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The socio-cultural and pedagogical implications of approaching religious tolerance in terms of radical centre values

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ABSTRACT
The postmodern times in which people live demand a new approach to values, particularly those that determine the extent to which a person should be tolerant of the views of people of different (religious) persuasion. Several theorists have raised the possibility and indeed the need for looking at values from the vantage point of a radical centre of values. A closer examination of this thesis reveals, on the one hand, that radical centre values as such do not provide viable guidelines for propriety but, on the other, that a theory of radical centre values can be used to explain certain forms of extremist religious behaviour such as radical intolerance (exclusivism) and total indifference (inclusivism). The application of the theory of radical centre values has several important socio-cultural implications, among others for the education of the person with integrity.
KEYWORDS *Values, radical centre theory, social relationships, culture, religion, tolerance, education*

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INTRODUCTION
Much has been written about religious tolerance and intolerance in the modern world (see Morton, 1998: 167-198; Grayling, 2002: 7-9; Schreiner, 2005: 6, 15; Bower, 2005: 43; Van der Walt, 2007: 160-213; Gray, 2009: 21-25; Wright, 2009: 413-428; Grayling, 2010: 220). The subject seems to have grown in topicality as communities become culturally and religiously increasingly diverse and pluralistic. Discussions abound about tolerance in the tension field between religious (and cultural) inclusivism, religious exclusivism, religious pluralism, religious dialogical pluralism (Vermeer & Van der Ven, 2004: 36), parallel pluralism, 'puzzle pluralism', gradual pluralism, magnetic particularism, healing particularism, imperial particularism (Van der Walt, 2007: 195-197), and about the conditions in which one could reasonably be expected to be religiously and culturally (in)tolerant.
The purpose of this article is to elevate the discussion about religious and cultural tolerance and intolerance to a philosophical level by looking at it from the vantage point of radical centre value theory, an approach developed by cultural philosopher Frederick Turner (1990a, 1990b, 1991a, 1991b, 1995, 2000) and others. To reach this aim, the article will unfold as follows. (1) The researchers will explain why the development of a radical centre values theory has become necessary. This will entail a brief description and discussion of current socio-philosophical conditions. (2) That will be followed by a brief discussion of the radical centre theory and related theories that could be used to show how religious and cultural (in) tolerance can be explained. (3) The next section is devoted to the problem of thick and thin value language. (4) The fourth section will discuss the implications of the radical centre of values approach for the education of the person of integrity. In covering these four areas, certain important socio-cultural and pedagogical aspects will be highlighted.

THE SOCIO-PHILOSOPHICAL NEED FOR DEVELOPING A RADICAL CENTRE THEORY OF VALUES
Makrides (2013: 250-251) correctly argues that postmodernism has not replaced modernism but has expressed important critical views about the tenets of modernism, and exists alongside modernism.

Postmodernity does not signify the end of modernity, but rather its critical reassessment, completion and further development.

The early twenty-first century is nevertheless still characterised by groups of people holding on to what has become known as the grand narratives of modernism. The religious groups and denominations that survive today, for instance, can be regarded as modernistic monoliths since for many of their adherents these institutions are the repositories, contexts and structures of moral value systems (Ackerley, 2008: 24); each of them embodies a grand narrative in the form of a set of historically developed and generally accepted values, values that are more or less homogeneously shared by their adherents. There is evidence, however, of these monoliths losing influence because of the postmodern zeitgeist which has taken root since the middle of the previous century (Schreiner, 2005: 12-13). So, on the one hand the researchers have remnants of modernistic, rationalistic religious and cultural grand narratives and on the other, an ever increasing number of individuals who have turned their backs on those grand narratives in favour of their own personal, individual "stories" or narratives. According to Bower (2005: 181, 254), it is a tenet of the postmodern perspective that individuals "invent" stories as fiction and stories masquerading as history to create meaning in regard to their identity, value and purpose.

Modern day society appears to be operating more and more on the basis of a values patchwork or supermarket (Schreiner, 2005: 12; Parkin, 2011: 155). There is no unifying perspective anymore; everything has become a matter of personal interpretation (Powlinson, 2003: 242). People accept and discard values as circumstances require; each person tries to find a way through this postmodern maze. What Hawking and Mlodinow (2010: 23) said about each person living in his or her own fishbowl and looking at the world through the sides of the bowl is truer today than ever before. Postmodernism has brought the intriguing insight that people never completely share the same worldview perspective, and that one of the tasks of individuals in these new circumstances is to develop a personal life and world map (Peck, 2006: 177, 179). This they do under the influence of their parents and other educators, their interactions with people beyond their immediate educators, with the social media (Moloi, Grobler, Van der Walt, Potgieter & Wolhuter, 2012: 132-134), and by reflecting about life in general and about their personal existence.

Because of all of these conditions, some thinkers have typified the postmodern condition as subjective and relativistic; there are no universal truths about what is morally right or wrong. What counts as such for each individual and his or her society is determined by his or her own traditions, beliefs and experiences (Grayling, 2010: 9; also see Needleman, 2008: 61, 108). According to McGrath (2005: 218), this attitude can be (partly) ascribed to the "uninhabitability" of modernity which led to a loss of enthusiasm for its goals and eventually to a complete inversion of many of its leading ideas, particularly its trust in the supreme ability of the human reason to understand the world and hence to completely master and control it. Van der Walt (2007: 178), following a thesis of Dutch philosopher Jacob Klapwijk, explains the relativistic nature of postmodernism as follows: since historicism places the human being and his or her culture on the axis and yardstick of time, in the all-encompassing perspective of history, it ipso facto reduces every viewpoint, every norm and conviction, however firmly believed, however ardently confessed, to a temporary phenomenon, an event of transient nature. It is held that everything is historically determined, as historically relative.

THE NEED FOR A FIRMER FOUNDATION

Educators and educationists and other professionals operating on the basis of values find it difficult to orientate themselves in these fluid conditions. People need a society free from total unpredictability (Parekh, 2000: 145). How does, for instance, an educator guide children and young people *normatively* in a desirable direction if the notion 'generally accepted desirable direction' does not exist, if the parent or teacher possesses no firm set of values that could guide his or her interactions with a child? Should educators, instead, guide children in the desired direction which the educators have a priori decided on because of the value system (grand narrative) that this desired direction embodies (Talen & Ellis, 2002: passim)?

The need for a radical centre of values theory arose because many professionals still attach value to a firm set of values on which to base their work. The same applies for the problem of religious and cultural tolerance. For some people, a radical centre of values can represent a firmer basis on which to decide what religious and cultural behaviour and tenets in others to tolerate (or not).

RADICAL CENTRE OF VALUES THEORY

In the 1990s, developments in science, philosophy, and culture suggested that relativistic philosophies may be mistaken (Talin & Ellis, 2002: 36). Consequently, culture philosopher Frederick Turner (1990a,

1990b, 1991a, 1991b, 1995) suggested the notion of the "radical centre" of values – a position that rejects both the acute relativism of postmodernists as well as the rigid moralism of traditional conservatives. Turner and other thinkers share a belief in self-organizing principles — that the universe is not deterministic, but self-renewing and infinitely creative (Turner, 2000: passim; see also Talin & Ellis, 2002: 36). Turner realised that mutual understanding and *modus vivendi* would be impossible in the postmodern circumstances that the researchers have described above. It has become impossible to expect people to share, to a certain extent, the same value system. The idea arose in Turners' (1990: 85, 97) mind of a "solvent" that could help people come to an understanding of a common medium for all kinds of cultural information, about which values all people would agree to, and on which they could base their future interactions with one another. If his theory is transposed to the fields of religion and culture, he in effect claims that once the bonds that hold the religious and cultural ideas and commitments of individuals and religious and cultural groups locked in a solid configuration are loosened by a "solvent" (the radical centre of values), the elements of religion or culture, being basically human, will have the hooks and valences to permit them to build up new coherent systems not limited to one religion or culture. As the human race recognises itself as a "we" it will paradoxically be more and more surprised by the otherness of what was once considered familiar in the respective religions and cultures. Turner makes this claim in the hope that moral values may one day be less arbitrary and thus more negotiable than they are today. It may be possible to develop some universal moral norms from an understanding of human nature (Turner, 1990b: 745). According to Talen and Ellis (2002: 36), Turner has defined a position that "rejects ... the acute relativism of postmodernists and the rigid moralism of traditional conservatives". This idea has since found support in various quarters (Hampshire, 2003: 133, 137-139; Bower, 2005: 225; Grayling, 2002: 8; Powlinson, 2003: 242; Van der Walt, 2007: 156; Harris, 2010: 70; Wright, 2009: 424-426; Rée & Urmson, 2005: 125; Lategan, 2010: 152).

The core notion of the radical centre of values theory, as Talen and Ellis (2002: 36, 37) indicate, is that there are durable, lasting and time-tested truths, values and discoveries that might be gleaned from the value systems that all individuals hold. These universally shared values form the 'radical centre' in terms of which, as will be indicated, religious tolerance and a viable *modus vivendi* can be explained, and in which the cultivation of the person with integrity can be rooted. The assumption here is that the radical value centre could provide a set of values that can serve, after some processing and reflection, as the basis for normative action. Needleman's (2008: 108-109) "ethics of the threshold" theory is similar to Turner's radical centre theory of values in that it pleads for the adoption of more permanent principles and tries to avoid the extremes of both moral absolutism and moral relativism Makrides' (2012: 264, 266) conceptualisation of a trans-confessional theory of religious tolerance and a constructive dialogue about it also relates to a radical centre of values theory. In Talen and Ellis' (2002: 37) opinion, there is a need for such *normative* theorising in a world stripped of meaning by postmodern philosophies and reductive views of nature and society (Needleman, 2008: 107).

While the researchers fully agree with Turner *cum suis* that a radical centre theory with regard to values has become necessary in the postmodern world of today, they would contend that this breakthrough notion should have been developed further into a more encompassing and explanatory theory that might elucidate how phenomena such as religious and cultural tolerance and intolerance actually work in modern society, where minimalist and maximalist value language actually fits in, how a *modus vivendi* can actually be promoted, and how the researchers could understand religious diversity and pluralism, inclusivism, exclusivism and (radical) relativism. By expanding it in this manner as they do in the remainder of this article, the radical centre of values theory could also make a contribution to socio-cultural-pedagogical theory in that it casts more light on the cultivation of the person with integrity, a subject that has not always received the attention that it deserves in a world full of corruption and other forms of socially deviant behaviour.

MINIMALIST AND MAXIMALIST VALUE LANGUAGE

The researchers now turn to the matter of thick and thin value language that flows from the application of the radical centre theory of values. Imagine a line with the term 'radical centre of values' in the centre, and towards the left of this, the inscription 'maximalist values'. To the right of the inscription 'radical centre of values' the inscription 'minimalist values' is found. The centre embodies the values garnered from the personal value systems of individuals who view themselves as autonomous holders of beliefs and values in the postmodern age in which people live. The radical centre embodying such universal values is a theoretical construct since such a set of values does not exist in the real world. The notion of a radical centre of values is nevertheless useful for the purpose of explaining why some people tend to be (totally) religiously tolerant and others to be (totally) intolerant.

Towards the right of the centre a minimalist interpretation of the values contained in the radical centre is found. This minimalist interpretation is a reformulation of the values embodied in the radical centre for a specific purpose such as to use them in common law, in a bill of human rights or in a code of ethics or an ethical code of behaviour (at a university or in a profession, for example). What is reflected in such documents are not the theoretically constructed values contained in the radical value centre itself but a set of values that have been slightly *processed* in the sense of having been selected, reinterpreted and reformulated for a specific purpose, such as to form the basis of a bill of human rights. In this form they are not quite as sterile and "contentless" as in the radical centre itself, but nevertheless remain minimalist. They represent the absolute minimum value system that a group of people or a community such as a nation or a profession can live with without arguing too much about what they mean with each value. In essence, such a minimally processed value system forms the basis of a social contract since it expresses the general consensus and trust (Ariely, 2010: 127-128) that had been gained during negotiations. According to Smith and Oosthuizen (2011: 7), it represents a vision, based on compromise, of the society that is worthy of the commitment of everyone. In the words of Currie and De Waal (2010: 32), this commitment is an indirect application of the values in the form of an 'objective normative value system', a set of values that must be respected whenever the common law or legislation is interpreted, developed or applied.

In many cases, it is up to legal authorities such as courts of law to interpret what exactly a certain value means in a certain society or in certain conditions (De Vos, 2011; Wright, 2009: 54-59; Schreiner, 2005: 6). In brief then: the minimalist set of values to the right of the radical value centre contains many or most of the values in the centre though with a degree of reinterpretation as dictated by their practical application in a group or society.

Although all people live in conditions partially dictated and determined by such minimalist codes (both legal and ethical), by far the most do not live strictly by them in their personal and communal lives. Most people tend to fill these essentially "contentless" values with content from their personal religions, life-maps or cosmoscopes. This explains why the researchers have, on their imaginary line, to the left of the radical centre the inscription "maximalism", referring to a maximalist interpretation and filling with content of the sterile values contained in the radical centre. Such values, formulated in maximalist value language, form the guidelines according to which individuals live their everyday lives.

The above can be illustrated with reference to the matter of human dignity (Parekh, 2000: 151-152). All people would arguably agree that the value "human dignity" should be contained in the radical value centre. All will probably also agree that the minimalist value "to respect the human dignity of other people" should be included in ethical codes and human rights manifestos, and that lawyers and other interpreters would have to explain exactly what is meant by that particular value (Parekh, 2000: 152), thereby contextualizing justifying the value on a universal level (Du Preez & Roux, 2010: 24). It can be assumed, however, that most people would rather entertain a more personal life-view filled and determined notion of what exactly it means to respect the dignity of other human beings, e.g. a Christian or Biblically founded view, or a Muslim / Quran (et cetera) view of human dignity. Because all of these interpretations emanate from the personal life-maps of the people who reflect on this problem, each interpretation will be particularistic, idiosyncratic and even confessional. This is understandable because individuals differ in virtually every aspect of their existence; these differences are reflected in their respective maximalist interpretations of the values contained in the radical centre. Swartz (2006: 566) correctly refers to these values that are maximally filled with life-view and religious content as "personal standards left to the conscience of the individual".

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS THEORY, WITH REFERENCE TO THE EDUCATION OF THE PERSON WITH INTEGRITY

Theorists seem to agree that an effective *modus vivendi* in a diverse and pluralistic society depends on the degree of integrity that the respective members of such a society possess. As far as the researchers could establish, none of these theorists has so far developed a detailed theory regarding the person with integrity by also taking the above theory of a radical centre of values into consideration. More intense light can be cast, indeed, on the notion of the education of the person with integrity by approaching the subject from the vantage point of this theory.

The person with integrity, Kubow (2011: 157) observes, is a person of noble character. Noble character speaks of one who possesses a distinctive and honourable quality, a particular attitude about life and self, and who demonstrates a consistent pattern of integrity in both private and public affairs. This ultimate dimension of character speaks to the core of who one is – one's values and beliefs that are developed in relation to others and lived out in the private and public spheres. Furthermore, as Nolan (2009: 13)

points out, a person with integrity is an organic individual who has successfully made a conscious ideological choice. The spirituality associated with, and flowing from such a choice helps him or her as an organic individual, as a fully integrated person, to transcend his or her self-centeredness and hence to be open to others and their opinions and beliefs in a spirit of unselfish altruism. The person with integrity will typically want to serve the interests of all in society in the interest of change for the better of all.

Noshulwana (2011: 16) proffers three criteria for integrity: the ability to discern between what is right and wrong (goodness as ethical behaviour); to act upon what has been so discerned, even at personal cost, and to say openly that s/he is acting on his or her understanding of right and wrong (authenticity as truthful behaviour). The first criterion captures the idea of integrity as requiring a degree of moral reflectiveness; the second brings in the idea of the integral person as steadfast, which includes a sense of keeping commitments. The third shows that the integral person is prepared to act unashamedly. A person with integrity, says Noshulwana, "possesses the serenity of (someone) who is confident in the knowledge that he or she is living rightly … a person we feel we can trust to do right, to play by the rules, to keep commitments". In short, says Julian (2002: 66, 110), the person with integrity is consistent, can be counted on, and is able to align his or her actions with his or her principles. The researchers could add other characteristics such as honesty, uprightness, no ambiguity, a general aspect of wholesomeness, respect for the dignity of others, sympathy, empathy, compassion, friendship, sensitivity, responsibility and the well-fare of others (Lusenga, 2010:24).

The notions of integrity and nobleness are often also associated with moral behaviour and responsibility which, says Lategan (2011: 86-87), portray the idea that a person acts in such a manner that he or she and other people can benefit from the action. Lategan seems to agree with Kourie (2006: 24) that integrity is deeply associated with morality in the sense of being willing to live a life for others, and to shy away from self-centeredness. Kourie's (2006: 25) idea of the person of integrity takes the researchers full-circle to the view of Nolan, namely that a person with integrity has taken a spiritual decision not to live for him- or herself anymore, but rather to live a life of compassion, tolerance, forgiveness, a sense of universal brother- and sisterhood. As Armstrong (2009: 29) correctly pointed out, this view of integrity seems to tie in with the classical Greek notion of *kenosis*, emptying.

The researchers will now examine how the radical centre of values ties in with the above understanding of the person of integrity and his or her education.

Every era in the history of human kind has made particular demands on education. The recent invocation of radical centre values does not imply that such specific demands that are at the same time commonly accepted to be universally valid should now suddenly be rejected. Its invocation does, however, imply that certain demands may be particular to a specific period in history, as alluded to earlier. One of these demands, which has been placed on education since the dawn of civilised society and has to be particularised on the basis of context, is that of educating the child for adulthood at the hand of socially acceptable values, norms and demands of propriety; in other words educating the child towards becoming a person with integrity, equipped with values maximally filled by life view content. Put differently, although the social act of the *demand* itself has always been understood to be universal, its content and the form in which it is being cast do not only relate to particular social contexts; it is also subject to continuous change.

Change is necessary since life is a vector. As a purposeful force, it has both magnitude and direction. It is, above all, a voyage and its course is carried into effect inside the force-field between varied (and variable) situations that people create for themselves and those that are being created for them – given the range of possibilities and limitations. A change in life-world therefore implies a change in life-situatedness and it is only logical for humans to endeavour to state objectives that have been derived from the demands that life is continually making on us. This life-situatedness, *per se*, is never isolated, railed-off or secluded; it is always related to other forms of situatedness, possibilities and limitations, and always reflects the values contained in the radical centre of values (Turner, 1990: 85, 97), in all kinds of configurations. It appears that there are at least three main navigational positions from which such particularized demands may be made on education, viz.

- the unique potential of the child and how education should best try and equip the child with the necessary dispositions that would turn him or her into agents that would take care of themselves, and in doing so, also take care for others (Van der Walt & Potgieter, 2011: 83),
- the life- and world-view of any particular community and how education should best try and change the child for the sake of a more desirable or better life and in the direction of the kind of commonly acceptable behaviour – both inside and outside any particular community – that is usually expected from a person with integrity (Van der Walt & Potgieter, 2011: 82), and

- the situatedness of the child in geographical space-time and how s/he should best be accompanied to become a truly "organic" person; i.e. one with integrity, given the possibilities and limitations of his/her tempero-spatial situatedness.

Their particularized (maximalized) values immediately appeal to most, if not all, people. They constitute the bedrock on which people proceed to construct their own life- and world-views. They have always been regarded as being fundamental and primary; they seemingly have designated priority in and during all our efforts to intervene in and interfere with reality. This strengthens the argumentative value of Turner's notion of a radical centre of values: people tend to particularize or maximalize the values contained in the radical centre of values.

The values in the radical value centre surface when researchers, for example, interrogate from a (postmodern) utilitarian, pragmatic and functional point of view:

- the basis of everything that may be worth something,
- the basis of everything that may be durable and lasting and
- the basis of everything that may be spaciously valuable.

Such interrogation shows that it is possible to distinguish between three inclusive, comprehensive and universal categories of values that all seem to reside in Turner's 'radical centre', namely: goodness (as ethical behaviour), truth (as authentic behaviour) and beauty (as aesthetic behaviour). Goodness (as ethical behaviour) represents the basis of everything that is worth something; truth (as authentic behaviour) represents the source of everything that is durable and lasting (and which is essentially realised/operationalised/positived through the dimension of time), and beauty (as aesthetic behaviour) represents the starting point of everything that may aspire to being spaciously valuable (and which is essentially realised/operationalised/positived through the dimension of space) (Potgieter, 1981: 8). Apart from the particularized and maximalized values that play a crucial role in education, as argued above, these three categories of values contained in the radical value centre should also be reckoned with in the process of educating young children.

As mentioned earlier, it would appear that educators and parents might not need the grand narratives of religious and cultural institutions anymore in order to account for (in an educationally justifiable manner) the unique potential of the child, the life- and world-view of any particular parental community, and the life-situatedness of the child in geographical space-time when it comes to the inculcation of values, norms and demands of propriety. A radical centre theory with regard to values has therefore become necessary in the postmodern world of today, and humans already possess an inherent ability to develop such a set of values that can be universally shared and at the same time be particularised (maximalized, as indicated above) – also with and among their children.

It is clear in the postmodernist times in which people live today that they need a more encompassing and explanatory theory such as that of radical centre of values. Such a theory can help clarify how phenomena such as religious and cultural tolerance and intolerance actually work in modern society. It can also explain the relationship between goodness, truth and beauty, on the one hand and, for example, the promotion of *modus vivendi* as an illustration of how the core values of goodness, truth and beauty might be operationalised in practice. Above all, radical centre theory can assist researchers in understanding that no person can become a fully integrated person, a person with integrity, without being educated in accordance with, on the one hand, norms, demands of propriety, values and attitudes that embody that integrity and find expression in religious and culturally tolerant behaviour, and on the other, norms, demands of propriety, values and attitudes that have been maximized (filled with normative content) in accordance with the educators' life and worldview.

Education should always strive to contribute towards a redemptive, deliberative, state-building, just and righteous society, filled with and run by citizens with integrity. Consequently, the truly "organic" person, one with integrity, should not only become and subsequently be an urbane, refined, socialized individual but also a caring, as well a religious and culturally tolerant member of his/her community and of society at large (Van der Walt & Potgieter, 2011: 82). In brief, the truly integrated citizen is aware of the values contained in the radical value centre, of the minimalistic values contained in policy documents such as a bill of rights on which a *modus vivendi* is based, and – most importantly – of the maximalistic values contained in his or her personal life- and worldview.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

An effective *modus vivendi* depends on the cultivation (education) of persons with integrity. In addition to the already widely recognised characteristics of a personality with integrity, the researchers drew

attention to a number of other features of such a personality, thereby contributing to our store of socio-cultural-pedagogical knowledge. To do so required that the researchers first had to contribute to societal relationship theory by outlining the notion of a radical centre of values that not only explains phenomena such as fundamentalism, maximalist value language, thin core value language, minimalist value language, religious and cultural tolerance and intolerance as well as the widespread phenomenon of value relativism which typifies the current postmodern zeitgeist but also casts more light on how the person with integrity could be educated.

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