

Submission  
No 420

## INQUIRY INTO EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS CLASSES REPEAL) BILL 2011

**Organisation:** Christian Democratic Party

**Date received:** 8/03/2012

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General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street Sydney NSW 2000

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We apologise for this late Submission to your Inquiry.

The secular Ethics Course was rammed through the NSW Parliament by the ALP and Greens in 2011 because they anticipated the Coalition would win the 2012 NSW State Election. The ALP and Greens wanted to tie the hands of the incoming Coalition Government which opposed the Ethics Course.

Parents have selected the Ethics Course because even though they thought they might not be religious, they wanted their children to be clearly taught what is right and what is wrong. They have been misled and disappointed over the Ethics Course which is simply a philosophical discussion group based on relativism or situation ethics. When parents have discovered this deception they have withdrawn their children from the Ethics Course.

The dangers of ethics with no right or wrong is illustrated by the recent report of two Australian ethical philosophers, Dr Alberto Giubilini, from Monash University, and Francesca Minerva from the University of Melbourne, who claim our moral right to kill new born babies. .

This secular ethics course takes no consideration of the mental development of children from infants to primary school age. The children have no foundation on which to base their philosophical discussion in discussing complex philosophical questions which would test many adults.

It also seems the topics for discussion in the Primary Ethics Curriculum "Framework" are based on radical Green party style politically correct issues that reflect their policies, for example:

Should humans eat animals?  
Should we protect whales?  
Should humans eat each other?  
What do animals need to live good lives?  
Should we tell on people who steal?  
Should we keep wild animals as pets?  
Should we protect plants from pain?  
Who owns the forests?  
Should we catch tadpoles?  
Should we keep animals in zoos?  
Endangered species and extinction.

Consumerism and ethical shopping.  
How to be an ethical shopper.  
Patriotism and cultural stereotyping.  
Is stealing morally wrong?  
Should animals have human rights?  
Are our futures and fates fixed?  
Can war ever be just?  
Should we give the environment moral consideration?  
Should we obey those in authority?

The shroud of secrecy surrounding the syllabus is without precedent in our education system.

Some criticism directed at Christian SRE has ignored the fact that the SRE now covers all recognised religions who wish to provide volunteer teachers.

Some newspapers have had advertisements headed "Scripture Teachers Wanted". These advertisements were for Muslim teachers to teach the Koran in SRE.

Hardly anyone would disagree that teaching ethics to children is anything but a good thing. The concern is: 'What ethics are being taught here?' Judeo-Christian? Buddhist? Communist? The facts are, we, the general public do not know. This situation clearly defines a case of a complete lack of transparency.

Here lies the root of the problem: we have a course taught in public schools, to public school students, yet the general public (including the parents of those children to whom the course is offered) has no right to know exactly what is being taught. We cannot fathom how a government can approve a course without knowing what *exactly* is being taught. How was this permitted?

At one point, the convenors of the ethics course stated that the curriculum could be made available to "NSW faith groups". This has been shown to be a most weak attempt at transparency. We sincerely doubt that the entire curriculum as is being taught in our public schools has been released to any individuals outside the group who comprise the St James Ethics Centre/Primary Ethics.

At any point has the *entire* curriculum being taught been reviewed by any individuals in the NSW parliament or the NSW Department of Education? Or has it been approved simply on the recommendation of Dr Sue Knight who was appointed to review the ethics trial?

On September 16, 2010, it was reported by the Catholic Communications, Sydney Archdiocese [http://www.sydneycatholic.org/news/latest\\_news/2010/2010917\\_1862\\_shtml](http://www.sydneycatholic.org/news/latest_news/2010/2010917_1862_shtml)) that there was an *alleged* conflict of interest between Dr Sue Knight who reviewed the ethics trial and Prof Philip Cam who designed the trial. The article stated that the two of them served as state executives for the Federation of Australasian Philosophy in Schools Associations (FAPSA), which suggested they not only knew each other but also shared the same philosophical outlook. This allegation may bring into question the impartiality of the review process on which the approval of the course was based.

One would have to be naive to assume that children will be only taught Socratic and Aristotelian philosophical ethics. There is clear evidence in the trial report that moral scenarios were taught where there was clearly a right and wrong situation, however, children were told that there were no right or wrong answers. This yielded clear concerns about moral relativism which were admitted by Dr Knight. She further admitted that ethics teachers had to put words into children's mouths due to their immaturity.

The ethics course is inherently limited in its fundamental purpose. Every single final recommendation of the trial in the report by Dr Knight stated that this course was meant to complement SRE classes – not replace them. There is a large difference between these two concepts, especially when it must be noted that the ethics course is being offered in some schools to all Year 5 and 6 students not just those whose parents decide to withdraw them from SRE.

Another important issue at hand is also one of informed consent. Parents have been able to have their children totally free not to attend SRE classes, based upon a fully informed decision over what is included in SRE classes. Society does not benefit if one believes that it is a good thing for children to be taught an unknown curriculum based on an unknown agenda, by individuals who put words into primary children's mouths.

We attach copies of the Rev Hon Fred Nile's Speeches covering the Ethics Course.

1. Annexure A: Speech opposing the Education Amendment (Ethics) Bill 2010.
2. Annexure B: Speech introducing the Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill.

Recommendations:

1. The NSW Legislative Council Committee has no option but to recommend that the Ethics Course concludes in November 2012 so as to protect the psychological health of NSW students.
2. An investigation should be held as to what other alternatives can be made available for children whose parents do not want them to attend SRE. Some schools already provide videos and text books so children are not left without meaningful occupation.

**Ian Smith**

Treasurer/Party Agent

Signed on behalf of the Christian Democratic Party

6<sup>th</sup> March 2012

## ANNEXURE A:

### EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS) BILL 2010

[http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LC20101201068?open&refNavID=HA8\\_1](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LC20101201068?open&refNavID=HA8_1)

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE** [3.20 p.m.]: I speak for the Christian Democratic Party on the Education Amendment (Ethics) Bill 2010, which amends the Education Act 1990 to allow special education in ethics as a secular alternative to special religious education in government schools. The Christian Democratic Party is totally opposed to the bill. We oppose it because it will create a secular, humanist, philosophical ethics course in New South Wales schools in 2011. The bill is designed to prevent the next democratically elected government, which we anticipate will be a Coalition government, from implementing its own education policies. Those policies may cover a range of issues, including the future of any ethics course. It is shameful for a Labor Government, in cooperation with the Greens, to pre-empt the wishes of the people of New South Wales in this way. The Government acknowledged that aim in the second reading speech. The Hon. Verity Firth, the Minister for Education and Training, stated:

So why is this legislation necessary? It has been made necessary by the opportunism of the New South Wales Opposition. It is necessary because New South Wales Coalition members believe that they have the right to prevent children engaging in an ethics course in the time set aside for special religious education.

In other words, the Minister acknowledges that the driving force behind this bill is a desire to frustrate the democratically elected government after 26 March next year. In my 29 years in this Parliament I have never seen a bill designed for that purpose. I have never seen a Coalition government attempt to thwart the legislative agenda of an incoming Labor government, or vice versa, in this way. That is what this Government is attempting to do. It is even more shameful that that is being done using legislation dealing with ethics. We have an unethical bill dealing with ethics. This bill could be used in an ethics class as an example of unethical behaviour. It is a good example of what politicians should not do because it is unethical.

As members know, the ethics course trial was conducted in 10 primary schools this year. The Minister for Education and Training and the Government keep saying that the ethics course has nothing to do with scripture. The word "scripture" is traditionally used because when classes in religion were established in public schools their purpose was to convey the teachings of the *Bible*, which are referred to as "scripture". The Minister has repeatedly said that the Government is in no way undermining the importance of scripture classes in State schools. However, the results of the ethics class trial demonstrate the opposite. The Government said that the ethics course would be offered only to children who do not attend scripture classes

**Dr John Kaye:** It is still true.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** It is not true; it is a lie. Once again, it is unethical. The truth is that the ethics course was promoted to every student at the 10 primary schools that participated in the trial. That broke the trust behind the introduction of the ethics course—it was to be offered only to children who did not attend scripture classes. It was promoted to every student and we know why. I do not know whether that happened at the direction of the Minister for Education and Training, but it did happen at the direction of the Director General of the Department of Education. He apparently directed schools to publicise the course to all students. That immediately created competition between the ethics course and scripture classes. Notices about the ethics course were sent to every parent of a child at those schools. They were all offered the option of sending their children to scripture

classes or ethics classes. That is obviously their choice, but that competition should never have occurred. The Government broke its promise not to create that situation. The basis of the course was that it would be offered only to children who did not attend scripture classes.

Some teachers at the participating schools also actively recruited children to attend ethics classes. I understand that some of them even taught the course, and that was contrary to the policy of the Department of Education and Training. They apparently volunteered to take the classes because no-one else was available to teach them. Primary school children look up to their teachers; they idolise them. Members can imagine the scenario of a teacher saying to his or her class, "I will be teaching the ethics course tomorrow. I promise you an exciting, interesting time." That would naturally encourage children who would have normally attended a scripture class to attend the ethics class instead. As a result, attendances at scripture classes declined, in some schools by 50 per cent or 70 per cent.

Joy Houghton, a friend and a scripture teacher at one of the participating schools, rang me in tears to tell me that she had only one child left in her class. She was devastated. That proves my argument that ethics classes were run in direct competition with scripture classes. I cannot prove it, but I believe that some people—perhaps including the Minister for Education and Training—totally disagree with scripture classes being offered in our schools. I know that many in the Teachers Federation object to them. They confuse our public education system with the American system, which does not provide for scripture classes or bible teaching in government schools.

For more than a century New South Wales legislation dealing with education has guaranteed the place of religion-based classes in our public schools. Scripture classes in public schools were enshrined in New South Wales legislation by Sir Henry Parkes and their place in the system was reaffirmed most recently in the Education Act 1990, which states:

In every government school, time is to be allowed for the religious education of children of any religious persuasion

The right to attend scripture classes is an essential part of New South Wales public education. Nothing should be done to undermine the right of parents to have their children attend classes in the teachings of their religion. Our state schools offer a range of religion classes. In the early days of the colony those classes would have been in the teachings of the Anglican Church. They were then expanded to cover the teachings of the Presbyterians, the Baptists and, when it was recognised, of the Catholic Church. Our multicultural immigration program has now seen those classes expanded to include the beliefs of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and many others.

Why is this Labor Government undermining a very important part of our multicultural society? Our commitment to freedom of religion has enabled parents to choose to have their children taught the tenets of their religion. Parents may not have had access to a church, temple or mosque, but their children have been able to attend religious instruction in our state education system, and that is right and proper.

I note too there is confusion in the Government's mind—and I am not surprised because many school teachers are confused as well—over the word "secular". Sir Henry Parkes, in establishing the public school system, which was to include special religious education and general religious education, said that it had to be "secular religious education". It sounds like a contradiction in terms, but he said it. What did he mean? He meant it had to be *Bible*-based, or scripture-based, and not denominational indoctrination. He was trying to avoid conflict within the public school system. He meant that the essentials of the Christian faith or the Christian religion should be taught in

those early days when there were no other religious teachers. So, the word "secular" in the Education Act was never meant to mean "non-religious". Yet the Minister has used that word in this bill. It provides:

(1) Special education in ethics is allowed as a secular alternative to special religious education at Government schools.

(2) If the parent of a child objects to the child receiving special religious education, the child is entitled to receive special education in ethics, but only if:

(a) it is reasonably practicable for special education in ethics to be made available to the child at the Government school, and

(b) the parent requests that the child receives special education in ethics.

(3) A Government school cannot be directed (by the Minister or otherwise) not to make special education in ethics available at the school.

When the bill was made public I was staggered when the Minister was reported to say that if the bill is passed and the ethics course goes into the state schools next year, if the majority of parents of a government school do not want the course and the principal does not want it, the school will be required to have it if one parent or more parents of the schoolchildren ask for the ethics course to be taught. The Government would force an ethics course on a primary school against the wishes of the majority of parents and against the wishes of the school principal. How undemocratic can that be? It just shows how unethical this bill is and how unethical the Minister is in seeking to implement it in New South Wales. Shame!

Why are we debating this bill? We are debating it because the Minister believes—and rightly so—that the Australian Labor Party will lose the next election and that the Coalition will be in government after 26 March. She is hoping and believing that the Australian Labor Party members of this House, together with the Green rump, can oppose any education policies of a democratically elected Coalition government. That is what this is all about. The Government has made an assessment of numbers and believes that the Australian Labor Party and the Greens will have the ability to defeat any legislation passed by a democratically elected Legislative Assembly and introduced into this House. I hope and pray they are completely wrong in that judgement. It will be in the hands of the people of New South Wales, and I trust that it will not happen.

Other members have referred to opposition that has been expressed to this secular philosophical ethics course. It is secular because there is no right or wrong: there is no God, there is no Jesus and there is no *Bible* in this so-called ethics course. It is also not truly ethics; the course will be a philosophical discussion. In many ways the bill should be talking about philosophical ethics. The course will involve a discussion wherein children will share their ignorance and there will be no direction given by a teacher as to what is right or wrong. Children are looking for leadership, for guidance and direction, and they will not get it with this ethics course. The Anglican Archbishop made this point in his criticism. He referred to this as a bad decision made under political pressure that which will impoverish the education of many New South Wales public school children. He went on to say:

Philosophical ethics is not a real alternative to the study of religion and it is unfair to confront parents with the dilemma of having them both taught at the same time. The "examined life" starts with a well-rounded education.

He went on to say:

Our concerns are for the children who now will be denied introduction into the great questions posed by the faith-traditions. For example, even though the ethics lesson plans were not publicly released, it is apparent that they did not include clear guidance on right and wrong.

Dr Sue Knight, who evaluated the course, said also that it does not provide clear direction about right or wrong. The president of the New South Wales Council of Churches, Reverend Richard Quadrio, described the government's plan as speculative and unworkable. He asked the question:

How are the St James Ethics centre going to recruit the hundreds if not thousands of volunteers needed to teach these classes if they are to begin in 2011?

Is the Government going to fund the St James ethics centre who admitted that their resources were stretched by teaching only two grades in 10 schools during the trial?

The bill queries whether it will be practicable or not—whether it will be reasonably practicable. It is almost as though the Minister is having second thoughts and asking "Can we do this?" This may be the first time a bill has been passed by the Parliament that does not have an adequate education plan to enable it to work. Members are passing a bill hoping that it will work. I do not hope it will work; I hope it will be defeated. However, it is clear that the Government has given no thought to resourcing this ethics course. If the Government takes responsibility for them and pays volunteers or allows state school teachers to teach the courses, there will be one fewer period in the regular curriculum—because the Teachers Federation is so strict that it will not allow a teacher to teach one extra period. The federation will not allow its teachers to take on an extra class; consequently, primary schools will lose one teacher period. Senior Bishop Peter Ingham of the Catholic Church also stated:

Criticism of the failure of lessons to provide clear direction about right or wrong, or to give a moral compass, stand out as key issues in Dr Knight's report on the trial.

He refers to Dr Knight's evaluation and states further:

Additionally, the questions raised by Dr Sue Knight about the sourcing of funding for the course and volunteers to teach it, have not been adequately addressed.

It is important that the parents of the State should not be misled. Parents want their children to be taught what is right and wrong; they want them to receive genuine religious education; they want them to be taught ethics and what is right and what is wrong, and that usually comes from a religious foundation, such as the Ten Commandments. But teaching the Ten Commandments is banned from the ethics course. They cannot be taught. No reference to God, Jesus Christ or any other religious leader can be referred to. The course has to be totally secular or, to be more accurate, totally atheistic. The parents of the State should not be misled. For those who care about their children and want them to be taught what is right and what is wrong this ethics course is not the answer. It is misleading to teach children what is called situation ethics—that nothing is really right and nothing is really wrong. There are absolute values of right and wrong and those absolute values should be taught to our children in state schools. Those absolute values come from the Christian Bible, which contains both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Of course the New Testament ethics supersede those of the Old Testament; they were presented by Jesus Christ himself when he said that he would replace the harsh requirements in the Old Testament with the commandments of the New Testament, which is based on love. The children of our State should be taught the positive teaching of ethics that come from Jesus Christ, the greatest teacher of ethics the world has ever known. I oppose the bill.



[http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Prod/parliament/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LC20110805025?open&refNavID=HA8\\_1](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Prod/parliament/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LC20110805025?open&refNavID=HA8_1)

**Bill introduced, and read a first time and ordered to be printed on motion by Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile.**

### **Second Reading**

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE** [11.22 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The object of the Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011 is to amend the Education Act 1990 to repeal the provision inserted by the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010, which allows special education in ethics as a secular alternative to special religious education at government schools. The effect of the repeal will be delayed until the beginning of the next school year immediately following the commencement of the proposed Act. This simple and concise bill contains the following three clauses:

#### **1 Name of Act**

This Act is the Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Act 2011.

#### **2 Commencement**

This Act commences on the date of assent to this Act.

#### **3 Amendment of Education Act 1990 No 8**

##### **(1) Section 33A Special education in ethics as secular alternative to special religious education**

Omit the section.

##### **(2) Schedule 3 Savings, transitional and other provisions**

Insert at the end of the Schedule with appropriate Part and clause numbering:

##### **Part Provision consequent on enactment of Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Act 2011**

##### **Repeal of provision relating to special education in ethics**

The repeal of section 33A by the *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Act 2011* does not have effect in relation to the provision of ethics classes in government schools until the beginning of the next school year immediately following the commencement of the Act.

As has already been said, there has been extensive debate in the community and wide coverage in the media, in particular, in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, on the ABC and other media outlets, in relation to this bill and my perceived actions regarding the future of the secular humanist so-called ethics course. I believe that that course does not teach children right from wrong but promotes the secular humanist relative philosophy where there are no

absolutes, such as "You shall not murder", "You shall not lie", and "You shall not steal." Even Dr Knight, who conducted the review for the Labor Government, said that the course should not be called an ethics course; rather, it should be called a philosophical relativism course, and I agree. Relativism is the basis of secular humanism. I believe, and I know other members will disagree, that that is the philosophy we saw during World War II with the Nazis and communists.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** I never did; I was speaking of the philosophy. Situation ethics were followed by other regimes such as the Nazis and the communists. Situation ethics means that nothing is right and nothing is wrong; therefore, human beings can be killed without any embarrassment or reservation. Situation ethics is a dangerous philosophy upheld by The Greens. I agree with the need for the teaching of true ethics in schools, colleges and universities in New South Wales. Those ethics should be based on history's greatest teacher of ethics, the Lord Jesus Christ, who presented Almighty God's moral ethic for the human race beginning with the Ten Commandments. Of course, as members know, Jesus Christ was far more than a teacher of ethics. He came into the world to be the Saviour, to seek and to save that which was lost, which is the Gospel.

I sincerely regret that some parents, I assume, have objections to Christianity or scriptures and may be atheists, and will prevent their children from learning about the most important aspect of our Australian culture, our Christian heritage and faith. Even our atheistic Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, said recently, "All children should have a knowledge of the *Bible*." She said:

... what comes from the Bible has formed an important part of our culture. It's impossible to understand Western literature without having that key of understanding the Bible stories and how Western literature builds on them and reflects them and deconstructs them and brings them back together".

I thank the Prime Minister for her comments. I am concerned that there has been a subtle change during the regime of the former State Government. Estimates have been given of up to 100,000 children who do not attend special religious education classes. Previously, the policy was that children would attend special religious education and scripture classes unless their parents wrote a letter asking for the child to be withdrawn. Some schools have reversed that policy by saying they want a letter from parents indicating the child is to attend religious education classes. That is a reversal of the traditional policy since 1880 and may account for what appears to be an increased number of children not attending religious education classes.

In view of the media commentary, I wish to state for the record that I have not sought to blackmail the Coalition Government. I simply reminded the Government that before it flatly rejected my Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill it should consult and remember that it needs our votes to pass its legislation, particularly the controversial industrial relations legislation. I never said that I would vote against the legislation, even though I had genuine concerns about its impact. This is important. During my meeting with the Premier on Thursday 28 July—a meeting held at his request—we did not discuss the industrial relations legislation or my vote on any matter. Members may be surprised to hear that. We only discussed the best way forward for my ethics repeal bill. We came to the conclusion that my bill could proceed through the Coalition cabinet and then to the party room for discussion.

I have no way of controlling the Coalition party room, but I hope that through the discussion in the party room it may lead the 88 members to agree that they can support my bill in due course. The bill will be adjourned to 16

September by the Hon. Paul Green to allow those discussions to take place. I also want to provide an opportunity for the church leaders to give further consideration to their position. There has been some thought, because of the extreme views of The Greens and others, about whether the church should avoid controversy by saying nothing more about the Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill. This is being discussed within the church. No one in the church supports the ethics course. There is no question about that. The church is wondering only how to avoid controversy and perhaps some backlash against those special religious education teachers in our government schools.

My intention throughout the whole process has been to hold the Coalition Government to its original election policy. The Coalition, along with Christian church leaders, condemned the Education Amendment (Ethics) Bill in this House and in the other place. The Coalition voted against the bill, opposing the Australian Labor Party and The Greens'. Christian church leaders have requested that I do whatever I can. As members know, I campaigned strongly during the recent State election on that issue. That is why I introduced a repeal bill on behalf of my constituents, as well as those who voted for the Australian Labor Party or Liberal Party, but who also agree with the policies and strategies of the Christian Democratic Party.

Unfortunately, just prior to the State election on 26 March 2011, the now Premier told me—wrongly as it turns out—that the Coalition believed The Greens would hold the balance of power in the New South Wales upper House. He told me, privately at the time, that despite his desire to continue with his original policy he believed the Australian Labor Party and The Greens, if they had the balance of power, would block any attempt to repeal the bill. However, as members know, and the Hon. Dr John Kaye has made the point very clearly in his contribution this morning, the Christian Democratic Party, in cooperation with the Shooters and Fishers Party, now holds the balance of power—I call it the balance of prayer and responsibility—and not the pagan Greens, who are no longer relevant in New South Wales. That is part of the reason for their anger and criticism of what I am endeavouring to do.

Given the outcome of the election, the Coalition can now implement its original 2010 policy. I trust that in due course it will vote for the Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill, which states that ethics courses will conclude in December 2011. School principals will have time to arrange suitable quality educational opportunities for children who are withdrawn from scripture classes in 2012 by their parents. Some church leaders were concerned that the repeal bill, if implemented immediately, would disrupt New South Wales schools. The church leaders do not want that to happen and neither do I. That is not my intention.

The St James Ethics Centre is now a secular centre. Some people believe that it is a voice for the Christian community. It is no longer in that role. The recent article by Dr Simon Longstaff in the *Sydney Morning Herald* contains a number of fallacies. First, he claims the churches now support the secular ethics course. The churches do not support it and that is the point I am making. The churches still strongly oppose it. I have a handwritten memo from Archbishop Peter Jensen stating:

I have always opposed the introduction of the ethics classes and regard it as an unfortunate breach of our long established principle.

Cardinal Pell has also contacted me. Cardinal Pell and Archbishop Peter Jensen are anxious there be no drawn out controversy in the media and in the public school system, and particularly that the church's position not be misrepresented—as it has been in this debate—to say that the Christian churches oppose ethics. That then becomes an untrue headline. The church and Christians support the Judea-Christian ethic and they have

reservations about a secular humanist ethics course that does not teach children what is right or wrong according to its founders.

Secondly, Dr Longstaff claims that I wish to repudiate the whole tradition of western thought. That is not true. Thirdly, he says it is wrong that I, Fred Nile, repudiate honesty, respect and moral courage. That is not true. Dr Longstaff's comments are ironic, given that one of the major objections I have about the so-called ethics course is that it explicitly does not teach morals and therefore should not be called an ethics course. It is a course on philosophical discussion. Dr Knight said it is dealing with philosophical relativism. Fourthly, Dr Longstaff criticised me using the language that "might was right", stating that I am using political power gained through having the balance of power in the House. However, he has forgotten when the ethics legislation was originally introduced in 2010 the Australian Labor Party and The Greens used their might to force it through the Parliament, particularly the upper House. This is the ethical issue: The Greens and the Australian Labor Party rammed the bill through before Christmas because they knew they were going to be thrown out of Government; they knew they were going to lose the election. Their strategy was to tie the hands of a new democratically elected government.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** The Coalition was democratically elected, but The Greens wanted to block the process. They thought they would have the balance of power, so they rammed the legislation through this place before Christmas to ensure that the new Government would not be able to reverse the process. That is what happened in a number of cases. When it suits them, The Greens believe that might is right. I appreciate why Dr Longstaff is defensive given the serious questions being asked about the validity of his course. Nevertheless, I believe it is unethical to engage in the sort of invective and characterisation in his article and some of the reports in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

I remind members and Dr Longstaff that Socrates—the philosopher to whom he often refers—was virtually alone and was ultimately executed because he dared to question the majority world view. He questioned what young people were being taught and the value of education. As we know, he was forced to take poison to end his life. I am simply questioning what children are being taught and the value of secular ethics education. As I have said a number of times, the course does not teach ethics as most parents understand the term and that is why they have questioned the churches' desire to get rid of the classes. We all want our children to be taught about what is right and what is wrong and the Ten Commandments, and people wonder why the churches would oppose that. However, they do not understand the specific nature of the so-called ethics course that is being offered to about 100,000 children in this State.

Some people tell me not to worry about it and say that they will concentrate on scripture teachers and special religious education. But what about those 100,000 children and those who are attending the ethics course? I understand that only 2,700 children are participating in the course. Because such a small number are involved some church leaders have told me that I am wasting my time pursuing this legislation. The ethics course is a dismal failure because of the 100,000 children who do not attend scripture classes only 2,700 have enrolled in ethics classes. That is despite their promotion by a number of teachers and in some Department of Education literature, which states that all children should have the opportunity to participate in the classes, not only those who do not attend scripture. That resulted in a number of children moving from scripture classes to the ethics course.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Dr John Kaye will be pleased to know that a number of them have subsequently abandoned that course because it is so boring.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** I am simply saying that some church leaders do not believe we should be worried. However, I have a Christian conscience and I am concerned for the children who participate in secular ethics classes. I have a responsibility to them and I will not allow them to be abused or misled by that propaganda.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Dr Longstaff assured me and others that we should not be worried because there is no movement to change religious education. He knows that even some of his own supporters, members of organisations such as the Teachers Federation, The Greens, the left wing of the Australian Labor Party and others wrongly believe that the separation of church and State means that there should be no religious education in government schools

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Members know that what I am saying is true. Those groups are now attacking the new chaplaincy program in government schools, which was introduced by the Howard Government and which has been supported by the Gillard Government. Those people who question the value of religious education and scripture classes wrongly believe that when Sir Henry Parkes introduced state education and said that it should be free and secular he meant that it should be non-Christian or non-religious. That was never his intention. In the 1880s, the term "secular" was used in a specific way to prohibit denominational teaching in New South Wales classrooms—that is, teaching the tenets of the Catholic, Baptist or Presbyterian faiths. He had no objection to scripture classes, which he decreed should be held for one hour each day. The official arrangement now is one hour of scripture classes each week. However, scripture teachers tell me that because of the administrative arrangements in many schools they are fortunate if they get 20 minutes in the class.

I make it clear to members that I have never said that the Premier should break his word. My position is that he should simply uphold the Coalition's original decision, particularly given that it strongly opposed and voted against the legislation that enabled the introduction of ethics classes. The Coalition quite rightly saw it as a long-term threat to the continuation of special religious education. Dr Longstaff became militant and sought to incite a mob uprising against me and my actions. His actions are more akin to those that he despises. Perhaps he should have a lesson in ethics. The *Sydney Morning Herald's* campaign in support of ethics classes is obvious on the letters page of that newspaper in that 99 per cent of the letters published have been critical of my actions.

The editorial published on 4 August is wrong in its assertion that "among the recent legacies of the NSW Government, few enjoy as much mainstream bipartisan political support and community endorsement as the introduction of ethics classes in state schools". The *Sydney Morning Herald* acknowledges that many people have made submissions opposing the introduction of the ethics course. A petition signed by 50,000 New South Wales citizens opposing ethics classes was presented in the other place and I have presented similar petitions in this place day after day. The *Sydney Morning Herald's* claim that the policy has widespread community endorsement is wrong. It is now claiming that a vote for the Coalition was a vote for the ethics course. I totally reject that; a vote for the Coalition was a vote against a corrupt, divided and inefficient Labor Government. That was what voters focused on when they went to the ballot box. Polling undertaken before the election indicated that the Labor Government would be thrown out. Anybody else could have been elected to throw them out.

**The Hon. Lynda Voltz:** So what you are saying is that none of Barry's promises count?

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** They all count, but the ethics course was not the key policy that people were voting for.

**The Hon. Lynda Voltz:** If he made a promise on ethics it does not count; the Premier's word is not as good as

what he says—is that what you are saying?

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** I am saying that the Labor Party was so bad that it was going to lose the election even if he had no policies. Many Coalition voters and our own Christian Democratic Party voters assumed that if the Coalition were elected it would repeal the Labor-Greens ethics bill, which was rammed through the Parliament just prior to Christmas—an unethical approach to an unethical bill. The New South Wales Parents and Citizens' Associations annual conference statement claims that all its members support the ethics course and do not support my repeal bill., I know that in many parents and citizens' associations there has been a change in culture and a change in leadership of the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations so that it now reflects more closely the policy of the Teachers Federation. The parents and citizens organisation now reflects more closely the Teachers Federation—in other words, it has become more radical. People have questioned some of the policies—

**The Hon. Lynda Voltz:** The world has changed.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** In the past parents and citizens meetings were peaceful and well behaved. However, if a person stands up at some parents and citizens meetings and says, "I oppose the ethics course", he or she will be screamed at, shouted at and told to sit down. That has never happened before in the history of the parents and citizens organisation. A number of organisations have been critical of the ethics course. As we know, during the previous debate, the current Minister for Education spoke strongly against the bill.

As members know, I also moved amendments during debate to add the word "philosophical" before the word "ethics", but those amendments were rejected by the House. Dr Sue Knight—who was handpicked by the Labor Government to do the evaluation—made it very clear that it should be called "philosophical relativism". As I indicated, I want to allow time for calm, rational consideration of this bill. Debate will be adjourned until 16 September 2011 so that further consideration can be given to the bill by the Coalition and other members of the House—I hope even the Labor Party, but I do not expect The Greens to give any consideration to it at all.