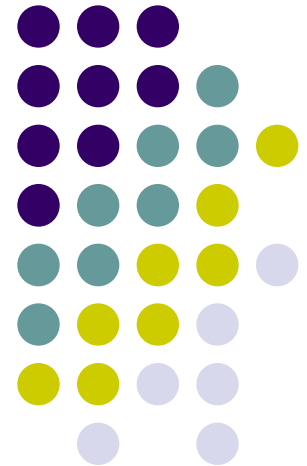


# Frontier Wars in Ethics

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Fr Kevin McGovern,  
Caroline Chisholm Centre for Health Ethics:  
CMTAANZ Conference,  
3 July 2014



# Outline



1. Frontier Wars in Australia
2. Frontier Wars in Ethics
  - i. Strengths & Limitations of Traditional Ethics
  - ii. The Enlightenment and the New Morality
  - iii. Deficiencies of the New Morality
3. Implications

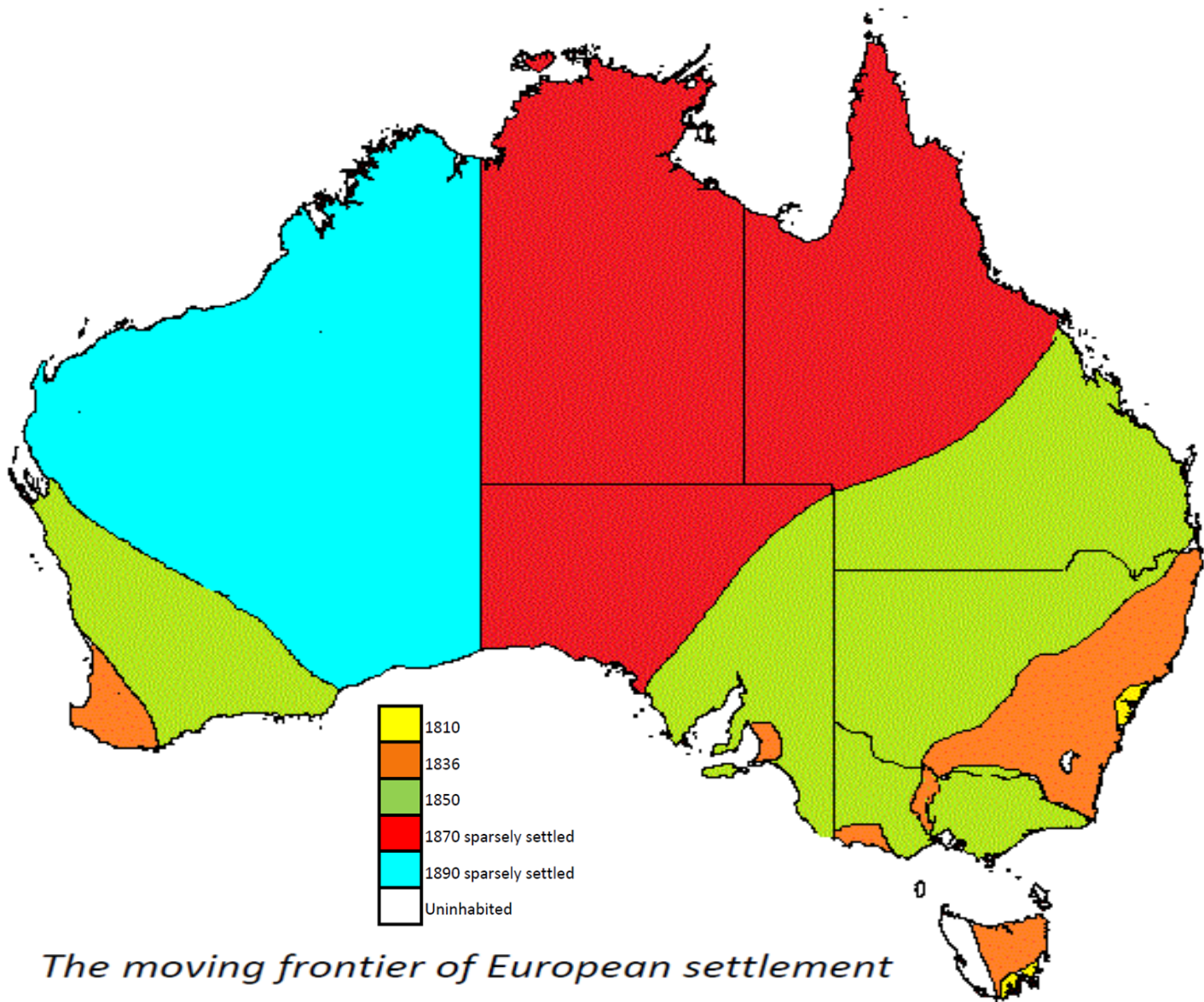


# 1. Frontier Wars in Australia

# The Great Australian Silence



- Until C20, settlers knew they were at war with the Indigenous Peoples.
- Early in C20, historians began to write of the “peaceful” settlement of Australia.
  - They were influenced by social Darwinism, which said that, when they are confronted by superior races, inferior ones simply lose the will to live.
- From the 1970s, historians have re-examined the historical record, and re-discovered the frontier wars.
  - History Wars
  - “Black armband” versus “white blindfold”
  - This debate is now over among historians, with the broad outline of the frontier wars now well established.
  - There is still limited knowledge about the frontier wars in the general Australian community.



*The moving frontier of European settlement*

# Deaths



- **World War One: 62,000 Australian deaths**
- **World War Two: 40,000 Australian deaths**
- **Frontier Wars**
  - **2,500 to 3,000 settler deaths**
  - **at least 30,000 Aboriginal deaths**
- **Boer War: 606 Australian deaths**
- **Vietnam: 520 Australian deaths**
- **Korea: 339 Australian deaths**
- **Sudan (1885), Boer War, Boxer Rebellion, Malayan Emergency, Indonesian Confrontation, First Gulf War, Afghanistan, Second Gulf War: each less than 50 Australian deaths**

# Other losses



- Loss of culture
  - more sophisticated than many people think
- Loss of the land
  - one of the world's great landmasses
  - Was the war which made this nation the frontier wars?

# Survival



- Pre-contact numbers: between 350,000 and 750,000
- Early C20 numbers: 150,000 (between 100,000 and 200,000)
  - many were injured physically and/or damaged psychologically
  - many lived in shanties on the edge of town
  - poor diet without access to clean water or sanitation
  - many died of diseases to which they had little natural immunity
  - birth rates were low; infant mortality was high
  - forced removal of children
  - stories were passed down, and they remembered what had happened
- survive
  - 2011 numbers: 670,000 (3% of Australian population)
- feel pride
- within multiculturalism



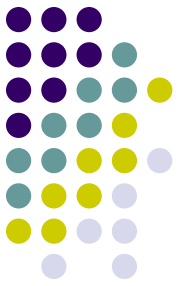


2. Frontier Wars in Ethics
  - i. Strengths & Limitations of Traditional Ethics

# Traditional Ethics



- Responsibility with exceptions
- Based on reason and revelation
- Human dignity based on *imago Dei*
- Teleological
- Doing and Being
- Virtues
- Common Good
- Activist Government
- Applied ethics – social ethics, bioethics, marriage and family
- Authoritarian
- Slow to change
- Some say, some reappraisal about sex and sexuality



## 2. Frontier Wars in Ethics

### ii. The Enlightenment and the New Morality

# The Enlightenment and the New Morality



- **David Hume** (1711–1776)
  - sought the basis of morality in the emotions (e.g. “moral sentiment,” “sympathy”)
  - BUT why should we follow these ‘moral’ emotions rather than our ‘immoral’ ones?
- **Immanuel Kant** (1724–1804)
  - sought the basis of ethics in reason and duty (e.g. the Categorical Imperative)
  - BUT why should we follow the Categorical Imperative?
- **Jeremy Bentham** (1748-1832), **John Stuart Mill** (1806-1873)
  - sought the basis of morality in consequences (“utilitarianism”)
  - BUT incommensurability of goods

# The Enlightenment and the New Morality (cont'd)



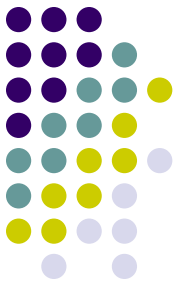
- **Frederick Nietzsche** (1844-1900)
  - efforts so far had presupposed traditional moral content.
  - Nietzsche rejected traditional moral content!
- **Immanuel Kant** (1724–1804)
  - moral values do not come from outside – either from God or from nature
  - instead, “each man his own moralist”
  - pure autonomy became the only basis and the only content of ethics
  - “moral relativism”



## 2. Frontier Wars in Ethics

### iii. Deficiencies of the New Morality

# Deficiencies of the New Morality



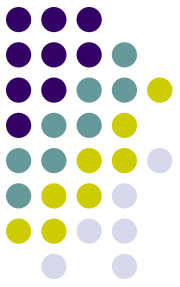
## Traditional Morality

- Responsibility with exceptions
- Based on reason and revelation
- Human dignity based on *imago Dei*
- Teleological
- Doing and Being
- Virtues

## The New Morality

- Autonomy with exceptions
- Basis is unclear
- Human dignity based on actual capacity for reason
- Not teleological
- Little emphasis on Being or the Virtues

# Deficiencies of the New Morality (cont'd)



## Traditional Morality

- **Common Good**
- **Activist Government**
- **Applied ethics – social ethics, bioethics, marriage and family**

## The New Morality

- **Individualistic, with little sense of the common good**
- **Limited Government**
- **Applied ethics – social ethics, bioethics, marriage and family, sex and sexuality**





### 3. Implications

# Implications



- 1) Tell the story of the frontier wars in Australia
- 2) Recognise the special place of the Indigenous Peoples in this land
- 3) Feel proud of traditional morality
- 4) Work for appropriate reappraisals within traditional morality
- 5) Multiculturalism
- 6) Conscientious objection
- 7) Promote the common good
- 8) Promote the virtues