13–14 years, in a London classroom. The student-teacher is narrating the life of Guru Nanak. One pupil responds to the account of Guru Nanak's disappearance in the river for three days by; 'That's stupid'… [In this context one finds] 'a pupil of European culture that privileges scientific knowledge [who] is also having to deal with the fundamentalist voice that claims all sacred text as truth; where the Sikh member of this Year 9 class feels uncomfortable with the context in which this story of Guru Nank Sahib is being explored; where a

12 See *Beattie, Tina*: The new atheists. The twilight of reason & the war on religion, London 2007.

13 See *Armstrong, Karen:* The battle for God. Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, London 2001.

14 *Boeve* 2012 [Fn. 11], 145.

15 *Ibid.*, 146

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*, 145

18 *Aldridge* 2007 [Fn. 3].

student-teacher is grappling with a pluralist paradigm that posits all religions are basically on equally valid paths to the same transcendent'.[19]

As Castelli goes on to point out, the comment 'That's stupid' captures a number of frustrations in the room.[20] These frustrations include: the pupil who is unable to engage with the story of Guru Nanak because of a lack of religious vocabulary and understanding; the Sikh child who feels that this account of her tradition fails to represent it adequately; and, the student-teacher who acknowledges the value of a pluralist approach, but can see that simple tolerance of difference is not sufficient in this situation. Whilst amiable enough, it is easy to imagine how such an exchange – whether in the classroom or another context – could become troublesome. The slightest offensiveness betrayed by any of the parties may well lead to an argument, and not the constructive kind. Indeed, one can see this kind of phenomenon made manifest in many encounters between followers of different religious worldviews today, at times erring on the side of superficiality, defensiveness, and name-calling, rather than on any form of sustained, critical and fruitful debate. This is largely because they are reactionary encounters at the outset.[21] When condensed into a fear of the religious 'other', this form of reactionary encounter increases the likelihood of individuals or the state "'adopting' violent 'solutions' toward the other, rather than seeking more rational courses of action."[22] One such example is seen in the phenomenon of 'Islamophobia', the seriousness of which is that it continues "to be a constraint on world peace, as a significant section of the world lives in fear grounded in ignorance of the other".[23] As such, the necessity for authentic religious dialogue for the common good of society is underscored.[24]

Clearly, education must play a role in the fostering of possibilities for such dialogue but 'what kind of education?' is the key question.[25] On the one hand, it is tempting to argue that what is needed in such a context is a better religious vocabulary in order to facilitate the capacity for dialogue, a position which would underlie an emphasis on content knowledge in religious education.[26] Clearly, such content knowledge is necessary in order to circumvent the kind of 'religious illiteracy' that Gates argues, among other things, sits behind literalist interpretations of doctrine and leaves violent extremism unchallenged.[27] Nevertheless, advanced vocabulary alone is not sufficient for impelling authentic dialogue for one may still engage with other worldviews in superficial, defensive, and even violent ways under the guise of sophisticated language.[28] In making this claim, we follow Alexander's understanding of dialogue: *"Dialogue requires willingness and skill to engage with minds, ideas and ways of thinking other than our own; it involves the ability to question, listen,*

19 *Castelli* 2012 [Fn. 1], 207.

20 *Ibid.*, 208.

21 See for example *Bouma's* research into reactions to Islam in Australia: *Bouma, Gary*: Islamaphobia as a constraint to world peace. The case of Australia. In: Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations 22 (2011) 433–441; cf. *Aldridge* 2007 [Fn. 3], 4; 15.

22 *Bouma* 2011 [Fn. 21], 434.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Habermas, Jürgen*: Religion in the public sphere. In: European Journal of Philosophy 14 (2006) 1–25; *Talbi* 2002 [Fn. 8].

25 *Bouma / Halafoff* 2009 [Fn. 1].

26 See for example *Rymarz, Richard:* Who is this person Grace? A reflection on content knowledge in religious education. In: Religious Education 102 (2007) 62–74; *Bouma / Halafoff* 2009 [Fn. 1].

27 *Gates, Brian*: 'Doing God' in ethics and education. A play in five parts. In: Journal of Moral Education 40 (2011) 309–317; *Bouma / Halafoff* 2009 [Fn. 1].

28 *Grun, Karl*: From ethical hostility to cooperative ethics. In: Handbook of moral motivation [Fn. 4], 429–448; *Kemsley, Harry*: Air power in counter-insurgency. A sophisticated language or blunt expression. In: Contemporary Security Policy 28 (2007) 112–126.

reflect, reason, explain, speculate and explore ideas; to analyse problems, form hypotheses and develop solutions; to discuss, argue, examine evidence, defend, probe, and assess arguments."[29]

In this article, we turn our focus not to the content of such dialogue initially, but to the space which would enable it to occur, on the premise that this – and the dispositions that develop within it – are integral to the way in which people approach dialogue with different worldviews, be it from a position of disrespectful defensiveness, or a position of respectful openness. As such, we do not deny the importance of content knowledge, but only seek to locate it within the more complex domain of interpersonal relations. In its own way, this could be seen as a proposal for religious education (RE) in general, but we offer it here as a reflection on the dialogue space between religious worldviews more broadly considered, given that such space opens up not only in RE classrooms, but also in school communities, workplaces, social circles, and political forums as well. As such, it is at the heart of civic discourse in all spheres. We turn now to Darcia Narvaez's *Triune Ethics Theory* (TET) as providing a model for understanding the nature of such encounters.

4. *The impact of ambience and disposition on the capacity to dialogue – Triune Ethics Theory (TET)*

TET draws on neurobiology, affective neuroscience, and cognitive science to highlight three 'systems' which are operative in human ethical decision making.[30] The first is associated with the most primitive parts of the human brain and is primarily concerned with security, personal survival and physical flourishing; the second is concerned with emotional engagement and the values of compassion, openness, and tolerance; and, the third is associated with the most recently evolved parts of the human brain and includes the capacity to engage in the deliberative and intuitive aspects of moral reasoning. We will consider each briefly in turn, and we point to Narvaez's own synthesis of the approach as the most appropriate resource for further exploration in the area. Where relevant throughout, we show that Narvaez's claims are supported by research in the field of values education. When held together, these two approaches provide a strong foundation for the suggestions we make regarding authentic dialogue in the final section of the article below.

Narvaez provides the following overview of the foundations of the approach: "TET suggests that three types of affectively rooted moral orientations emerged from human evolution. These ethical motives and behaviors arise out of biological propensities. When an individual treats a particular orientation as a normative imperative that trumps other values, it has ethical significance. Each ethic makes normative claims and is primed by the context, in inter action with personality. As a type of motivated cognition, each ethic influences what affordances are salient for action, imbuing ongoing experience with particular moral value."[31]

The first ethic is referred to as the 'Security Ethic', and relates to the oldest and most primitive parts of the evolved human brain which emanate from fear, anger and basic sexual drives. Significantly, because these systems within the brain have ancient origins, they appear as 'hard-wired' into the brain, which means that they *"are less easily damaged, unlike those of the*

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29 *Alexander, Robin*: Education as dialogue. Public Lecture at Hong Kong Institute of Education, 2005. Available at: http://www.robinalexander.org.uk/docs/HK_lecture,_Education_as_Dialogue.pdf, 2.

30 *Narvaez* 2008b [Fn. 4].

31 *Ibid.*, 96.

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other two systems, making these the default systems when other things go wrong."[32] Inasmuch as they relate to physical survival, the systems associated with this ethic include the propensity to seek and explore one's environment as well as, when threat is encountered, the engagement of the parasympathetic (rage) system and the fight-or-flight response, or the sympathetic (fear) system. The systems also underlie territorial and boundary-protecting behaviours which means that, when they are engaged for humans in social contexts, they can *"trigger tribalism, rivalry, and mob behaviour"*.[33] Whilst these systems remain calm in environments perceived as safe, when safety is threatened, they can take over the rest of the brain.

For Narvaez, the security systems of the brain can be referred to as a 'Security Ethic' when humans operate primarily out of them and *"prioritize security behaviors over other moral values"*.[34] The features of such an ethic include: maintaining an in-group and a hierarchy through the use of shame, threat, and deception; rigid following of precedent and tradition; and, obedience. Importantly, the emphasis on security comes with the price of decreased sensitivity to other goals, including engagement with other persons.

Significantly, according to Narvaez, the next two ethical systems (and their associated areas in the brain) are unable to develop, or operate, adequately in persons who find themselves in situations characterised by threat and fear, because such ambiences engage the 'security-based' system which operates largely at a preconscious level and is dominated by the concerns noted above. Following from this, providing *"a safe, secure environment where basic needs are met allows individuals to minimize triggering the security ethic and allows an emphasis on the ethics systems that better represent human aspirations."*[35] This insight ties in well with updated pedagogical research, including in values education, that has highlighted the crucial role that safety and associated feelings of well-being play in students 'doing well' at school, including in academic achievement.[36] The antithesis of this insight is in the recognition that lack of safety and security is a major inhibitor in students progressing at school in general. Herein, lies the importance of the establishment an expression of the Engagement and Imagination Ethics, which we will now consider below.

The *Engagement Ethic* is founded on the systems of the brain associated with human sociality, a dimension of our existence which we share with other mammals that are naturally orientated towards relationships.[37] These systems are nourished (or otherwise) in the early years of development which are, ideally, characterised by frequent interaction between parent and child.[38] Furthermore, the systems underlie the capacity to empathise which Narvaez, and others,[39] see as critical in human development and flourishing. As such, there is a link between the proper function of this dimension of the brain and the developmental history of a

32 *Ibid.*, 98.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Narvaez* 2008a [Fn. 4], 314.

36 *Hattie, John*: Visible learning for teachers. Maximizing impact on learning, New York 2011; *Rowe, Ken*: In good hands? The importance of teacher quality. In: Educare News 14 (2004) 4–14.

37 *Narvaez* 2008b [Fn. 4], 101.

38 *Ibid.*,104.

39 Cf. *Hoffman, Martin*: Empathy and moral development. Implications for caring and justice, New York 2000; *Eisenberg, Nancy / Spinrad, Tracy / Sadovsky, Adrienne*: Empathy-related responding in children. In: *Killen, Melanie / Smetana, Judith* (Eds.): Handbook of moral development, Mahwah 2006, 517–549; *Slote, Michael*: The ethics of care and empathy. New York 2007.

person, which leads Narvaez to argue that although "*evolution has prepared the human brain for sociality and moral agency, proper care during development is required for normal formation of brain circuitries necessary for successful social engagement, cultural membership and moral functioning*".[40] When such developmental cues are present, the Engagement Ethic is able to function. By and large, it is characterised by the values of compassion, openness and tolerance. As such, it also has close links with the capacity for empathy, which a number of authors regard as a significant – if not primary – driver of moral behaviour.[41] Again, we make links with updated values education research that demonstrates the overall wellbeing, including academic wellbeing, effect of classrooms characterized by compassion, openness and tolerance:

"The study also provided confirming evidence from both the quantitative and qualitative data around the many testimonial claims made in earlier studies about the impact of values education on school ambience. For example, evidence was elicited of a … 'calmer' environment with less conflict … rise in levels of politeness and courtesy, open friendliness, better manners, offers of help, and students being more kind and considerate … a greater respect for each other's position; and of … the creation of a safer and more caring school community." Contributing to this more peaceful and cooperative environment were changes in students' acceptance and understanding of difference and diversity. This change was evident in the statistically significant improvement in teachers' perceptions of students' 'inclusive behaviour'.[42]

Finally, we turn to the *Imagination Ethic*, which is associated with what has commonly been the focus of research into moral behaviour, namely its rational dimension.[43] Underlying the Imagination Ethic are the most recently evolved parts of the human brain, upon which are founded the capacities for 'problem solving and deliberative learning' as well as the capacities for creativity, flexibility, and perspective-taking.[44] In neuroscientific terms, these functions are largely associated with the pre-frontal cortex (PFC) which, Narvaez is quick to point out, is constitutive of thinking in a way that includes both rational and affective components, and also engages with the more primitive parts of the brain. Significantly, deliberative reasoning can express what is occurring at a more primitive level in rational terms, a point to which we will return below. Furthermore, these systems offer the possibility of regulation of emotion.[45] Finally, they appear to be equally reliant on adequate care for their proper development and they are clearly affected by the nature of the environment in which they operate.

In view of this, according to Narvaez: The Ethic of Imagination links primarily to these recently evolved parts of the brain, particularly the PFC. The Imagination Ethic allows a person to step away from the impetuous emotional responses of the older parts of the brain and consider alternative actions based on logic and reason. This ability allows for propensities

40 *Narvaez* 2008b [Fn. 4], 104.

41 *Gascoigne, Robert*: Freedom and purpose. An introduction to Christian ethics, Mahwah 2004; *Narvaez, Darcia / Vaydich, Jenny*: Moral development and behaviour under the spotlight of the neurobiological sciences. In: Journal of Moral Education 37 (2008) 289–312; *Narvaez* 2008b [Fn. 4].

42 *Lovat et al.* 2010a [Fn. 6], 220.

43 *Krapp, Andreas*: Moral motivation from the perspective of the self-determination theory and the person-object theory of interest. In: Handbook of moral motivation [Fn. 4], 113–140; *Wren, Thomas*: 'Why be moral?' A philosophical taxonomy of moral motivation. In: *Ibid.*, 27–48.

44 *Narvaez* 2008b [Fn. 4], 105.

45 *Ibid.*, 104.

lacking in other ethics – reflective abstraction and deliberation about morality.[46]

This ethic does not, however, operate in isolation from the other 'pre-rational' ethics, as if the brain's rational capacities were somehow splendidly isolated from the older systems of the brain.[47] Instead, these latter provide the instincts and intuitions which the Imagination Ethic expresses in a deliberative way, thus emphasising the necessary connections between the three ethics of the Triune Theory.[48] Furthering the allusion to updated values education research, we point to the evidence that persistently uncovered a 'double helix' relationship between the rationality entailed in 'quality teaching' regimes and the affectivity implied in the values education regime. As in the genetic principle connoted by the double helix, so it seems it is the case in pedagogy that issues of quality and those of values are ultimately intertwined and ever in conversation with each other.[49] So it is with the three ethics of TET.

Nevertheless, the Imagination Ethic does offer unique tools in forming the expression of the tendencies of the other ethics. The first of these is the capacity that *"allows humans through learning and willpower to choose which stimuli are allowed to trigger emotional arousal or action sequences"*[50] and, conversely, those which are not. Thus, relevant knowledge about what constitutes a good (or evil) choice in this regard has some weight in the operation of the ethic. The second is the capacity to 'frame' behaviour, past and present, by situating it within the context of an explanatory narrative that normally operates on both an affiliative (social) level and an individual level as well. Such narratives provide further impetus for behaviour, and help to direct reactions to the cues of the Security and Engagement ethics, for better or for worse. Narvaez illustrates this point with the following helpful examples:

"Arpaly (2003) points out how the Nazi Joseph Goebbels had occasional episodes of compassion (which he interpreted as weakness of the will) towards the Jews he was helping exterminate, leading him to perform altruistic acts for Jews against which he subsequently hardened his resolve and actions. An Imagination Ethic which fostered the belief in evil Jewry was able to overcome an Engagement Ethic that reacted otherwise. On the other hand, the deliberative mind may be vetoed by the intuitive. In the case of morality, Arpaly points out how Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn believed that the most moral thing he could do was turn in Jim, his friend, the escaped slave. But he cannot bring himself to do it. Although the deliberative mind may learn particular principles from upbringing or schooling, such deliberative learning may not trump the deeper tacit understandings, learned from life experience. Thus the Imagination Ethic operates in interplay with the other ethics."[51]

5. TET and interreligious dialogue

With this interplay in mind, we return to the challenging situation of interreligious dialogue that was introduced above. In view of the understanding of TET, it is possible to see how each of the ethics may be made manifest in the current situation: the Security Ethic will tend to be engaged in those situations that are

46 *Ibid.*, 105..

47 Cf. *Amasio, Antonio*: Descartes' error. Emotion, reason and the human brian, London 1996; *Porter, Jean*: Nature as reason. A Thomistic theory of the Natural Law, Grand Rapids 2005.

48 *Narvaez* 2008b [Fn. 4], 105.

49 *Lovat, Terence / Toomey, Ron* (Eds.): Values education and quality teaching. The double helix effect, Dordrecht 2009.

50 *Narvaez* 2008b [Fn. 4], 105.

51 *Ibid.*, 106.

characterised by fear or lack of trust in encounters with the religious 'other'; the Engagement Ethic will continue to drive diverse groups of people into situations of encounter with each other (but will not necessarily prescribe the nature of those encounters – this will depend on the ambience in which they occur and whether or not the Security Ethic is the primary mode of operation at a given time); and, the Imagination Ethic will draw on rational deliberations to limit the operations of the more primitive ethics, or to situate their instincts and inclinations within the context of a moral narrative which justifies (or otherwise) their operation.

What arises clearly out of this account of the operations of the three ethics, with the background information about the nature of interreligious dialogue in the current context, is that it is typically the Security Ethic that is engaged in such encounters. Spurred on by a suspicion and, at times, outright hostility towards the religious 'other', the Security Ethic provides a means of response which follows the pattern outlined above: namely, hostility, exclusion and, in the worst case scenario, outright violence. A similar pattern emerges when the context within which the religious other is encountered is characterised by fear. If one's own religious beliefs constitute a core of one's identity, and encountering difference is seen as a threat to this identity, then the ingredients for the ignition of the Security Ethic are, similarly, in place. Furthermore, when such responses are aligned with the Security Ethic, they may be left unchecked, or could be explicitly justified, by rational criteria. Such an observation supports the view proffered above, namely that content knowledge alone – a religious literacy – is not all that is required for the transformation of such encounters. A more articulate justification of the Security Ethic's concerns does not equate necessarily to authentic dialogue. Indeed, it is possible that this will guarantee the opposite, albeit with a more sophisticated language.

The reason for the above potential hardening of attitude is that dialogue requires *"a willingness and skill to engage with mind, ideas and ways of thinking other than our own"*[52] which are dispositions largely unavailable to the brain operating out of the Security Ethic. As such, what is needed is a context wherein the Engagement and Imagination Ethics can be engaged, characterised as these are by the capacity and commitment to empathise emotionally and cognitively with other persons and their worldviews. According to the research cited above, the contexts which facilitate the operations of the brain in this way are initially characterised by safety, expressed more specifically in the values of trust and care. When such values are seen as primary, rather than ancillary to such encounters, they allow for a greater possibility of dialogue.

One possible critique of this view is that, in focusing on these affective dimensions of encounter, one loses the academic rigour necessary to interreligious dialogue today, instead erring on the side of making people 'feel good' in order to overlook their very real differences. We would not accept such a critique. According to the evidence cited above, the very best possibilities for this level of academic interaction occur *only* when the brain is able to function in its full capacity which, as we have seen, relies on more than the capacity to share content, but also on the fulfilment of moral foundational needs such as the need for security and relationality. Furthermore, the evidence emanating from updated research in values education suggests that it is in the nexus between security and relationality that the best forms of dialogue occur. One element of the Australian research deliberately involved students from largely Muslim dominated schools with those of largely non-Muslim schools, the latter with demonstrable history of being anti-Muslim. Within and

52 *Alexander* 2005 [Fn. 29], 5.

beyond school pedagogies combined to target safety and security issues and to move students from both sets of schools into each other's territories, in order to engage relationally in ways that assured feelings of safety and security. The results, as recorded in a government report on the project reads as follows:

The pedagogy was intensely focussed on addressing the misunderstanding and prejudice that had led to (an adversarial incident between the students from the different sets of schools) … It was also pitched in a way that was designed to soften some of the emotions that were still charged on both sides. Hence, a democratic and dialogical pedagogy sat at the centre of a day intended to challenge understandings and feelings that were fairly fixed and raw at the time. Apart from the persistent within-school pedagogy aimed at achieving enhanced understanding of the other, this beyond-school experience, together with several others equally strategically placed, seemed to work to challenge the earlier problematic attitudes and understandings. Students reported as follows:

> I found that we all liked similar things no matter where we came from.
>
> It was great meeting people and finding we are the same.
>
> While some had a different religion to me … we were alike in other ways.
>
> We had similar ideas, we said the same things … I also got to know their friends and they got to know mine.
>
> I learnt that everyone thinks in different ways … I also learnt that no matter how different a person is, you can learn to cooperate with them.[53]

6. Conclusion

In summary, we have argued that the levels of inter-religious dialogue necessary to ameliorating disturbing and potentially conflict-oriented encounters all too common in Western societies today can be identified helpfully by reference to the Triune Ethics Theory (TET) of Darcia Narvaez. Furthermore, we have provided evidence from updated values education research that endorses and offers practical examples of the effect conceived of in the above theory. The article proposes that TET constitutes a useful tool in conceiving of ways in which the civic negativity of a persistent 'us and them' mentality can be satisfactorily addressed and remedied.

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53 *Lovat et al.* 2010a [Fn. 6], 222.