

# EUREKA STREET

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# Australia Nation



# Incoming tide

With Martin Krygier, Wendy Brady, Humphrey McQueen,  
Adrian Chan, Marilyn Lake, Paolo Totaro

# And the winner is ... *E*thics

**James Franklin** wins the *Eureka Street* Ethics Essay Competition for 1998, and the \$1500 prize donated by Southern Cross Capital Exchange Ltd.

*Eureka Street* congratulates Dr Franklin and thanks Southern Cross Capital Exchange Ltd for its generous sponsorship. We also congratulate the other entrants for the high quality of their essays and the enthusiasm of their response. The judges were Professor Tony Coady, Director of the Centre for Philosophy and Public Issues at the University of Melbourne, Fr Andrew Hamilton SJ of Jesuit Theological College and the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne and Morag Fraser, the editor of *Eureka Street*.

## Accountancy as Computational Casuistics

**I**F A COMPANY'S SHARE PRICE RISES when it sacks workers, or when it makes money from polluting the environment, it would seem that the accounting is not being done correctly. Real costs are not being paid. People's ethical claims, which in a smaller-scale case would be legally enforceable, are not being measured in such circumstances. This results from a mismatch between the applied ethics tradition and the practice of the accounting profession. Applied ethics has mostly avoided quantification of rights, while accounting practice has embraced quantification, but has been excessively conservative about what may be counted. The two traditions can be combined, by using some of the ideas economists have devised to quantify difficult-to-measure costs and benefits in environmental accounting.

When BHP managed to close the Newcastle steelworks, its share price surged, to the benefit especially of the directors who made the decision. There has to be a suspicion that capitalism is pulling its usual trick of distributing the profits to itself and the costs to someone else. That means that the accountancy is being done wrongly. That in turn means that there is an obligation to discover how to do it right.

There are plenty of other cases where costs are distributed to people against their will, and where they have no legal or other recourse, because of a combination of difficulty in measuring the loss, and the lack of a legal regime to sheet home losses to those causing them more or less indirectly. US buyers of oil do not pay the cost of sending the USS Enterprise to the Gulf to protect the source of the oil; that cost is not 'internalised', but paid by the State. Financiers insist on their rights to global mobility of capital and the freedom to invest where they like, but those in the Third World who lose their livelihood as a result cannot insist on any right to global mobility of labour; nor are they compensated for their not having the right to camp on Rupert Murdoch's lawn. Or—to take an example that may appeal to a different part of the political spectrum—the benefits accruing to small and isolated nations from the United States' role as global policeman are largely unmeasured and unpaid for.

*Essay continues on p43 ...*



*When T.E. Lawrence attempted to join the RAF in 1922, under the pseudonym John Hume Ross, he was initially turned away by the officer in charge. What does Biggles have to do with all this?*

—No answers, just more of the same, in our exceptionally dreadful Summer Quiz. See pp16–17, if you dare.

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## EUREKA STREET

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and theology

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COMMENT

MORAG FRASER

# New broom

WELCOME TO 1999 AND OUR NINTH YEAR of publication. We began, as our long-time loyal readers will recall, in the aftermath of the Gulf War, 1991, and now we are playing tag team with the millennium. The timing is pure coincidence, not portent, so we don't kid ourselves about our chance alignment with history, but at least it has the signal advantage of reminding us what year it is.

But then, no-one sensate will be able to avoid knowing what year *this* is. Proximity to the new century—let's not even mention the millennium and its controversial timing—brings on more than meteoric activity: it stirs the reflective, predictive and apocalyptic beasts we normally keep in hibernation.



I make no promises that *Eureka Street* will not stir, with the rest of the world, and spend some of the year considering where we have been as a nation and where we are heading. But no gloom. Passion perhaps; gloomy prognostications rapidly become self-fulfilling prophecies; passion and commitment lead to action. So we are starting on the front foot (our ardent New Year plea, too, for the Australian cricket team).

This month we take a comprehensive look at Australia through the eyes of six of its prominent, most independent-minded citizens. Their individual views are robust, various and often extremely challenging; as cultural analysts, they are witty, imaginative and humane, and alert us to facets of Australian life we will deny or ignore at our collective peril. Every one of them is a stranger to complacency.



Humphrey McQueen will give you a taste:

If we all behaved the way in which we were told we should behave to make the economy work, the whole society would have come to an end. It's because we don't put monetary values and greed at the top of how we actually organise our daily lives that the market society still works. Volunteers run sports societies and parents and citizens organisations. People pop over the fence to see that somebody else has got enough to eat if they're sick. That's how we know daily life functions, and we don't want it any other way. We know that for a whole range of reasons there needs to be a welfare state to fill some of the gaps, but people still have compassion and still want that virtue to be acknowledged as of some value (see 'A class balancing act', p25).

Our press gives a lot of space to its voyeur's version of vice, but the language of national virtue, demonstrated here by McQueen, doesn't get much of a run. 1999 seems the appropriate year then—before the deluge?—in which to make a public change to the national rhetoric, and express publicly the social concerns many of us voice in private. So do spend some of your summer time enjoying and pondering what this month's independent scholars have to say about Australia.

And when your sense of civic virtue is firm and sharp, then risk it all—maybe on January 26th—on our appalling, devious, far-fetched and family-fragmenting Summer Quiz (pp16–17).

Best of luck. ■

—Morag Fraser

COMMENT: 2

JON GREENAWAY

## O Suharto's legacy of violence

ON THE FRIDAY PRIOR to the sectarian violence of Sunday 22 November, a gathering of religious leaders in Jakarta issued a statement warning that religion was increasingly being used to divide the nation.

The meeting was held at the South Jakarta home of Abdurrahman 'Gus Dur' Wahid, head of the 35-million-strong Muslim fellowship, Nahdlatul Ulama. A number of his organisation in East Java had been killed by black-hooded assassins. In a statement endorsed by the group, Gus Dur observed: 'There has been a trend that religions are used by certain factions to sow hatred in an attempt to maintain power and to persuade other factions to join them.'

Two days later, rumours that a mosque had been burnt by Christians from the island of Ambon led to reprisal attacks that left 13 dead and over 10 churches ransacked or gutted. During the spree, the Santa Ursula convent school was invaded and put to the torch.

Primarily for lack of evidence to the contrary, the incidents were generally reported as spontaneous sectarian violence bred in an atmosphere of general chaos. However, just as NGOs claimed that the May violence and targeting of ethnic Chinese was orchestrated (the killing in October of 18-year-old Martadinata Haryono who was helping to substantiate claims of rape has been cited as proof of this) some believe that the riot was provoked.

A summation of eyewitness reports currently being circulated tells of a well-organised exercise. A group of people were seen throwing stones at a mosque while worshippers gathered there for dawn prayer. The mosque is near Christ the King Church in the Jakarta district of Ketapang. The group then set off in the direction of the church and were pursued by Muslims. The Muslims captured them before they were taken into custody by police. The stone-throwers were identified as Christians by their ID cards—the authenticity of the cards was later questioned—and an enraged mob then set fire to the church. At the same time, groups appeared near surrounding

churches and claimed that the Ambonese had torched the mosque, thereby initiating the other attacks.

On the Tuesday after the riots, the Archbishop of Jakarta, Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja, made a statement to the effect that it would be unfortunate if the riots had been instigated rather than random, because that would mean that religion had been used to serve political interests. Gus Dur was more forthright, claiming that they were not spontaneous but orchestrated 'by hoodlums who bow to one person'.

The hoodlums Gus Dur referred to are members of shadowy para-military groups responsible, he claims, for the deaths of his members and implicated in the violence directed against students. One political observer noted that in May 600 troops from Kopassus, the special forces unit, disappeared while it was under the command of the now disgraced Suharto loyalist, General Prabowo. They have yet to return.

WHETHER THAT 'ONE PERSON' might be, if he exists at all, he has become part of the metaphor for Indonesia at the end of its most turbulent year for three decades: a country like a marionette lurching about its stage as unseen puppeteers fight over the strings. Even General Wiranto, whose popularity and control of the armed forces seemed assured prior to the crack-down on the students, is not above the controversy now.

If the anti-Christian riots were instigated, they were a powerful signal that in Indonesia now alliances cannot be made easily, and demands should not be issued. Perhaps the simplest way to interpret the power struggle leading up to this year's elections is to imagine that 'one person' to be Suharto himself. His style of leadership was to play groups and individuals against each other so that none would emerge to challenge his presidency. A sequence of violence, including the riots of last May against ethnic Chinese and the shooting of students outside Atma Jaya University on 13 November, is his legacy. ■

Jon Greenaway is *Eureka Street's* South East Asia correspondent.

# Compassion on short rations

**M** R E IS A SOMALI. He was recently reprieved temporarily from deportation to Somalia. The events illustrated the moral disarray within the Australian Government's treatment of asylum seekers. They also revealed the depths of moral sensitivity and strength within sections of the Australian community.

The facts are undisputed. Mr E belonged to a family of goldsmiths of the Shikal clan. His father and brother were killed and his sister raped by members of the Hawije militia. He fled from Somalia fearing torture and death. When he came to Australia he was detained. His case was rejected by Immigration Department officers, and subsequently by the Refugee Review Tribunal on the grounds that his fear of persecution did not fall within the provisions of the Refugee Convention.

His prospects of escaping torture and death in Somalia, however, were thin, for the Hawije militia control the airport precinct. As he was being deported under the guard of a South African security firm, P&I Associates Int., whose brochure offers 'to remove the inadmissible from its current location', he refused to go quietly into the plane. Lawyers, working pro bono, sought an injunction in the High Court against his removal.

His case was rejected in the High Court on the mercantile reasoning that he was being legally despatched. The Minister for Immigration, who has the right to grant asylum on humanitarian grounds in cases of manifest injustice, refused to reconsider the case. By this time, the case had attracted the attention of Amnesty and the United Nations Committee against Torture. When the Minister refused to consider Amnesty pleas, the case was named by the international office as one for Urgent Action—the first such in Australia for a decade.

But, apparently to forestall further pressure, and allegedly without giving him the customary 48 hours notice, the Immigration Department moved him from Maribyrnong to Perth at 6.00am. From Perth, he was to catch a connecting flight to Johannesburg. One of the other detainees rang his solicitor, but claimed that what was supposedly a confidential conversation was cut off. Once alerted, Amnesty and the United Nations Committee against Torture protested. A group gathered at Perth airport, and members of the Transport Workers Union refused to handle any plane on which he was to be deported.

The Minister then had him moved to Port Hedland, awaiting a report from the United Nations Committee against Torture. It would have been considerably cheaper to return him to Melbourne. From Port Hedland, distance and cost deprive Mr E of the support of the Somali community and of ready access to his lawyer.

*As Mr E was being deported under the guard of a South African security firm, P&I Associates Int., whose brochure offers 'to remove the inadmissible from its current location', he refused to go quietly into the plane.*

Thus, through the accident of there being no direct flight from Melbourne to Johannesburg, the pertinacity of dedicated lawyers, the concern of Amnesty and United Nations officials, and through the moral sensitivity of union leaders—and despite the unresponsiveness of the Australian government—an innocent human life was spared. At least for now.

The case of Mr E is alarming. For its features show that it is legally permissible to despatch other asylum seekers back to their deaths. Indeed, in September, 19 Somalis were returned by foreign security guards to Somalia. They have not been heard of since. Such outcomes are inevitable, because so many asylum seekers do not enjoy adequate legal advice in cases where simple mistakes and inconsistencies increase the probability of their claims' rejection. The Refugee Review Tribunal, moreover, is under pressure to make quick decisions, and works within a negative

climate. It is easier to fail to appreciate the likely murderous consequences of rejection in such circumstances. Egregious mistakes, such as those made in the case of Mr E, are more likely.

This makes it all the more important to allow effective appeal against decisions which have lethal consequences. But without wealth or a generous and tenacious lawyer, such as Mr E found, legal appeal is difficult. Moreover, the government intends to remove the right of judicial appeal from asylum seekers.

**I**N THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, the only guarantee against fatally lawful miscarriages of justice is a conscientious exercise of ministerial discretion. But this case shows to what lengths Minister and Department will currently go to consider cases on narrowly legal, rather than humanitarian, grounds.

Finally, Australia's system of arbitrary detention and the employment of foreign security guards encourages the view that asylum seekers are 'the inadmissible' waiting to be removed. When confidential phone calls are cut off, it is natural to suspect, fairly or unfairly, on a sound factual basis or otherwise, that what was being discussed was a factor. When asylum seekers are so isolated, their humanity can be disregarded and their lives discounted without anyone ever knowing. Nevertheless, the case also shows that—even when government and Minister show little concern for human dignity or for the value of innocent human life—moral convictions remain strong among the legal community, Amnesty, lay Christians, and unions. And, in this case, those moral convictions were availing. ■

**Andrew Hamilton** SJ teaches at the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne.

# The republic of rear vision

**T**HE NOTION OF Australia's becoming a republic has now acquired such an air of inevitability—even among those deeply disappointed by the model adopted by the Constitutional Convention—that little thought has gone into what will happen if the people reject the model at the referendum at the end of this year. But a yes vote is far from inevitable.

If the referendum fails, it will not be the direct fault of the Prime Minister, John Howard, who has never made any secret about his lack of enthusiasm for a republic, but who has played fair so far and can be expected to live up to his promise of a fair question being put to the people. Many in his Government will be campaigning for a republic in any event, concerned lest the Liberal Party seem to miss the boat on any spiritual rebirth of the nation.

But the omens do not look good. The Convention of a year ago captured the public mood—if only for looking less than boringly partisan, and for putting a focus on parliamentary debate rather than executive. But much of the momentum has now been lost. And it cannot necessarily be restored by a public relations blitz or an advertising campaign, least of all if those who disagreed civilly with each other inside a comfortable chamber are seen shouting shrilly at each other from a stump.

Moreover, the weak presidential model ultimately chosen divided the republicans but, as significantly, stripped some of the enthusiasm for the cause. Any number of republican proponents, including Kim Beazley, will insist that fine points of detail, or further change, can occur further down the track, but others will wonder whether they should marshal their enthusiasm for what is almost consciously being sold as a wimpy nothing-really-is-going-to-be-different piece of symbolism.

**T**HE POINT IS, OF COURSE, that many yearn for the symbolism. Mark McKenna, an ANU political scientist, has drawn attention to words used repeatedly through the convention discussion of a new preamble to the constitution: 'a new beginning ... a euphonic, useful, and uniting statement of fact ... a moral imperative ... a moral charter ... a mission statement ... a vision statement ... something to tell us who we are ... something to believe in ... a document to reinvigorate the national narrative ... a welcome mat.'

Another social researcher, Hugh Mackay, has pointed to how much of the public cynicism about politics comes from the narrowness of what passes for politics, and has spoken of how voters yearn for leaders who can 'explain us to ourselves and tell us where we are going. What is the vision? This is the

most unfashionable word in Canberra at the moment but not in the community. What is the vision for the 21st century? What kind of nation are we going to become. How will we get there? What will it be like?'

In the current cycle of politics, any leader who could do this could win support. But the powerful symbolism of the end of one century and the beginning of another, and the backdrop of an Olympic Games whose campaigns proclaim that it will be a major moment for Australian identity make the potential even more attractive.

How well, however, are the players set for it? It may well be that the more bruising parts of the Government's agenda on tax, industrial relations and cutback of government will be behind it when the referendum occurs, towards the end of the year, and that Liberal republicans can stand easily beside Labor leaders to advocate a yes vote.

But it is hard to imagine even republican Liberals allowing Kim Beazley any advantage from leadership of the campaign. Will a campaign led instead from outside—whether by Malcolm Turnbull or by constitutional bores—do any better to attract votes? It could, if it were seen to be run by some of the enthusiasm of the younger delegates of the

convention, but it is almost of the nature of a committee system to choke off enthusiasm first.

Can John Howard spell out an exciting counter-vision which inspires a positive rather than a cautious 'no'? His difficulty does not turn primarily on the lack of respectability for his case for no change, or on the fact that the vision thing is not his forte. Rather, it is in the emotional appeal of a republic and his inability to put anything against it except the notion of the strength, familiarity and stability of the current system.

There are many Australians deeply unconcerned about a lawyer's debate about the importance of particular words, the mechanisms for getting rid of a president, or even whether we have a president at all. They would follow the right sort of leader in any direction, without much regard for road maps, if they were told where they were going and it seemed exciting. But if it doesn't, they've had enough bumping along the track going nowhere that they might well prefer to stay where they are. The result will not be determined at coffee tables in Melbourne, Sydney or Canberra, but on kitchen tables in Brisbane, Hobart and Perth. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.





## What lawyers can't learn

From Peter Gaughwin

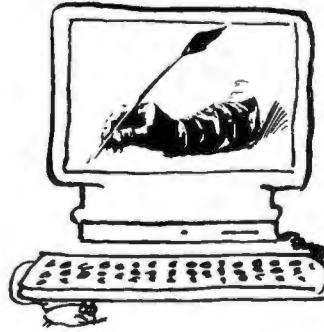
I agree with most of what Moira Rayner says in her splendid article, 'What lawyers don't read' (*Eureka Street*, November 1998). In particular, I agree with her that the ethical and philosophical bases of law are often underrated, or just omitted, in both the university and practical components of legal education.

My own experience of legal education is that the ethics component amounted to a set of dos and don'ts and many of the things covered were legal proscriptions dressed up as ethics—e.g., don't fiddle the trust account. However, notwithstanding the unsatisfactory nature of such an approach, it was probably better than nothing.

Moira Rayner, however, does not sufficiently make the point that courses in legal ethics, to have some hope of real success, are really dependent on the student having a personal grounding in ethical behaviour. It is not overly hard, if one has passed other law subjects, to pass a course in ethics. It is a lot harder to practise them.

There are some lawyers who would not fiddle the trust account because

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they know it is illegal and likely to land them in jail if caught. Actually understanding *why* one should not fiddle the trust account is a different matter. That has to do with the trust given to the lawyer, but more importantly the respect one individual has for another. I like to believe there are many lawyers like this.

Ethical behaviour in law will, in the end, be dependent on the person the

lawyer is. If, for example, one's principal is unethical then, in my view, the only thing that will stop the employee behaving similarly will be his or her innate ethical make-up, not a pass in Ethics 1.

Ethics therefore are a critical component of who one is; academic courses may enhance that, but I doubt if they will ever teach people who have no innate basis for such behaviour to be ethical.

Selecting people to practise law, then, may mean that we have to look at who people are, rather than just at what they can do, or have done. I believe that the ethical person who chooses law will always be up to the task. The unethical person may give the appearance of being so, but I doubt if he or she will really care too much about the client, particularly when the lawyer's interests are in conflict with those of the client.

Peter Gaughwin  
Adelaide, SA

## Fallout over Cambodia

From Jon Greenaway

I would like to reply to Tony Kevin's letter (*Eureka Street*, December 1998) in brief. Though he takes issue with Joan Healy's contention (November) that the violence in the Cambodian provinces during the lead-up to the July elections prevented a proper democratic process, he also criticised the media and myself for fostering a simplistic perception that Ranariddh and Rainsy are the cowboys and Hun Sen's CPP the Indians.

To suggest that there is uncritical portrayal of the Cambodian opposition and a blind acceptance of their arguments is ridiculous: anyone would have difficulty imagining Prince Ranariddh as a noble freedom-fighter after witnessing one of his jerky and petulant press-conference performances. There are many among the press who have an intimate understanding of the shadow play that is Cambodian politics. Without having the luxury of the entire paper or news bulletin in which to tell the full story, the media must focus on the main story. And while Tony Kevin thinks otherwise, the main story is not the anti-Vietnamese rhetoric of the opposition, their recalcitrance in negotiations with Hun Sen and their use of refugees as pawns in their struggle. It is the scores of bodies discovered after the



July 1997 coup, prior to the elections and after the crackdown on demonstrators last September, and Hun Sen's refusal to investigate them. It is also Hun Sen's stacking of the National Election Committee and its lacklustre investigation of reported election fraud and CPP's use of the military, police and bureaucracy to further its political ends.

Whether Ranariddh and Rainsy would be any better is debatable—as one Cambodian watcher put it to me, 'Hun Sen's the bastard with power and Funcinpec and Sam Rainsy are the bastards without power.' Tony Kevin emphasised the need to understand what is happening in light of the last three decades of Cambodian history. True enough, Hun Sen is presiding over one of the less bloody periods during this time. Violence surrounding the elections in 1993, in which hundreds were killed, was far worse than at last year's, so in historical terms things are improving. But how many people do you need to have killed before you declare it an outrage? Perhaps it is not such a terrible thing that the focus of the press is more attuned to the present day.

Perhaps what also leans correspondents towards the opposition is that they come into contact with ordinary Cambodians who declare their heartfelt desire for more democracy and less tyranny and who have put their lot in with Sam Rainsy and Funcinpec since they see it as the only practical option available. For their sake one hopes that the new coalition will be a transition to the kind of society they dream about.

**Jon Greenaway**  
Bangkok, Thailand

## Shootout over Damascus

*From Tony Campbell SJ*

Michael Weldon (*Eureka Street*, December 1998) hangs a huge construction on the hook of St Paul's knowing 'little or nothing of what Jesus taught'. In venturing into the New Testament, I am as far out of my professional bailiwick as Mr Weldon is evidently out of his. Nevertheless, before St Paul (then Saul) was knocked off his feet on the Damascus Road, he was reputed to be a top-gun prosecutor of Christians. Top-gun prosecutors usually have expert knowledge of their targets—in this case, a thorough acquaintance with the tenets of early Christianity.

**Tony Campbell SJ**  
Parkville, VIC

## DLP jousts

*From James Griffin*

Debating points aside, it does not matter how long-windedly the DLP inscribed social welfare policies into its electoral programs. Not even Chris Curtis (*Eureka Street*, Letters, November 1998) can deny that these policies were utterly subordinate to narking the ALP and ensuring the election of the Liberal-National Coalition (and therefore realisation of its policies).

The DLP's guru, Bob Santamaria, boasted that after the demise of that party (to which, of course, he loved to say he never belonged), he voted informally. That's how much he liked to differentiate between the major parties' (social welfare) policies. That's how committed he was to the political processes of our democracy.

Needless to say I am delighted to know that many former DLP members have sloughed off Santamaria's nonsense and now vote for the real Labor Party.

**James Griffin**  
Spence, ACT.

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Economic, cultural and other pressures are changing Australian society. The rate of change is likely to increase over the next few decades. The sort of society which will emerge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will depend in large part on the explicit and implicit values held by individuals in Australia and mirrored in our institutions. The challenge we face is to shape and sustain a society based upon and guided by values which are broadly acceptable to the community and reflect its hopes and aspirations.

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# The Month's Traffic



## Media amnesia

ON TUESDAY 17 NOVEMBER, the Governor-General launched, at the Australian War Memorial, my book *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*. In the course of a wide-ranging speech (see next page), Sir William said (drawing on my first chapter): 'There are few memorials to the colonial conflicts of the 19th century—certainly almost none, at least of an official kind, to the Aborigines who were slaughtered in the "Black Wars" of the period.' In my own remarks (drawing on the



Message on a war memorial in Echuca, Victoria, Anzac Day 1992, from the niece of an Aborigine, Bill Egan, who served in the AIF and died in France.

last chapter of the book), I proposed some future directions for the building in which we were gathered, including the representation of warlike encounters between black and white. That would require, I said, 'imagination, candour, tact and consultation, and a breadth of vision which signals that though people in our past didn't shrink from using the language of warfare, that has been only part of the story.' I went on: 'Here, I think, as we approach the centenary of federation, is a challenge and an opportunity for the Australian War Memorial to make a distinctive contribution to the task of reconciliation.'

Sir William Deane's remark had made my own words newsworthy. On the front page of *The Australian*: 'Black wars forgotten: Deane', and on page three: 'Veterans condemn black war memorial'. A misreport in other Murdoch papers, and

repeated on radio stations, made the event a much bigger piece of news. Across the top of page two in the Brisbane *Courier-Mail*: 'Governor-General pushes memorials for Aborigines'. The report, by Helen McCabe, attributed my proposal to Sir William. If true, that was quite a story. All through Wednesday I was answering phone calls, beginning with Graham Richardson at 2GB soon after daybreak and ending with Radio Netherlands late at night. When interviewers drew breath, I told them that only I, not the Governor-General, had floated the idea that was arousing such interest.

Some responses to the Governor-General's purported initiative were favourable, some not. In the *Canberra Times*, which had inadvertently not reported the launch, letter writers nevertheless commented on what Sir William was supposed to have said. One proposed Deane for President and another suggested that Yarralumla and its grounds be turned into a memorial park dedicated to Aborigines killed in defence of their native land. Eventually, Government House issued a statement, published in the Canberra paper on 24 November, setting out what Sir William had said and not said.

This was the second such statement from Yarralumla. On 19 November the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* published an editorial declaring that Sir William had 'overstepped the mark' and lecturing him on what a governor-general should and should not do. That day the Official Secretary at Government House put out a press release headed 'What the Governor-General did not say about the Australian War Memorial'. The paper preferred a different heading: 'No views on Black Memorial', published it not on the editorial page but as a letter, and removed the stiffest sentence, which said: 'That statement is false.' The editor evidently judged those vice-regal words not fit to print.

Nor was his Brisbane counterpart deterred by the refutation. The *Courier-Mail* published on 20 November, the day after the press release from Yarralumla, an opinion piece by Glen St J. Barclay similar in tone to the previous day's *Telegraph* editorial, still assuming the accuracy of the paper's report and saying that Sir William's 'proposal that Aboriginal victims of European settlement be honoured in the Australian War Memorial most likely will have the opposite effect'. Next day,

21 November, the *Telegraph* gave space on its editorial page to a piece by Michael Duffy headed 'A G-G running off at the mouth', not mentioning that the 'anguish in some quarters' caused by his remarks had been heightened by a false report and an unwarranted editorial in the *Telegraph* itself.

By Monday 23 November, the editor of the *Telegraph* had evidently decided that the story had been milked dry, not reporting a word of the Prime Minister's remarks on the subject on Channel 9's *Sunday*. On that program, Laurie Oakes fed the PM (just back from Malaysia) the inaccurate version, which had the Governor-General 'suggesting there should be a memorial in the Australian War Memorial to Aborigines slaughtered in the black wars of the 19th century. What's your reaction to that?' Howard's reaction was a finely crafted ramble to the effect that he didn't think much of it. Whether or not he had been



War memorial, Thirroul, cemented into place for unveiling on Anzac Day, 1920

briefed to know that Oakes had been misled by those reports, he wasn't about to make any criticism of Sir William Deane. What about memorials elsewhere? 'Well, I think ... I think that is a separate issue. I mean, I ... I don't ... you know, I'm not sort of jumping and saying yes, or not that but I think it's inappropriate in the context of a war memorial.' Then it was on to morale in the defence forces.

I haven't seen or heard any apology or retraction in any of the media which had me ventriloquising the Governor-General.

—Ken Inglis



# Abiding memories

*This is an edited version of Sir William Deane's speech given on the occasion of the launch of Ken Inglis' Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape (published by Melbourne University Press).*

**I**T WAS ONLY five years ago, on the 75th Anniversary of the Armistice that brought the First World War to an end, that the remains of an Unknown Australian Soldier who had died in that war were laid to rest in the Hall of Memory here at our Australian War Memorial. It was an occasion at once symbolic and deeply moving in the dignity of its ceremonial. It was, as Professor Inglis observes in this splendid new book, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, an occasion in which the ritual marked the true completion, in a spiritual sense, of the national memorial, in the National Capital, to all Australians who have served and died in their nation's wars.

And it did so in a way that transcended the formal and the ceremonial. For what was wonderful about the burial of the Unknown Australian Soldier was in the way in which its meaning was so spontaneously understood and accepted by the Australian people. It spoke to something deep and abiding in the hearts of men and women everywhere. Some 50,000 people placed wreaths and flowers on the open tomb in the three-and-a-half days before it was sealed. While waiting in a queue to enter the Hall, they discovered you could wedge the wire stem of a red Remembrance Day poppy between the bronze tablets in the cloisters bearing the names of the Roll of Honour. Soon, as Professor Inglis remarks, 'the walls became more densely splashed with scarlet as people on their way to and from paying respect to the Unknown Soldier, made their own personal gestures in memory of the known, from brothers, husbands and fathers killed in Vietnam, to great-uncles two world wars away'. For, as the then Prime Minister, Mr Paul Keating, eloquently observed, the Unknown Soldier was and is 'all of them'. Those gestures and that perception would have profoundly gratified the great war historian, C.E.W. Bean, who conceived this place as a combined museum, repository and shrine—unlike any other in the world. Half a century after the Australian War Memorial was opened in the midst of a second World War, Professor Inglis writes that the Hall of Memory 'was welcoming at last the sentiment of reverent recollection

C.E.W. Bean had always wanted it to harbour'.

It is, in the main, that spirit of 'reverent recollection' that has led Australian men and women to erect some 4000 memorials to those who have served and fought and died in our wars over the course of the present century. Memorials that can be found everywhere from the capital cities and their suburbs, regional centres and country towns to the smallest rural hamlets and wayside halts. Memorials whose nature ranges from the monumental—the cast or carved soldier generally at repose, the obelisk, column or cenotaph—to the utilitarian—memorial hall, fountain, swimming pool, entrance gates or avenue of trees. Memorials that may stand prominently upon a hill or in a garden or in a busy thoroughfare, but almost always on common—usually civic—land. Memorials that, until the decision to return the bodies of service personnel killed in Vietnam, were surrogates for the funeral stones denied the loved ones left to mourn at home. Memorials that with simple, spiritual though not specifically religious texts—commonly LEST WE FORGET, from Kipling's *Recessional*—enable people to lay their own thoughts and feelings with their tributes. Memorials, too, that unlike those in other parts of the world, very often list the names of the survivors as well as the dead—certainly from the First World War.

They are war memorials that are omnipresent in the Australian landscape, although until recently they have largely been ignored by cultural and architectural historians. Professor Inglis, in this thorough, scholarly, accessible and altogether handsome book, has corrected that omission. Now, he remarks, 'the interrogation of war memorials has become a vigorous branch of cultural history' both for what they tell us about the people and communities who made them and also for what, remembering the response to the burial of the Unknown Australian Soldier, they have to tell us about our society today.

There are few memorials to the colonial conflicts of the 19th century—certainly almost none, at least of an official kind, to the Aborigines who were slaughtered in the

'Black Wars' of that period. It was not until the South African War that the history of war memorials in this country finds its proper beginnings: it is then that we see the first stone trooper appear, the first references to 'the fallen', the first listing of the names of the living as well as the dead. Yet the Boer War touched the lives of few Australians. The young Australian nation remained, in the words of Ernest Scott, 'unruffled by war'. Or, in the words of Bernard O'Dowd, 'a prophecy waiting to be fulfilled'.

All that was to change with the landing of the Anzacs at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. As Professor Inglis observes, 'the days of 'She is not yet' were over'. It may well be, as Bean was to say, that the real meaning of Gallipoli was 'the discovery of the character of the Australian men'; but the Great War as fought at the Dardanelles, on the Western Front and in the Middle East was to touch virtually every Australian man, woman and child. Ken Inglis estimates that every second extended Australian family was bereaved by the war. That nationwide loss gave rise to the extraordinary 'war memorial movement', as he calls it, of tributes in stone and marble and brick that were to transform the Australian landscape.

**E**ACH MEMORIAL has its own history. Professor Inglis and his team have spent the past 15 years studying and recording those histories in the pages of this book and on a comprehensive inventory lodged in the Australian War Memorial. The individual histories display some recurring themes: for similar questions were faced by people across the country. Where would the memorial be? Who would pay for it? What form should it take? Should the opening be a civil or religious ceremony, or some combination of both? In some places, the questions were only settled after considerable local conflict ... 'like going into battle with Germany again' as *The Mudgee Guardian* reported. In other places they were settled amicably, such as at Thirroul, whose stone soldier, unveiled on Anzac Day 1920, was described by D.H. Lawrence in the pages of his novel *Kangaroo*: '... small and stiff and rather touching ... a real township monument'.



The monument at Thirroul recurs as a *leitmotif* throughout *Sacred Places*, standing for all township monuments: its construction, opening, its place in the local Anzac Day ceremonies, its move in more recent times to a park away from the busy traffic, and the fact that lately the numbers of people attending the Dawn Service have actually been increasing. The third last photograph in this beautifully illustrated book is of two young Australians visiting the Thirroul monument with their Lebanese grandfather to see the name of their Anglo-Australian grandfather who was killed in Libya during the Second World War. Such is the place still occupied by war memorials in today's multicultural Australia. In that regard, it is worth noting that at the head of Anzac Parade—of what Professor Inglis calls our 'sacred way' in a phrase from classical antiquity—stands the Australian Hellenic Monument and, opposite, the Ataturk Memorial Gardens with its inspired words from the defender of Gallipoli and founder of modern Turkey: 'You the mothers, wipe away your tears ...'

On approximately half of all the First World War memorials in the Australian landscape, the names of local soldiers who survived are inscribed together with those who were killed. That is, as I said, a most unusual practice in other countries. It reflects the fact that, as Monash consistently stressed, the Australians were all volunteers—the only sovereign country whose combatants by 1918 could be so described. As Professor Inglis points out, the practice also underlined 'with appalling regularity' the awful fact that about one in five of the men who went to war from that place never came home.

It was different with the Second World War. True, far greater numbers of men and women were involved in the armed services and in civilian war work. It is true that some Australian cities were bombed and that for the first time conscripted men fought outside Australian soil: but the number of deaths, at around 30,000, were half those of the First World War. In many cases the names of those who died were added to the existing monuments, but generally speaking the separate memorials to the forces of the Second World War took a utilitarian form. As the Canberra poet, Geoff Page, writes:

The next bequeathed to us  
Parks and Pools  
But something in that first  
Demanded stone

Monumentality may have been out of fashion. But it had returned—albeit in contemporary form—by the time the memorials were raised to those who served and died in Korea, Malaya and, especially, Vietnam. Indeed, Professor Inglis remarks that the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial is 'the most impressive monument' along Anzac Parade. In some places, moreover, the memorials to Australians who had fought in Vietnam were actually made by Vietnamese people who had come to Australia as refugees from that war. And, of course, the lottery which compelled service and the perception of contemporary ingratitude that marked the Vietnam War have, in retrospect, added a special significance and sadness to the monuments to those who died.

There is so much more I could say: one might, for instance, discuss at length why it is that we are seeing such extraordinary renaissance of interest in Anzac Day and our country's military past by today's generation of young people—not only here in Australia but also by those who visit in great numbers—many of them young backpackers—the peninsula at Gallipoli and the old battlefields of the Western Front. Is it simply nostalgia? Or affection and admiration for ageing veterans? Or family tradition? Or a sense of national identity and patriotism? Or does the pride and anguish we feel for those who fought and suffered and who are remembered on our war memorials touch some deeper wellspring of honour and sacrifice and commitment to the peace they gave us?

I cannot answer such questions in any comprehensive way. I can only say that such depths of national emotion were touched on that Remembrance Day in 1993 when the remains of the Unknown Australian Soldier were laid in the Hall of Memory. And that has not abated since. For me, his tomb has become the true heart of our nation. I believe—as C.E.W. Bean would doubtless hope—that it will remain so at least for the foreseeable future. Here in the heart of the land they loved.

And here is undoubtedly the most appropriate place in the world for us to be gathered today for the launch of *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*. For just as the Unknown Soldier is all of those who served and died in all our wars, this Memorial in our National Capital is the national monument and tribute to them all. ■

**Sir William Deane** is Governor-General of Australia.

## Putting the hard word on juries

**J**URIES MAKE million-dollar decisions, and change people's lives, but recently, the whole rationale for having juries seemed to fall apart in front of my eyes.

My wife and I sat in the Victorian Supreme Court, while a barrister questioned a witness in a damages case. They were using words like salient, interpolate and undulate. They talked about something being linearly interpolated, yielding a tilt, imparting an inclination, and being transverse to a current.

My wife has a four-year degree from a well-known university, yet she found a lot of the evidence difficult to follow. 'Why can't these people speak English?' we wondered. 'Is the jury really understanding this?' Yet none of the jurors asked a question or objected to what was happening. Sometimes the judge said what he thought the evidence meant, and asked the witness if that was right.

Lawyers sometimes say that barristers don't want educated people on juries. If this is true, it is even more important that witnesses speak plain English.

What should the courts do?

They could make witnesses hand up a list of technical words at the start of their evidence, with a plain English explanation of each word. They could start their evidence by explaining any technical words they need to use. Court rules could require that written witness statements (which are often handed to jurors) be made in plain English as far as possible. If necessary, they could have an appendix at the back to give details that need scientific, technical or medical terms. Judges could instruct witnesses that they are to give evidence in plain English and explain technical terms as they go along. Judges could encourage juries to ask their own questions of the witness.

If we don't want jurors to end up in conversation with the witness (as in the American Grand Jury system), jurors could write the questions down and hand them to the judge, who could then put them to the witness. Judges could ask juries whether they feel they have understood the witness, before the witness leaves the box.

Unfortunately, all of these changes could be very difficult to implement.

Juries aren't organised. They are six or 12 people who are thrown together for a few days, and then go their separate ways. There is no 'jurors' lobby group' in the same way



that old soldiers have the RSL or doctors have the AMA. Not many people will be the first to stick up their hand in court and say, 'I don't understand this.'

Barristers won't bring about change, because they don't realise they aren't speaking plain English. A barrister once told me I looked 'querulous'. When I said I'd have to look the word up in a dictionary, everyone in the room just laughed. I later discovered the word meant complaining. Judges won't do it, because by the time they get to the bench, they have probably heard enough expert witnesses to have become used to the way they speak.

It's hard for a plaintiff to bring about a change, because most plaintiffs don't know court procedure, don't know what to expect, and probably don't realise that a problem even exists. They may not even have met some of their own witnesses before the case begins. (This is possibly because the solicitor may select the witness, who may be giving evidence on something like a blood test, or a design flaw in a car. The witness may have no need to meet the plaintiff.)

There seem to be only three groups who can bring about change.

One option is for the government to amend the Evidence Act, Supreme Court Act, and County Court Act. They could require the use of plain English statements, and require judges to instruct expert witnesses to use plain English.

The second is for solicitors simply to make individual decisions to push their witnesses into plain English. You would expect the jury to have more sympathy for the side they understood. Entrepreneurial legal firms could use this as a selling point for their services: 'We'll make sure the jury understands your case.'

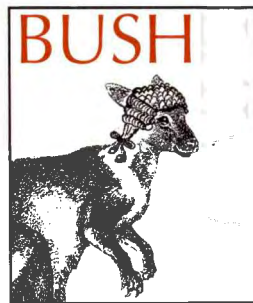
The third is for the media to agitate for a change, interviewing former jurors, former plaintiffs, and solicitors.

Somehow we have to get away from the stupidity of putting gobbledygook in front of a jury and asking them to decide million-dollar questions on the basis of it.

—Richard Snow

## Lost and found weekend

GETTING THE MOST OUT of a long weekend is an art. There is not enough time to lounge around and let the holiday go where it will. Every minute of the three days must be used with the utmost efficiency. It's designed for the aerobically instructed, the digitally diaried, and the self-helped.



BUSH LAWYER

SÉAMUS O'SHAUGHNESSY

# My oath

*Judges and magistrates all have their fair share of moral dilemmas and colourful stories (remember that burglar who fed the cat on his way out with the television?). But, as all fans of SeaChange would know, being a magistrate in a country town—where you might be hearing a case against your neighbour's son involving your GP's back shed—presents a very particular set of problems and delights. Eureka Street's new columnist, 'Séamus O'Shaughnessy' writes about life as a country magistrate.*

ALL JUDICIAL OFFICERS from JPs to Justices of the High Court swear an oath to 'do right to all manner of people, without fear or favour, affection or ill-will'. Those poetic cadences express the judicial virtues of independence, rationality, integrity and fairness. How does it work in practice? What are the challenges and pressures?

For a number of reasons, judges and magistrates generally avoid mixing with litigants and lawyers conducting cases before them. First, there should be no appearance of bias towards one party or another. Second, it is harder to make a decision against a friend than against a complete stranger—that is human nature. Third, cases should only be decided on the evidence heard in court. If decisions are made behind closed doors, or if the community thinks they are being made that way, public confidence in the independence and integrity of our judiciary will inevitably decline. Most lawyers know this, at least in theory. But not all.

No judge or magistrate I know of is consciously biased. In the city, it is relatively easy, because of the relative anonymity to be found in a crowd, to avoid pressures to favour one side or the other. And in the city, judges and magistrates tend to keep to themselves in court hours.

In the country, things are done a little differently. I was warned by a solicitor friend of mine that I would be regarded as a terrible snob if I did not mingle with the local lawyers in the morning tea room of the courthouse. Naturally, they were all interested to find out what I was like. I was equally curious about them and their town.

It helps to make a court run efficiently if there is a degree of familiarity between the lawyers and the judicial officer presiding over the court. Nevertheless, it is necessary to maintain a degree of distance. You cannot

be everyone's best mate in court, nor can they be yours. Sometimes it is necessary to criticise lawyers or their arguments. For justice to be done, lawyers also need to be able to argue their cases fearlessly.

With some misgivings I took my friend's advice. Chatting with the locals over a cup of tea certainly helped me understand the towns on my circuit. Unfortunately, one or two lawyers stepped over the mark and had to be reminded gently but firmly that I could not gossip with them about their clients. I sent a letter to all the lawyers and prosecutors regularly appearing in my court laying down the rules. There was no further problem.

The staff of Magistrates' Courts know the local police well, because they are the main users of the courts' services. In some courts, the clerks are married to the local constables. This can lead to a perception that the court and the cops are members of a club. So, despite the occasional difficulties, having morning tea with the lawyers and prosecutor helped balance the picture.

All the notorious local characters are well-known to the court staff. Usually the staff do not tell magistrates about the background of defendants, so that we will not be swayed by out-of-court information when hearing a case. But some cannot help themselves. I was recently told by one clerk when I arrived at a courthouse that if I left my car in the court carpark the defendant, whose case I was about to hear, was a madman who would probably pour brake fluid on it.

When I heard the case I set aside the clerk's prejudices and eventually acquitted the defendant. The prosecution could not prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant had stalked the alleged victim, despite the suspicious circumstances. But I have to confess that I moved my car. ■





The Australian Theological Forum  
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I am as organised as a blind man's jigsaw puzzle, so it's an art in which I have no skill whatsoever.

When a fellow Australian in Bangkok suggested that a few of us go down to an island for the Chulalongkorn Holiday it sounded like a good idea. He had a Thai mate who was working in some sort of diving business and lived in a shack up the hill from a beach. Perfect: someone else was running the show and all I had to do was swing in a hammock and drink beer.

I was a little worried that the island was near the resort town of Pattaya. Thailand has many beautiful locations but Pattaya is not one of them. Discovered by American GIs on break from fighting the Vietnam War, it does a very good line in seediness. If I'd had any sense I would have been immediately suspicious when he assured

While a mechanic busied himself trying to unbolt the rail we kept the locals entertained with some athletic catching of a shuttlecock hit with a cricket bat.

Problem fixed, we were off and, after another hour on the road, in a boat chugging its way to Koh Laan. It's not mentioned in the *Lonely Planet* guide books but there it is—only 45 minutes off the coast. After docking we piled into a contraption that looked like a motorcycle crossed with a Mr Whippy van and made our way to a beach on the other side of the island. The rainy season had slushed up the roads, so the vehicle duly bogged itself along the way. Volunteering to push it out, I cleverly placed myself behind the right wheel. Some of the mud which sprayed out the back missed me, and everyone laughed quite a lot.

We were unloaded by the beach and

"AND LEGEND HAS IT THAT ONCE,  
LONG, LONG AGO, THERE LIVED  
SOMEONE WHO ACTUALLY HAD A  
PLAUSIBLE DEFINITION OF MULTICULTURALISM!"



me the island was kosher and there would be no problems—f he were Pinocchio he'd have a javelin sticking out of his face.

To get there, three big whities from Australia had to pack ourselves into a Thai-style ute, which has an extension for a back seat in the cabin. This meant two of us were wedged into a space only slightly larger than a politician's magnanimity. Fortunately, just as my left leg began to go gangrenous, the sound of banging stopped the car just beyond the outskirts of Bangkok.

A metal rail just underneath the running board of the car had come loose, popped out by the strain. An attempt at running repairs failed so we tethered it with a pair of old jocks that held until we reached a garage.

checked in at the grandly titled 'Koh Laan Beachside Resort'. It looked as if no-one had bothered to clean up after the last typhoon: the restaurant cabana had a hole in the roof that could have been made by a wrecking ball, the concrete was crumbling and the reception area was strewn with sheets of corrugated iron and cardboard. The owner of the establishment was a hunched-over old Chinese-Thai who spoke a weird language of his own. He served us lunch and some beers before he shuffled off to a bench for a nap, leaving us in the care of a woman who wore more make-up than a Japanese geisha, and three mangy dogs.

Day two of our long weekend and we shifted to our friend's place. For some reason

he liked to call himself Roy. This seemed the go: a good beach to swim at, deck chairs and a charcoal barbecue. A Thai friend brought along a guitar he could actually play. But after a very relaxing day we discovered the kicker—the bedding was a bit thin (hardly surprising as Roy paid \$85 a month rent for his shack). The three of us spent the night on a linoleum-clad floor, laid out as bare as sausages on a grill.

I woke up early on day three and wandered out on to the balcony, massaging out the flower pattern from my stomach. Power boats zinged their way from Pattaya in a mad rush to the island's main beach where the foreign tourist cargo are deposited under umbrellas until evening and then picked up and returned to the mainland in similar fashion.

After breakfast we returned to the beach where we had spent day one. On a pontoon out in the bay sat a miniature two-person submarine. Roy's job was to drive it. For \$100 a time you could join him in a dive to see sand and the occasional fish. The vessel had to be entered by water—via a hatch underneath. Once inside you had the overwhelming sensation of being in one of those converted VW Beetles that mad bastards used to try to sail to New Zealand.

We gave the submarine a miss and spent most of the day swimming around and through an old barge that had been sunk some 150 metres off-shore. Moored next to it was a boat with a group of scuba-divers on board. We had a yarn with a doctor who had practised for many years in Sydney but who now lived near Pattaya and worked for a Russian company 'that did lots of things'. He fed us indescribably bad oysters and complained about his psoriasis.

The day was drawing to a close, and we had to start thinking about returning to Bangkok. Very few people were left on the beach—the reason being that the last ferry for the mainland had left 20 minutes before. In a panic we negotiated with a guy who had a boat, to take us back to Pattaya. He looked like a pirate and charged like one but we got to shore and piled into the clown car. Just in time.

Thailand is a country where shrugging off problems is the art, not managing time to the minute. —Jon Greenaway

*This month's contributors:* **Ken Inglis** has been Professor of History at the ANU and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Papua New Guinea; **Richard Snow** is an economist; **Jon Greenaway** is *Eureka Street's* gonzo South East Asia correspondent.

## W Not just Mickey Mouse

HERE ARE ALL THE YOUNG PEOPLE? For the church in Australia, this is a question of survival. Obviously, church decline is a complex phenomenon: the causes are many and the patterns varied. But as a chaplain of a university college, I can see at least one of the gaping holes through which the future of the church is pouring. For so many students, nothing makes religion seem irrelevant more quickly than the religious education programs they encountered at school.

I recently surveyed, on behalf of a church committee, the offering in the schools of my own denomination. The picture, though not entirely uniform, was bleak and explanatory. Remarkably few of the programs were adequately informed by contemporary religious thought, and programs were in fact contemporary only in the graphics adult educationalists believe children will think 'cool'. This problem was compounded by an almost colouring-book level of intellectual demand: little wonder so many students regard R.E. classes as a spare and a time to test the patience of teachers. Contrary to the best teaching methods in other subjects, many programs are primarily catechetical and do little to encourage independent and critical thought. Add to this the scarcity of trained teachers.

The one joy was to discover the work being done here by one of the United Kingdom's leading philosophical theologians, Peter Vardy of Heythrop College in the University of London. Dr Vardy, who is also an educationalist, conducted a broad survey of religious education programs in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria in 1995–96. Problems that I saw in the Uniting Church schools, he saw right across the board, even in the Catholic school system, which has a greater commitment to religious education programs. In 1997, Dr Vardy outlined a new vision for Australian religious education (summarised in 'Towards a New Approach to Religious Education', *Occasional Paper* 53, November 1997, Incorporated Association of Registered Teachers in Victoria). His education program, already being adopted by at least two leading Victorian schools, has five strands.

The first strand aims to give children an understanding of the Bible as a foundation for important features of European culture and to develop a sophisticated ability to deal with its complexity. The second strand ('values education') aims to develop a theoretical understanding of the different systems of moral thought and their application to concrete issues. The third strand ('philosophy of religion') introduces young people to questions of the existence and nature of God, the problem of evil and the question of death. There is a fourth 'other religions' strand, while the fifth strand aims to 'provide children with an appreciation of the value of silence and of an alternative perspective on life to materialism'.

Underpinning the content is a methodology that opposes indoctrination and encourages children to think for themselves, aims to develop tolerance of difference viewpoints, allows for ambiguity and doubt and seeks an integral place for the affective dimension of human responses to religion alongside rational inquiry. While some will say that the content is not new and, perhaps, that the methodology is not entirely new either, the integrated breadth and depth of the program and the expected level of competency certainly are.

If I have a reservation about Vardy's program, it is his continuation of the single-subject model of religious education—what is learnt in R.E. risks being undermined in many other classes, and limiting religion to a single class might also be a missed opportunity. A contemporary approach to religion could be an integrating force for a curriculum increasingly fragmented by notions like Key Learning Areas. While a single subject could be preserved as a hub, the Bible, for example, could be dealt with as literature in English, where its operation as a hermeneutic key to other Western literature could also be pursued, and then as history in a humanities program. Similarly, there would be good reason to deal with the existence and nature of God in science classes, since we can employ the logic of science in the quest for God, and our understanding of God's interaction with the universe must be compatible with our scientific knowledge.

In a world that confronts many young people as fragmentary and opaque, there is certainly a need for an integrating program that assists them to find intelligibility, meaning and purpose. ■

**Rufus Black** is Chaplain of Ormond College at the University of Melbourne and a lecturer in the United Faculty of Theology.



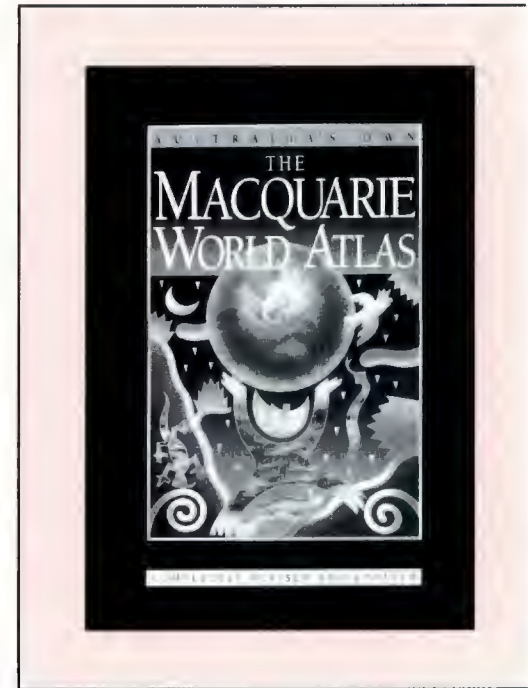
# an even more anno



1. To whom did Abe Lincoln refer as 'the most meritorious man of the Nineteenth Century'?
2. From which country did Zimbabwe buy \$A82 million worth of arms in November 1998?
3. How many pulsars have been found since the first one was discovered by Jocelyn Bell in 1967?
4. Name the saint who said the following:  
Take from me, Good Lord, this lukewarm fashion, or rather key-cold manner of meditation, and this dullness in praying unto Thee. And give me warmth, delight and quickness in thinking upon Thee ...
5. According to Vasari, whose portraits provide the faces of the three magi in Botticelli's 'Adoration of the Magi' in the Uffizi? (See left)

arty

6. Which church has claimed since 1164 to be the burial place of the Magi?
7. What are the traditional names in the West of the three Magi?
8. Name the authors of the following Australian plays: *The Legend of King O'Malley*; *The Front Room Boys*; *Chicago, Chicago*; *A Stretch of the Imagination*.
9. What is the longest sentence for white-collar crime ever meted out by an Australian court? And who was the recipient of the sentence?
10. Name the unusual instrument that was employed on The Beach Boys' groundbreaking 1966 single 'Good Vibrations'.
11. Name the novels (and their authors) from which the following first lines were taken: (a) '1801—I have just returned from a visit to my landlord—the solitary neighbour that I shall be troubled with.' (b) 'Amerigo Bonasera sat in New York Criminal Court Number 3 and waited for justice; vengeance on the men who had so cruelly hurt his daughter, who had tried to dishonour her.' (c) 'Ettie is famous for her neck.'
12. Who built the first internal combustion engine and when?
13. Where do you find a Bowman's capsule?



pesky



14. Who was Margarita Carmen Cansino much better known as?
15. Name the seven dwarfs.
16. Which mother and daughter both won Nobel Prizes?
17. Name the Celtic mare goddess of fertility; the Egyptian cow-goddess; the Hindu elephant-headed god.
18. So you use the Internet. OK, spell out and explain the following: POP; ISDN; URL.
19. Who finally solved Fermat's last Theorem?
20. What are the eight Uniat Churches? Name three of them.
21. When did women get equal voting rights with men in (a) Australia (b) USA (c) Great Britain (d) France (e) Switzerland (f) New Zealand?

# an even more anno



# Dying summer quiz

22. Which poem concludes:

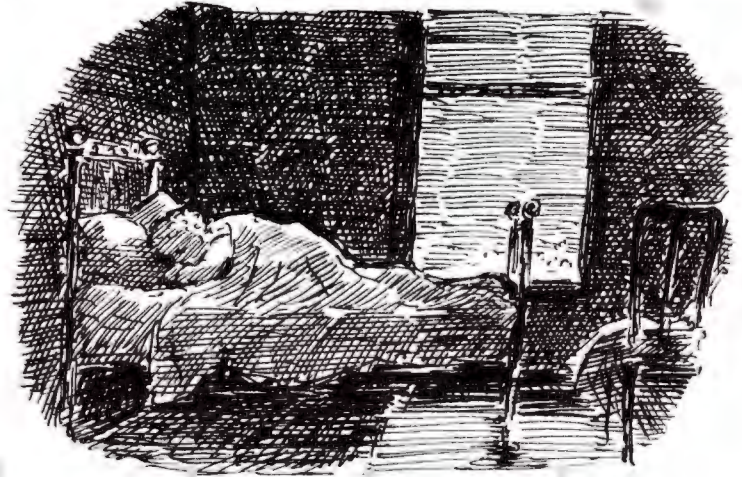
And all about the courtly stable  
Bright-harnessed angels sit in order serviceable ?

23. Which short story ends 'I said some words to the close and holy darkness, and then I slept'? Name the author.

24. The sentence, 'A bunch of workmen were lying on the grass of the park beside Macquarie Street, in the dinner hour' opens which novel?

25. Who are Julian, Dick, George (or Georgina), Anne and Timmy the Dog? They have an Uncle Quentin.

26. What is the name of Captain Kirk's ship?



flummery

You thought last year's was an intolerable tease. Well, this one is worse. But just keep your eye on the prize: this year we're giving away *The Macquarie World Atlas*, completely revised and updated and worth \$99.95, to the author of the most correct entry. You can use it to crib your way through the geography questions in next year's quiz.

So gather round the table, work out as many answers as you can and post or fax your (legible please) answers to reach us by Monday 9 February 1999, at:

Eureka Street Summer Quiz,  
PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121  
fax 03 9428 4450

Please include your name, an address and telephone number. Winner and answers will be published in the March 1999 issue.

whimsical

27. Where do we find these lines?

Crabbed age and youth cannot live together,  
Youth is full of pleasance, age is full of care;  
Youth like summer morn, age like winter weather,  
Youth is full of sport, age's breath is short.

28. Which novelist wrote: 'The one certain way for a woman to hold a man is to leave him for religion'? Name the novel.

29. When did the first direct elections to the European Parliament take place?

30. Which science fiction writer wrote the essay: 'Why are Americans afraid of dragons?'

31. What famous writer also uses the pseudonyms, Julian Morris and Michael East? Name a novel written under each pseudonym.

32. What is Spock's home planet?

33. What do Mike Tyson and Mark Antony have in common?

farcical



34. What is the name of the Pope's cathedral church, which therefore ranks above all other churches?

35. Name the Australian detective created by Arthur Upfield.

36. What do George Gershwin, C.S. Lewis, Howard Florey, and Herbert Marcuse have in common?

37. What city is closest to the Rann of Kutch and what border do you have to cross to reach it?

38. Who was Hildegard of Bingen's secretary?

39. Name all of Michael Jackson's siblings.

40. When T.E. Lawrence attempted to join the RAF in 1922, under the pseudonym John Hume Ross, he was initially turned away by the officer in charge. What does Biggles have to do with all this?

Dying summer quiz





# Peer pedagogy

**A**N IDEA THAT EMERGED in a small group of Monash University medical students could end up becoming the basis of a giant preventive medicine program for 300 million young people in China. And along the way, the program could change the way Chinese medical students are taught, stimulate public health research there, and provide Chinese health authorities with a new weapon in public health.

It's all to do with using medical students to educate their university and high school peers about STDs and AIDS. The idea is being tried out in a pilot program under way in Beijing and Shanghai. The program has financial and in-kind support from three large European companies. 'Peer education' is being assessed as a means of containing the spread of AIDS, now acknowledged as a significant problem in China.

The pilot program has already led to scenes which turn traditional Chinese education on its head. Sex is a particularly sensitive topic in China—and highly political too, because of its direct link to population and family planning. What's more, education in China traditionally is provided only by one's respected elders. And until relatively recently, foreigners were seldom granted access to Chinese students on campus. So to watch students play a game of 'Chinese Whispers' in a university classroom during a lecture delivered by a third-year medical student as part of an Australian-derived sex education program—a scene I witnessed on a recent trip to China—is more than unusual, it's astonishing.

The story starts more than a decade ago, when Professor Roger Short, then Professor of Reproductive Biology at Monash, began a course that taught medical students the facts of life in the AIDS era. No-one else was doing it, he says. Then, in 1991, a group of the Monash medical students approached Professor Short with a blunt message. It's all very well for us to learn about HIV and how to avoid it, they said, but what about the rest of the university community? So began the 'Safe Sex Tent', pitched every year since then at the university's Orientation Week for new students.

But the medical students wanted to go further. They realised that by the time young people arrived at university, many of them were already sexually active, and it was too late. So the students suggested they take their message about safer sex back to their

old high schools. The teenagers at these schools, they argued, would be much more likely to accept information about sensitive topics like AIDS and sexual behaviour from people of their own generation than from their teachers.

Thus the concept of peer education about AIDS, STDs and safer sex emerged. The students even put together a safer sex show. It was an immediate success. The schools begged for repeat performances; the Dutch pharmaceutical company, Organon, provided money to make a series of videos, with about 900 copies sold to schools Australia-wide; and the originators of the program have ended up travelling the world lecturing about their experience.

In 1995, a delegation from the Chinese Ministry of Health paid a visit to Professor Short at Monash, and saw the videos of what had been happening there. Not only did the members of the delegation recognise the potential application to China, but Professor Short was able to suggest to them a catalyst who could initiate the program for them.

That catalyst was Dr Gao Yuan, one of Professor Short's former PhD students, now an Australian citizen, but who grew up and attended university in China. 'Having grown up in China has been more of an advantage than a disadvantage. This is because I know how people think and how the system works here. And since my higher education training was in Australia, and I lived there for more than 10 years, I also know how to undertake this project to meet Western standards.'

Now manager of the Australian-China Joint AIDS/STD/Safe Sex program, Dr Gao has become much more than simply a cultural bridge to adapt the Monash experience to a Chinese context, he has been able to introduce Western research techniques to help substantiate the program's value. The program is based around a set of five extended lectures which fit in with the Chinese moral outlook. They are designed to attack the 'Three-Headed Monster' of AIDS, STDs and unplanned pregnancy by advocating the postponement of sexual activity, fidelity to sexual partners, and the use of contraception once sexual activity has begun. Also, as it happens, Dr Gao is a born teacher. Despite some initial scepticism from students, the program so far has been a huge success.

Once the lectures started in Beijing and Shanghai, word spread quickly among the student body. The peer educators were much in demand. Almost all of them tell stories of being approached outside class. Most have been asked to explain what they knew to friends and colleagues in their dormitories. One girl from Beijing was bailed up in the subway by students from a nearby university wanting to know when their turn for the program would come. A boy in Shanghai was ushered into a separate room at a party and asked to tell what he knew to 14 others. Many of the peer educators have ended up instructing their parents and other members of their family.

**B**UT THE REAL PROOF of success is in the attendance figures—in Beijing about 90 per cent of the students kept on coming to class—not bad, given that classes were not compulsory, and were held at a busy time of year.

Although only in its first year, the program is already providing unpredicted spin-offs. For instance, it is one of the first programs ever in China to provide future doctors with skills to communicate medical information. And it's becoming clear that the idea of using peers to provide information could usefully be employed more widely in China—in anti-smoking campaigns, breast cancer education, health during pregnancy.

The program also has introduced Chinese medical academics to Western ideas on research and evaluation of public health and education. Even the teaching methods employed have been novel. Learning in China is considered a very serious pursuit. The idea of using games, exercises and stories in class is radical.

It's a powerful illustration of what can happen with the right idea in the right place at the right time—and of the potential impact that Australian innovation can have, if marketed properly. Of course, you have to be generating the ideas first. And that is why places like the US, Britain, Japan, much of Europe, and Singapore are boosting dramatically the money they are putting into higher education and research over the next few years. With raw potential such as Australian students to build on, it's a pity our federal leaders do not have the same foresight. ■

**Tim Thwaites** is a freelance science writer.



# Australia observed



Independent Scholars of Australia Supplement

## Diversity and citizenship an introduction

**I**N AUSTRALIA, WE HOLD DEAR our image as a free, democratic and egalitarian society. But to what extent do we really function as a civil society matching the ideals we espouse?

This question gave life to a recent seminar entitled 'Australia observed'. Organised jointly by the NSW Chapter of the Independent Scholars Association of Australia and the Library Society of NSW, the seminar was designed to reflect on the diversity of social relations, the institutions and governance, and the values of contemporary Australia. Recognising not one but multiple Australian identities, and acknowledging that there are many ways of looking at this nation and the world, we sought to view these issues from several different perspectives. It is important that divergent voices be heard.

Threads which underlie and bring unity to the papers read at the seminar (and now published here) relate to the elements of a good society and the social impediments to its realisation. Despite differences in perspective, common themes and criticisms emerge.

One of the most pervasive themes is the lack of fit between an ideal of egalitarianism and the reality of social structure and social practice. All the articles are in some measure concerned with the power of the dominant group to define the ideal, 'normal' citizen, embody this definition in its institutions and thereby exclude those who fall outside its boundaries. This process contradicts the very notion of egalitarianism and flouts the premises of a democratic society.

All, whether directly or indirectly, draw attention to the impaired and qualified social and economic participation of the members of those groups branded as 'different'. Citizenship is not contested at a formal level of responsibilities, such as voting and paying taxes, but at the less well defined level of rights and freedoms. When it comes to participation in and enjoyment of many social benefits, such as education, employment, and, less tangibly, leisure, prestige, even regard and recognition, those people defined as 'different' slip into a lesser class of citizenship.

Since white settlement, the denial of full citizenship to others, especially on the basis of race, has been a persistent feature of Australian society. Although there have been significant moments of awareness and sensitivity leading to gestures of inclusion, advances have been moderated by periodic retreats. The authors here are concerned with the most recent manifestations of regression.

For intellectual analysis to have a value in society, it must make meaningful connections with experience, and not only examine but also clarify social choices. One compelling picture that emerges from these six views relates to the complex and changing character

of Australian society in which the negotiation of social relations is a continuing exercise. Despite highlighting the devaluation of minority groups and the discrimination confronting them, the six papers retain a sense of hope and identify ways in which, as a functioning participatory democracy, we can move forward.

A common cry from the hearts and the heads of these authors is for the restoration of non-economic values to equal status with the economic, taking care to avoid collapsing all social values and goods into an economic frame. This is not to deny the importance of economic issues. As Humphrey McQueen reminds us, effective economic analysis and management is a prerequisite for the delivery of social justice. There is a fit here with Martin Krygier's point that prosperity is a social good, perhaps even the more the better, certainly for those who have it. But it is a social good not to be judged in isolation. It is necessary, but not sufficient. If our institutions are to keep the worst evils at bay and nurture our ambitions, as envisaged in Krygier's 'good enough' society, they must incorporate our social values.

**T**HE AUTHORS IN THIS COLLECTION make it clear that there is no one way to work towards a good society, just as there are no absolutes in what constitutes that state. Shortfalls, it seems, are inevitable and maybe inadequacies keep us on our toes. This is not to say that Australian society has a worse record than many others. As Paolo Totaro notes, numbers of migrants who experienced exclusion from the mainstream of Australian society, nevertheless rejoiced in the absence of many of the evils they had left behind.

These papers were written before the recent federal election. Nothing on the political front has changed to make their arguments less distressingly relevant. These are fundamental matters which will have an impact on Australian society for decades and must not be compromised by hasty and superficial changes in rhetoric and policy. They deserve deep, honest and serious reflection in anticipation of a better society where all citizens can participate freely. As individuals we need to rethink our attitudes and behaviours and ensure that they are guided by the values that are central to the effective functioning of a fair and democratic society. And, taking our cue from Adrian Chan, as people of goodwill we must speak up, frequently and loudly. ■

**Jan Todd & Gretchen Poiner** are both members of the Independent Scholars Association of Australia Inc. The Association can be contacted at PO Box 268, Canberra City ACT 2601.



# A good society

MARTIN KRYGIER

THERE IS A BOOK BY BRUNO BETTELHEIM, which bears the splendid title, *A Good Enough Parent*. I haven't read the book, and I understand he was not a great parent, but the title has stayed with me, and occasionally consoled me, for years. It has just the right combination of demanding yet anti-perfectionist ambition that is appropriate to the condition of parenthood. And other conditions as well.

It is no small matter to be a good enough parent. Though commonly full of joys, parenthood is a serious and difficult business, and not everyone is good at it. There are many things good parents will wisely avoid, and many other things they will try to see through, however difficult that might be. Some parents are really not good enough, some are not good at all, and doubtless we can all do better than we do. And however much we try, we might still be disappointed, and so might our children. But the combination of indefinite article and qualified adjective in Bettelheim's title avoids two of the most common mistakes and potential sources of misery that afflict modern parents. One is the belief that there is one right way to be a parent, notwithstanding that this is an area of life peculiarly vulnerable to fads and so the 'one way' keeps changing. The second is the ambition to attain perfection as a parent or, even worse, through one's child. It might occasionally be useful—perhaps in a fleeting moment between violin lessons and trips to the orthodontist—to pause and recall Bettelheim's title.

I recalled it when asked to discuss 'the good society'. I will try to address the topic in that tone of somewhat sceptical idealism that Bettelheim appears to recommend. My characterisation will be resolutely—I'd like to think heroically—inconclusive. Others are free to add to it. A society which adequately satisfied the few conditions I mention would be good enough for me to praise, but not for everyone, and the goods I mention are not the only ones I value. But I do value them, and to the extent that a society didn't display them I would consider it needed improvement; if they were drastically absent, drastic improvement.

My remarks take the form of commentary on five theses. Marx, you will remember, had eleven. Here as elsewhere, my ambitions are more modest.



1. 'A' not 'the'.

SPEAK ABOUT A, AND NOT—as I was invited to and as is more common—*the* good society, for I think that apparently innocent definite article is both misleading and dangerous.

It is misleading because there are many ways in which societies can be, or fail to be, good, and no one way. Isaiah Berlin spent a long and distinguished life insisting that there is a major divide in social thought between those who think there is but one good for humanity and that it is possible and appropriate to strive for it, and those who think there are and should be many, not just as a matter of fact but in principle. I take the second view: both at a macro-level—there are many different and yet good societies—and at a micro-level—there are many different goods within a society. That is so, even though at both levels, as Berlin also never tired of insisting, these plural goods will often conflict and we will frequently be forced to make choices between them. Not to mention between them and evils.

Such choices are inescapable at any time, but arguably all the more so today. We live in a modern, perhaps even post-modern society, and there are indeed few places in the world where modernity and its consequences can be avoided. One such consequence is that our societies house pluralities—of occupations, people, languages, faiths, interests, values, ways of life, and cultures—and they will inevitably do so. Society-wide organic unities, if they ever existed, no longer do or can. On the whole, and with some small anxieties, I welcome that, but even if I didn't, I see no way of avoiding it. It is our fate.

Since it is, we should be sceptical in principle of anyone who suggests with a spirit of certainty—as our politicians too often do—that they know one special nostrum which must be taken, whatever it might threaten, because of the overwhelming benefit that nostrum promises, or because there are no reasonable alternatives to it. This scepticism is warranted, virtually whatever the nostrum, whether it be a scheme of taxation or a way of 'streamlining' universities or, more generally, a one-factor—these days usually economic—understanding of social well-being. Even if one supports the proposal, one should resist the monomaniacal pretensions of its promoters, and their temper—all the more, if one finds it disturbing.

The search for *the* good is not only misleading but dangerous too, because those

who think there is one good for humanity, and that they or their party, sect, church or nation know it, have inflicted some of the worst miseries that have ever befallen us. And that is no accident. For armed with the faith that such a good exists and that it can be attained, it is easy—and so it has proved—to move to the next step of allowing or approving the destruction of people and things that get in the way. Such good-doers or do-gooders can even inflict sufferings and other evils with a clear and easy conscience. This would be unpardonable even if all those millions of broken eggs had produced even one palatable omelette. But they rarely have.

Even if there were a single good, and even if there were some way of knowing it, one should be chary of sacrificing too much in its pursuit. For while it is possible to live in a good society, it is not possible to live in a perfect one and a lot of harm can be done by futile strivings. In this sense, the best truly is the enemy of the good. Imperfections matter, and we should try to reduce them, but we should not act on the assumption that we can eradicate them all. Indeed, the attempt to do so is often the very worst thing we can do. We live—*always*—in worlds of trade-offs, of more or less, not all or nothing. Disappointing though that might occasionally seem, it too is our fate and we should not try to evade it or claim title to exemption from it.

Moreover, the need to take compromise seriously should be welcomed as positive, not grudgingly accepted as merely better than nothing. For the attempt to realise unrealisable ideals is not necessarily the best strategy for anchoring one's values in the world.

That is perhaps an illustration of the economists' 'theory of the second best'. As I understand it, this theory holds that if in an ideal theoretical model a combination of factors and circumstances would produce a particular optimal result, but some of these factors are missing in actuality, you won't necessarily do best by simply seeking to maximise those of the stipulated factors that remain, in the circumstances that you have. Or to adapt an illustration made by the philosopher Avishai Margalit, in his masterly work, *The Decent Society* (Harvard UP, 1995), imagine you are desperate to fly for a holiday in Hawaii, but only have enough fuel to drop you a few hundred miles short, somewhere in the Pacific ocean. Rather than try to fly as close to your goal as you can, you might do better to settle for Heron Island. Or Lorne. Margalit has another

illustration, with which it is possible to empathise: 'St Paul believed that the human ideal for men is celibacy. But if someone has strong desires, he had better not remain a bachelor, trying to fornicate as little as possible and thus coming as close to the ideal even if he can never actually reach it. It would be better for him to get married.'

One way of expressing this first point is to emphasise the *adjectival* nature of 'good' in our topic. We shouldn't seek 'the good', as some moral philosophies do, but rather ensure that what we do and have *is* good. Societies come in all shapes and sizes, they're the products of accident, good and bad luck, intelligence, heroism, stupidity, cowardice, inertia, energy, and many other things. What we are now as a society depends in great part on what we were before, and we can't control what we were before. But we can influence the character of what we are now and what we might become. And why not try?

2. A good society delivers us from (some) evils. The more the better.

THOUGH THIS IS A negative goal, no society can be good in which it is ignored. It is not the ultimate value in a good society, but a primary one, a condition for other goods. In *Between Fear and Hope*, last year's Boyer lectures, I distinguished six of what I took to be the worst evils that we know people *can* do to each other because we know people *have* done them to each other, often. The list is merely illustrative and it could easily be extended but it shouldn't be shortened, for each of the evils I discuss there—physical cruelty, humiliation, incivility, unfreedom, poverty, injustice—is truly evil. We should seek to avoid, and our institutions should be apt to help us avoid, the worst evils of which we know.

One of the worst things about the totalitarian regimes of this century is that they were not merely fanatical in their pursuit of what they took to be good, but that (partly for that reason) they were contemptuous of the demand that they avoid evil. And one of the most distasteful things about their many Western admirers, who didn't personally suffer those evils, was that they condoned, ignored or denied them where they occurred and manifested nothing but contempt for the institutions and values that allowed their own societies to avoid them. At best such attitudes were frivolous; at worst they were not.

Still, avoiding evil comes at a potential price. Many so-called communitarian

political theorists have argued that a public discourse which emphasises *rights* has weakened our understanding of *responsibilities*, and more broadly still our capacity for enriching *relationships*. Yet many of us value both the protections that legally secured rights afford and the enrichment of entwining relationships. Libertarians claim that a society cannot protect freedom and ensure equality at the same time. But many people value both. Not everything we do to avoid evil—for example, trying to limit the discretion, or increasing the accountability, of officials by formal and precise rules—is apt to produce good—for example, responsive and imaginative decision-making by those same officials. Not every measure apt to reduce our fears is equally apt to help us attain our hopes. Even worse, measures devoted to the one end might block endeavours to attain the other. This happens, for example, when ‘legality’ degenerates into ‘legalism’ and it happens in other contexts as well.

We should recognise the possibility of such tensions between institutionalising protections against what we must avoid and institutionalising ways of reaching out for what we want to achieve. There are often good grounds for principled trade-offs and compromises in our institutional set-ups. But we shouldn’t *assume* that everything that serves to protect us will be ill-designed to enable us to flourish. Often both aims can be accommodated without significant loss. Often also, if our protections and institutions are strong, we can hazard to encourage moral aspirations that might have been dangerous in harder times. Often our protections stay in the background—like plumbers when the sewers work, or divorce law when a marriage is strong—and we get on with other things. But we should not denigrate plumbers and sewers, or even lawyers. We should just not have to think about them all the time. Nor soldiers, police and so on. All of them need to be in good shape but if they are, we’re better off if they, or even the thought of them, don’t dominate our lives. We should, then, pursue ways in which we can avoid evil without hamstringing our efforts to do good, and, conversely, do good without threatening our defences. What we should *not* do is lock ourselves in a world so tightly secure that not even dreams can get in, or so loose that our dreams threaten to become nightmares.

What I am trying to do here is harness

together the insights into the human condition of both pessimism and optimism. It is perhaps a characterological divide, maybe even congenital, that some people are drawn to optimism and others to pessimism, but in principle it should be possible to learn from both. The pessimist is concerned—at times obsessed—with the bad that might happen. While that is a sad obsession, it is a healthy concern. For as has been well said by someone—Henry James has been suggested—those who lack the imagination of disaster are doomed to be surprised by the world. But then, sometimes, so are those without the capacity to imagine success. The former might fail to protect themselves against the loss of things precious to them; the latter might deny themselves the experience of anything



precious to lose. Love, after all, is a very risky venture which no consistent pessimist should contemplate, since it renders one almost infinitely vulnerable. One should of course reckon with that vulnerability. And yet it would be a pity to avoid it altogether.

3. *A good society does not merely close doors against evils. It opens them to goods.*

**P**ARTICULARLY VALUABLE are forms of life which do both. *Civility* is one such form. It is not an ultimate goal of life, but, particularly in large and modern societies, it is a condition both for the existence of certain goods and for their flourishing.

Civility is a social condition; it can’t be exercised in private, and it’s not even especially appropriate for the ‘privacy of your own home’, where one might prefer to find some love. A marriage, for example, which is best described as civil is perhaps better than an uncivil one, but it is still likely to be in poor shape. Civility is particularly appropriate for relations in public, though. It’s a lubricant of such relationships, not a glue as love can be, but not a poison like hatred either. Since our societies are too large and various for us all to love each other, civility affords the possibility of cool, sometimes tepid, sometimes even warm bonds between people who would be better off not hating

each other. Civility is, of course, not a virtue that excites passions, for that is the opposite of its aim, but it is critical all the same.

Civility is first of all a baseline virtue, a platform on which one might safely stand and move in crowded societies, secure from the terrible fear of ways of interacting that we know are available to humans, and maybe even tempting, since they have so often been tried. On the platform of routine civility we might seek to build richer and finer sentiments and engagements, and we might value them far more. But we should never forget the importance of such a platform.

All the more since, as I have argued elsewhere, not only is civility better than incivility when non-intimates meet, it is also immensely positive in its consequences. For it makes possible routine and fertile—

non-predatory—relationships among strangers or non-intimates, relationships which can be co-operative without being communal, and which can extend the range of our resources, encounters, activity, and productivity. It is also a form of relationship particularly suited to a democracy: not servile as

perhaps befits servants, or courteous as befits courtiers, simply civil as befits citizens.

It is easier to identify civility than to explain it, and easier to explain it than to introduce it where it has never existed or has broken down. This is one of the major challenges to institutional design in much of the world today, though it is not always obvious that institutional design is enough. Where civility exists, we have reason to be grateful, for it is not inevitable. It needs enabling conditions, practice and, occasionally, defence.

Another good with both protective and productive aspects is decency. Here I draw as elsewhere on the particular sense given to the word by the Israeli philosopher, Avishai Margalit, in his book *The Decent Society*. According to Margalit, a society is decent to the extent that its institutions don’t humiliate people. That is an arresting and important formulation for the following reason. It is easy when thinking of suffering, to focus on tangible evils: physical harm and insecurity, poverty, illness, and so on. These are indeed evils and a good society will seek to alleviate them, even if it can never eliminate them completely. But humiliation is often an invisible evil, easily bestowed and hard to remove. A society whose institutions are organised in ways that don’t humiliate people is to that extent



good. And I should add that they shouldn't humiliate *peoples* as well, for often humiliation, like identity, is the common and contagious attribute of group membership. It is in that sense an efficient evil: it can be suffered by members of derided or excluded groups, even in the absence of particular individual dealings or long after the worst of such dealings have ceased or changed. No-one who tries to imagine the range and effects of harms that Aborigines have suffered in the last 200 years should ignore this particular, potent and insidious kind of wrong.

Negatively expressed, then, a decent society does not humiliate its citizens. Positively, it manifests respect for them. That is the right way to treat people in principle. It's not a bad idea in practice either.

#### 4. *In a good society, justice is done.*

**T**HIS, AS IS OFTEN OBSERVED, has a formal and material aspect. Formally, one is particularly concerned with legal justice, which is a complex amalgam of institutional virtues, and which depends upon the rule of law. Its character is controversial and it is not a simple thing to achieve, but it has to do with the regular and institutional restraint and channelling of political power, and with its impersonal, institutionally fair and unbiased application. It is never perfectly attained, but the value of attaining a good measure of it can scarcely be over-estimated. Again, it is one of those virtues best appreciated by those who know its absence. Again too, a society should afford it routinely, as a solid protection against the evils that are available without it. When I speak of formal justice, or legal justice, still more of the rule of law, I am never tempted to add 'mere' as many radicals have been. For these are precious things. They are critical to a good society, even if most people in such a society will only be interested in them from time to time.

But is it good enough? A great deal has been written also about substantive justice, social justice, justice in the distribution of goods of various sorts. This too is controversial, and enormously difficult to attain. Sometimes people insist that the search for justice competes with that for prosperity, and since the latter is good for everyone, conceptions of social justice are harmful. And indeed prosperity is good and perhaps (though not necessarily) the more the better, at least for those who share it. Certainly those who do share it tend to prefer it to its opposite. But it is easy for some to have while others do not, and,

though not always the case, it is not rare for some to have at the expense of those who don't. That latter condition is always unjust. And its temptations are huge. So, often, are the opportunities. By definition these are never available to everyone, and by common observation they are not randomly available either.

The gross amount of goods in a society must never be judged in isolation from other values, but in terms of its contribution to, and its compatibility with, other social goods, among them civility, decency and justice. Since, as I began by arguing, not everything we want is compatible with everything else we want, hard choices often need to be made. It is wrong to deny that these *are* choices, on the grounds that what is good for aggregate prosperity, or the prosperity of some, is necessarily good for everyone. It is also wrong to pretend that these are not *moral* choices, though morality is rarely the only register that is appropriately engaged, or should be decisive, in making them. A civil, decent and just society is likely to be better to live in, and more easily attained, if it is prosperous too. But a rich society, or a society in which there are riches, will be morally impoverished if it is not also in good measure civil, decent and just. Accommodating these goods together might involve costs, among them economic costs. But not doing so will also involve costs, among them moral costs.

#### 5. *Is Australia good enough?*

**A** GOOD SOCIETY, then, is one which manages both to avoid the worst bads and multiply and fairly share valuable goods. Since no society avoids all bads and none manifests, let alone multiplies, all the goods, and even fewer share them fairly, no society is fully good. Like universities, societies do good by degrees. And in the goodness business, perhaps unlike the contemporary university business, no new degree is a bad one.

Australia is clearly not *the* good society, since no society can be. Still, by the measures I have suggested and compared with most societies I know and know of, Australians have done pretty well, been pretty lucky or both, in many of their dealings and for much of their history. In most respects, this is a particularly civil society, generally decent and relatively just. There are many societies of which none of this can be said.

Even if we had done better and been luckier, of course, that would be no reason for complacency. Sustaining a good enough

family is itself a task for life, but then there is death. Not so with societies. To adapt the Talmudic saying: 'the work is not upon thee to finish, nor art thou free to desist from it'. And while it is unwise to berate one's society for not being perfect, there is no reason to avoid trying to do better. Moreover, there is one specific reason why Australia is not yet a good enough society, all the more startling for its moral centrality and distinctiveness in our history: the sustained plight of Aborigines since whites arrived here.

In our short history, there is nothing else that is equivalent to what happened to Aborigines. Those of us whose identity is bound up with this nation, and like to think well of it, can at least be relieved, even proud, that there are no other tragedies of this order. But the history of Aboriginal/settler relations is so full of incivility, indecency, injustice, poverty, not even to mention murder, dispossession and more, that we have every reason to feel shamed. Not usually, today, because of what we individually have done, not as an extended version of personal guilt. Rather because of what our community has in its record and is responsible for; that community of which we are part and which is part of us, in which we are bound up, whose successes and virtues please us and whose vices sadden us, which gives us elements of our identity, and for which we might feel affection, might even admit to feeling love. And since what we do now *is* our responsibility, it is hard to say we are good enough until we have adequately faced the challenge of that shame.

Moreover, if we react with a determination to ignore the grounds of that shame, or to insist that it is simply cancelled by the good in our past and present, or to blame the victims, or to insist that what they regard as injustices were merely misfortunes, and anyway it was all in the past and we weren't here then, we have another—and more directly personal—reason to be ashamed. ■

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# A class balancing act

HUMPHREY MCQUEEN

I HAD INTENDED TO DISCUSS the observers of Australian society in the post-war period. However, there have been two changes to our political situation. I'm inclined to think that the implosion of the Japanese and Asian economies is a much more important event than the Queensland election, but they are not unconnected. Certainly in their consequences they are going to feed each other. So, while I will make some passing references about past social commentators by way of comparison, what I want to do is to talk about the extra-parliamentary politics—not about election results—but about the culture and the economics of politics in our society now.

One of the observers in this post-war period, the one who is the best known to us all, is Donald Horne, who wrote *The Lucky Country*. As he keeps complaining, people still think that he was saying that Australia was a lucky country, whereas he was saying that we were a badly managed country that got by on its good fortune. And that one day the luck would run out, that this post-war luck could not carry us through forever. The people Horne attacked most in *The Lucky Country* were the business executives, whom he said were lazy or incompetent and needed to learn how to manage to make Australia a place in which the reasonable good fortunes of the preceding 20 years or so could continue.

There was a sense in which *The Lucky Country* could be seen as a book about economic rationalism and as a lively way of bringing to attention ideas that other people had had about how the Australian economy should be organised. Certainly, the notion that we could go on living behind protective walls with high tariffs was an attitude that Horne was beginning to criticise. He wasn't the only one. Jim Cairns at this stage was making the point that tariffs were OK for the bosses but that the workers needed planning. And that tariffs were a bad substitute for real economic planning. So criticisms of how the economy and the political system should be run have

continued through this post-war period.

*The Lucky Country* epitomised a moment in which Australians focused on Australian criticisms of Australia. The book that had created a similar kind of stir a few years before was John Douglas Pringle's *Australian Accent*, which is a delightful read. But it was written by the Pommy editor brought out here by those cringing Fairfaxes who couldn't believe that anyone born in Australia could ever edit an Australian newspaper, just as the Anglican archdiocese of Sydney had to bring in an Archbishop to Australia. And so the switch between John Douglas Pringle's book and Donald Horne's book was the sense that we could now take criticism by ourselves of ourselves seriously.

It wasn't that panic at the airport or Fremantle dock where reporters rushed down and bleated: 'What do you think of Australia?' Here was a critique penned by someone who had lived here and abroad. And that, if not exactly a turning point, because it had been happening for a period of time, registered an important change.

Today one of the attitudes that irritates me not a little is to be told 'Oh, you mustn't do or say that because the rest of the world won't like it. It will embarrass us at the United Nations.' Since few organisations in the world are more embarrassing than the United Nations, I don't really care what they think about us. What's important is what we think of each other. That's the criterion on which we should judge our political and social behaviour. Not what the neighbours are going to say, but whether this is a good way for us to behave and produce the kind of society that we want for ourselves and for each other. So we can now look at ourselves as ourselves and be critical about us and take ourselves seriously at the same time, as Horne continues to do.

Donald Horne was also critical and misunderstood when he wrote *The Death of the Lucky Country* at the end of the Whitlam regime. People thought he was saying that the dismissal of Whitlam spelt

the death of the lucky country, whereas the book was about the collapse of the world economic boom. The dynamics that had sustained that period up to 1973–74 came to an end with the first oil price crisis after the loss of the dollar standard. Horne said that world was over. Although it has been over for the last 25 years, there are just some people who haven't caught up, and who think that if only Billy McMahon was still Prime Minister, everything would be all right.

I want to go back and insert a five-letter word, 'class'. I want to look at some of the ways in which we need to observe ourselves in terms of class. We need to rebalance. Of course, there was a stage when there was only class, and the position of women or of Aborigines or of migrants either didn't exist or would be solved when you solved the class question. Now we all know much better than that. It doesn't work in that simple way. There is a Stalin story to illustrate the point. Some of his colleagues went to Stalin one day to ask him which was the greater danger: left-wing adventurism or right-wing opportunism. Stalin is supposed to have replied: 'Whichever one we're not watching at the moment.' And that is, in a sense, what I want to say about the balance between class, ethnicity and gender. We've been looking for the last 20 or 30 years very hard at ethnicity and gender in our society, and not looking at class. It's time we redressed that balance. We are now suffering for not having paid attention to that aspect.

SPeaking in the library, it occurred to me that it's worth remembering how libraries fit into this pattern in ways that not all of us are immediately aware of. Fortunately, in this NSW State Library where you can leave your bag in one of the lockers and put a dollar in, you get your dollar back when you take your bag out. But the State Library in Victoria took your dollar. That doesn't seem much if you have a salary. But plenty of people who use libraries find that a dollar a day is a lot of money. And if they



brought their own lunch, of course, they were not allowed to take it into the library with them, so they had to spend another dollar to get their lunch out of their bag. The same applies to photocopy cards. I can run \$20 on my photocopy card and take it off my tax. But if I'm somebody who needs to photocopy only one or two pages, it's harder and harder to find a photocopy machine that will take only your 20 cents.

These are some of the ways in which the poor are made miserable. All these little ways, that when you're not thinking about where your dollar goes, we don't worry about. We are now thinking about where we're going to get a drink of water. But for poor people this is a problem all the time, because there aren't many easy places to get a drink of water around the town, except to go into a public toilet. Café society has taken over the footpaths and if you can pay \$2.50 to sit there, they'll give you a glass of water. But if you've got to wait for a bus for

**I** OFTEN LAMENT THAT in late capitalism morality has become a struggle between vanity and gluttony. But it is also true that this society, and indeed every society, continues to function because most of us don't behave in that greedy way much of the time. If we all behaved the way in which we were told we should behave to make the economy work, the whole society would have come to an end. It's because we don't put monetary values and greed at the top of how we actually organise our daily lives that the market society still works. Volunteers run sports societies and parents and citizens organisations. People pop over the fence to see that somebody else has got enough to eat if they're sick. That's how we know daily life functions, and we don't want it any other way. We know that for a whole range of reasons there needs to be a welfare state to fill some of the gaps, but people still have compassion and still want that virtue to be acknowledged as of some value.

there wasn't such a problem as to how to make the economy work. Capitalism seemed to have solved that problem, so the left didn't have to worry about it. This was the period in which Les Murray could write a book called *Poems Against Economics* and be taken seriously. Then Whitlam came along and, when he was accused of not knowing anything about economics, said, 'Don't be ridiculous. Of course I know about economics. I've found a section of the Constitution which allows me to spend even more money.'

This notion that economics was about spending money became a very powerful one among social reformers. On the left the idea arose that economics was a male activity, and that if you talked about economics, it was a way of oppressing people. Then the next generation came along and spoke algebra at us, about J curves and other things that people don't understand. So we got to a point where people would



three quarters of an hour in the heat and you don't have that kind of money to spend, then a glass of water is a luxury. A lot of that has been forgotten. We've recently had a Minister for Education who was amazed to hear that students couldn't go to the movies at least once a week. There is a vast gulf between how people who do have incomes lose touch with how people who don't have incomes get through on a daily basis.

One of the consequences of losing touch with class is we've also lost touch with economic analysis. One of the reactions against Stalinism and the kind of left-wing politics with which it was associated, has been to identify economics with Stalinism. So the 1960s were full of talk about alienation theory and about how you felt about being working class. Because the economy was booming along quite nicely,

glaze over or get angry at any kind of economic discussion. There has been enormous interest in the last 20 or 30 years in the media as image, but it is much harder to get anyone to talk about who pays for the images, about where the advertising comes from. I heard Rob Bolton, who does a very good program about the media on the ABC, talking about the *Newcastle Herald* and its reformatting. In 28 minutes of talking, never

once did he ask a question about the advertising, as if in some way the reformulation of a newspaper would be done without consideration as to what effect it was going to have on advertising incomes. The ads on the page of a tabloid are quite different from the position of ads on the page of a broadsheet, and what squeezes out stories in tabloids are the ads. But no-one wants to know about this. This is too hard. This is that awful thing called economics, that only left-wing dinosaurs like me are concerned about. I was taking a course at Curtin University in late 1987 where I was trying to lead the students to these questions, when I had the great good fortune of being there when the stockmarket collapsed and all those great media buyers, including Mr Fairfax, fell on their faces. So these students who were being brought up to study images in the media, were confronted by the fact that there were other dynamics functioning.

**B**ECAUSE ECONOMIC rationalism so often appears in its social and cultural consequences to be irrational, can we therefore avoid the questions of economics as well? My dear old friend, the late Tom Fitzgerald, used to say about Labor governments, to which he was sympathetic but critical: 'What Curtin and Chifley understood and Whitlam never understood, was that *if you get the economy wrong then you can't get anything else right.*' Curtin, who was Tom's great hero, was no economist but he knew that he had to have Chifley there so that whatever else he wanted to do as a Labor Prime Minister would be possible. And that is a lesson that we have to reabsorb. It's not very difficult. As Bob Hawke said to Whitlam, 'Look, a feller as bright as you, you can learn it in a fortnight, there's nothing much to know.' And that's true. Despite all the nonsense, anybody here today could understand within a fortnight the basic points you need to know, as a piece of descriptive economics. The higher mathematics is a different story, but it doesn't relate to anything anyway.

For instance, it is important to understand why the collapse of the Asian currencies meant that last year's argument over tariff levels in Australia became totally irrelevant. And yet I spoke to some journalists in the press gallery in Canberra for whom this point had not become clear. They simply did not understand there was any connection between the value of the currency and the level of tariff protection—that you can, as happened in fact, move

from having small positive tariffs to a negative tariff overnight. There was no decision of the Industries Commission; no-one decided that here was a policy question; it happened because our competitors' currencies collapsed. Going back earlier, Whitlam did not understand that the mining boom was forcing up the value of the Australian dollar so that by 1974 the Australian dollar was worth 1.45 American dollars. And this meant that every other product in Australia, all the manufacturing industries, simply could not compete. And in the midst of this situation, when the factories were functioning with 20 per cent negative tariffs, the whizkids in Canberra, Whitlam & Co., decided to cut all tariffs by 25 per cent, because they made no connection between the currency and the tariff level.



There is a wonderful story of Joan Robinson, one of the great economists of this century, who, when asked the difference between her view of the world and that of a Marxist economist, said 'Well if a Marxist wants to know what the law of the tendency of profit to fall is he looks up chapter 13 of volume III of *Das Kapital*. If I want to know, I work it out on the back of an envelope.' That sense of working it out on the back of an envelope is what I've still got to do. I can't work it out in my head the way these other clever people can. But we can think it through. We can all do that, because it is descriptive economics.

Economics is not something to be terrified of. The experts make it terrifying deliberately. Poor Keating was totally bamboozled by all this for years. John Edwards' book shows that they just played with him. They would tell him one story and he'd go off and tell it to the public. But eventually he did learn that they were telling him lies, that none of the things they ever told him had ever worked. Finally, when he was Prime Minister, he came to realise this. There is a wonderful story about him and Kelty at a meeting in the early 1990s when the phone rings and someone comes into the office and says, 'Prime Minister, it is your mother on the phone. She wants to speak to you.' So he gets up and goes out, and as he's going he says, 'She's on a fixed income and she's worried about declining

interest rates.' Kelty says, 'Tell her to look at the real rates, not the nominals.' And Keating says, 'You can't bullshit your mother.' But that's what they did to us, for about 13 years, and they still try to do it. They try to make it appear all too hard, so electors can't possibly understand what is happening.

**P**UTTING CLASS BACK into the argument means being able to go back and look at economics again. You need to understand, for instance, the connection between tariff rates and the value of the currency, because they will determine what will happen in this country as the Asian implosion carries us along its way.

All the talk about globalisation is a public relations job for what we used to call imperialism. When we called it imperialism we knew what to do with it—you smashed it. With globalisation you just lie down in front of it. So with that transformation towards the growth of big corporations and monopoly capitalism, One Nation is only the beginning of a transformation of the party system. It is not necessarily going to end up with a party on the far right taking over. One question is whether it's possible to get a social democratic party back again. I suspect that if the Labor Party is returned to office, within two weeks it would be back to selling off Telstra and introducing a GST. When you listen to many of the candidates or members explain why they are in One Nation, they talk about everything except Aborigines and immigration. Journalists ask them, what about Aborigines? I heard a candidate from Western Australia respond, 'No I don't believe what they say over there. Common sense and compassion wouldn't let you believe that.' So what we have been focusing on about this discontent has been the offensive aspects. But there are these other issues that go well beyond the racism of One Nation, and erupted around the Maritime Union.

We also need to put class back into other discussions—into ethnicity and gender, for instance—as well as discuss it in its own right. Here are some examples. On the situation of women in society, the welfare state needs to be broadly defined to include arbitration and trade unions. It's not just what the state can do, because we know there are women in this society who don't need the welfare state. My mum needed the welfare state, but Janet Holmes a Court does not. There are other women who don't need the welfare state because without one they can get cheaper servants. They don't want an



arbitration system and trade unions, because they can get women to do their sewing in factories or to personally sew the sequins on their ball gowns for slave labour rates. The question of equal pay, which is where Edna Ryan came into this movement in the 1950s and 1960s, still hasn't been achieved. There have been improvements, but Edna died a couple of years ago still campaigning for the original demands for equal pay and still concerned about the position that working women occupy in society.

But the women's movement as an academic intellectual enterprise has very often moved further and further away from working-class women. One of the leading American feminists, Elizabeth Fox Genovese, has just published a book about American working lives in which she uses a title taken from one of the women: *Feminism is not the story of my life*. Remembering that there are working women in America who don't have even the minimal protection of an arbitration system, unlike women workers in Australia who at least have the conditions installed by male chauvinists for male workers, Genovese reports on generations of women who express views which sound feminist but say they are not feminist because their theorising doesn't relate to their daily experiences and the battles they have had.

**T**HE SAME POINT NEEDS to be remembered about the position of ethnic communities in Australia. Certainly if you are a Sri Lankan doctor who comes to Australia, then initially you will confront problems in having your qualifications accepted. You will doubtless also meet certain degrees of prejudice about your being non-white and you will find yourself more welcome as a medical practitioner in some areas than in others. But the notion that you are, as a Sri Lankan doctor coming to Australia, disadvantaged in a way in which a Scottish car labourer is not disadvantaged is one of the great mistakes of the last 25 years. The notion that migrants who come from English-speaking countries are in some way better off in this society than all migrants who come from non-English-speaking or non-European societies is wrong. The cultural, educational, even the speaking abilities associated with certain British accents, are going to be as great a disadvantage to you in getting certain kinds of jobs and in being treated as a social equal as is coming from a non-English speaking background. So the programs we put in place to deal with people coming from non-English

speaking backgrounds also need to be there to deal with many migrants coming from English-speaking backgrounds who were socially and culturally, or otherwise disadvantaged. And they are well aware of that. They ask, 'Why is there no program to help me and my children get out of places like the car factories around Elizabeth or the western suburbs?'

Similar issues can be seen in relation to certain environmental concerns. There is great tenderness about the living conditions of battery chickens, but very much less concern about the working conditions of the women in the chicken factories. We are all in a way using those women as our domestic servants, but they've been industrialised, so we are not embarrassed about having them around the house waiting on table. But they all wait on our tables by providing that semi-prepared food for us. Either as a chicken for us to buy and cook ourselves or as a prepared chicken to take home and eat. We say we don't have servants any more, but we do: they've just been industrialised and are out of sight, and hence out of mind.

Perhaps the most unfortunate case is that of Aborigines, because of the consequences the loss of class analysis is now having. A point I heard Henry Reynolds make many years ago I repeat at every opportunity: 'You can't just fix unemployment for the Aborigines in the bush.' He went on to say that you can set up an art centre or a keeping place and employ a few Aborigines in that country district, but if you're going to provide real work for generation after generation, the changes that you need to bring to the bush are changes that you have to bring to everybody in that town; to the rural poor whites as well as to the Aborigines. Chronic joblessness is not a problem that can be solved simply by putting in schemes for Aborigines. It simply cannot work that way. It's not a matter of denying that the Aborigines are at the bottom of the pile. They are. But when you take out the abattoirs, then eventually the banks go and the schools go. Unskilled work for all kinds of people is no longer there. I'm not suggesting you put the abattoirs back, but the notion that you can solve the economic and social problems for one section of the rural community and isolate them out just brings to pass what Henry Reynolds predicted. You just make life worse for the Aborigines because they are resented more because they seem to be getting something that the poor whites in the town aren't receiving. Instead, the kind of policies that were needed were closer to those of regional

development, which was one of the first areas that the Howard Government closed down—the Regional Development Division.

People in the Hunter Valley or around the Western suburbs see this and they look at the Queensland election result. They are intelligent enough to do the obvious thing. They say, well if you jump up and down and you vote for One Nation, then the whole government turns around and starts giving you things—like giving back Telstra. But they don't do anything for us. We're just poor white trash out in the Western suburbs. So if we threaten to do the same thing, perhaps someone will do something for us. It is those social and economic connections which have been sidelined and marginalised, and the way we need to respond to the current situation is to intervene to deal with those broad issues of class and disadvantage.

**I** BEGAN BY TALKING about class and observation. There is another sense of the word 'observed' and that is to look with your eyes. One of the matters that has been concerning some Sydney-siders recently is looking at the Opera House, and how an apartment block is going to get in the way of some of those views. I'd like to conclude with a couple of reflections on that issue. First, the fact that that apartment block could ever have gone up is an indication of what happens when you have a deregulated market. Nobody was in charge of saying it shouldn't be there. Second, the fact that there are people who can afford to buy in at those prices at a time when other people don't have homes is also a judgment about our society. Third, it is even more extraordinary that anyone could suggest that any government spend \$400 million or more to buy the block and knock it down at a time when there are families spending 60 per cent of their income on rent, quite apart from the homeless. Confiscate it by all means, but turn it over to the poor. The idea that \$400 million could be spent in this way is an extreme version of not understanding what it costs the poor to put a dollar into the bag-handling locker. It's the same distance between how most people live and those who might have their view spoiled occasionally. ■

**Humphrey McQueen's** latest book is *Temper Democratic: How exceptional is Australia?* (Wakefield, \$24.95)

*This is an edited transcript of a paper presented to the seminar 'Australia observed' on 1 August 1998.*

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# Observing the other

WENDY BRADY

## Prologue

It was the day when they had been fishing. It was clear, they were able to see some sort of image—not sure what it was—coming towards them. She stood there and watched it get closer and closer. The men moved out from the trees. They went close to the shoreline. She stayed back watching, wondering, waiting.

He was on the deck, pulling at the ropes, looking out, wondering, watching, waiting. He was seeing things that he never thought that he would see. He glanced up and caught the gaze of a young woman, a young black woman. He looked at her and she reminded him in some way of Mary whom he had left back in England. And suddenly he was reminded of it, he could smell the stench of the Thames, he could hear the noise, he knew it, and for one brief moment he wanted to be back there, not here entering the unknown.

She looked up and she heard her uncle call in their language 'Go away, go away.' And then she saw this man: Was it a ghost? (A strange colour they were, these creatures.) Where were the women? Who were they? What were they doing there? She looked up, she looked at her uncle and looked back at the children, and she felt afraid. He heard the first mate call and he knew he had to get back down to business, he looked out and he looked at the strange land, looked at the men coming towards the shore and looked at her. It was the unknown and he was afraid.

**T**HIS STORY IS made up of remnants—it's not factual. But it gives you some idea of the way in which people of difference can be seen through each others' eyes. Currently, we are operating within a climate where difference is regarded as dangerous. When I look out at you, I look at you with a face that actually represents a history of colonisation. Loss of ownership of land, loss of human rights, and for some of us, the loss of our colour but not the loss of our culture. I can walk down the street and not necessarily be seen to be who I am. But if I walk down the street with my cousins, or my aunties or my uncles, or my father, then I'm understood to be part of that other dangerous group.

In Edward Said's book *Orientalism*, I see connections with our lives as Aboriginal people. He writes: 'The most readily accepted designation for Orientalism is an academic one, and indeed the label still serves in a number of academic institutions. Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient, and that applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian or philologist either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism.'

As an Aboriginal person having experienced the education system at universities, I've come across a number of experts, particularly in regard to Aboriginal people. Most of those experts have come to their area of expertise, not necessarily from

a will or a desire to own Indigenous people, but within a European notion of an investigation, posing questions, having them resolved, finding new knowledge. It's only in recent times that we have been able to change this approach. It has come about through Aboriginal people posing those questions, also by those who are engaged in these endeavours attempting to change the way in which they acquire and express knowledge. There has also been a desire to work in coalition and collaboration with those of us who were formerly only the subjects or objects of investigation.

**W**HAT DOMINANT CULTURE often refuses to consider are the elements of Aboriginality. Aboriginal Australians reflect the history of invasion and colonisation. We carry it in and on our bodies. We range in colour, form, attitude across a complexity and multiplicity of layers. These layers have come from our generational knowledge and from the imposed notions of who we are as a people. These contradict and are more complex than the often simplistic descriptors used to represent us as Aboriginal people. In contemporary culture we carry those elements which have been imposed but which we have also appropriated from others and retained for our own cultural maintenance. We are placed within European historical mythology that claims us as the exotic, the erotic, the naive, the unsophisticated, the vulnerable, the static,

and which often locates us as pre-civilised. This mythologising is challenged by us and by those who are trying to dismantle the impositions of introduced and dominating cultures. I quote from Cherric Moraga, an Hispanic woman, who wrote, 'I have never had a race-less relationship. Somehow I have always attributed this to being mixed-blood, but I wonder if anyone has. Maybe white people are the only ones in this country to enjoy the luxury of being "colour-blind" with one another, white people in all the glory of their centrality. Not I.'

The classification of Aboriginal Australians commenced before we were seen by Europeans and once seen, we were categorised according to some pseudo-scientific criteria of race, beliefs, sexuality and intelligence. Our bodies and identification generally remain caught in those classifications. Mary Pratt described European explorers', writers' and scientists' attempts to produce 'information' from their experiences in Africa in the 19th century. She then points out that they tried to 'interlock' these 'information orders' into categories of the 'aesthetic, geographical, mineralogical, botanical, agricultural, economic, ecological, ethnographic' and then attempted to make them appear as if they were a 'natural' pattern.

These so-called natural 'information orders' were then used to produce 'European knowledges or disciplines' which were a product of European world views rather than some uncommanded natural phenomena. It should be for those experts



who carry these presumed knowledges or disciplines to question the European distortions of Indigenous people and our lands; to question the information that has infiltrated the minds, attitudes and actions of many non-Indigenous people. To generate that response, we have to reposition ourselves. No longer can observers stand back in conscious distance, but must engage in forming questions when viewing us and viewing themselves. The borderlines of race and gender must be crossed. This will result in turmoil because the boundaries have been challenged. It also disturbs those who see themselves as controlling the borders. It takes courage to be a transgressor. Australia has a history of those who have challenged the borderlines. But we need now to reposition yet again. I and many other Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are sometimes filled with a sense of hopelessness. But we won't thrive on that emotion, nor can we allow hopelessness to

humour in that, but there is also the sense that this young man can only see himself now as being able to reflect resistance to that notion by engaging with it. This, I think, is more to be feared than anything that can be said against us.

**A** SOCIAL OCCASION highlighted for me one of the main problems in being observed as the other. I was invited to a dinner with a group of people with whom I work. A person at the table asked me my area of work. I said, 'I head an Indigenous Studies Unit at a university' and he said, 'Oh, so you study Aborigines.' 'No,' I responded, 'we really teach about our culture' and he said, 'So you teach about European culture to Aborigines?' I took a deep breath and replied, 'No, I'm Aboriginal.' When he looked across at me he said, predictably, 'But you don't look Aboriginal.' My response was, 'No, I look colonised.' Immediately he became defensive and felt

were alive today to hear many of us now, including those of us in our family and the younger generations, stand up with pride and say, 'We are Wiradjuri.'

The problem is that we are reclaiming our identity but the non-Indigenous society has yet to understand that we can claim it. We are still classified in terms of the broad terminology of Aborigine or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander—and now we have the even broader terminology of Indigenous. When we can claim back our nationhood, we will no longer have to bear the fact of being observed and classified according to criteria imposed by others. Our multiplicity of identities doesn't ever take away from what is at the heart of who we are as a people. Often when I meet non-Aboriginal people and I present myself as an Aboriginal person, I can see them search my face for something that will answer their understanding of what it means to be an Aboriginal person.



prevail, because we have younger generations who are looking to us to give them back a sense of hope.

I come from a community and I come from a population group who have one of the highest rates of youth suicide in this country—particularly among our young men. Currently in Mulawa prison in Sydney, 30 per cent of the population are young Aboriginal women, young Aboriginal mothers. The population age range is 19 to 25. They see themselves as having a life that is contained within violence. There is no sense of hope for the future, because they see violence, alienation and discrimination reflected from the dominant society. And there is that persistent sense of being viewed not only as different but also as dangerous. Consider the recent labelling of us as cannibals—one wonders what is in the mind of those who attach such labels. One young Aboriginal boy said to me recently when I was talking to a group at a school: 'I never thought I'd have a barbecue and invite her to dinner,' he said, 'but I wouldn't mind having a barbecue and having her for lunch.' There is a degree of

that he had the right to call into question my naming and my identity. When I introduce myself as being from the Wiradjuri nation many people say to me, 'Where is that? Does that mean you're Aboriginal?' One person asked me if it was an Asian nation. All of that we take on and treat with some degree of humour, but it doesn't take away from the fact that we are being named and classified outside ourselves.

My grandfather used to tell a great story of the days when he was put on a station. The police or the Board representative from the local area would come round and classify them annually for the census. My grandfather said that his classification really depended on the time of the year. In some years he was full blood and in other years he was half caste depending on whether it was winter or summer.

But he always said, 'We will never be anything other than who we are; we are Aborigines.' And he said, 'You must remember always that you are Wiradjuri.' He had grown up on that station without having the right to actually name himself at any time; he was forbidden to do so. I wish he

**C**OALITIONS OF PEOPLE are now forming to undermine any progress or advancement that we might have made or we might make by attempting to legitimise and to establish us as dangerous through the classifications of Aboriginal, half caste, quarter caste, octoroon. Recently, there has been a debate between the UN and the Indigenous Working Group on a Declaration of Rights for Indigenous People. Surprisingly, against the backdrop of the negotiation, a spokesperson for One Nation claimed that a lawyer had come from Canada to work with Aboriginal people to form a guerrilla army, with the intention of taking over Queensland to form an Aboriginal state. This prompted many other strange responses from different quarters. Are we assumed to be so dangerous that we can undermine a whole structure of a nation, when in actual fact what has driven us and delivered our recognition has been the work of coalition between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal? 1967 showed us that, 1938 showed us that. Why would 1998 be any different?

Who drives reconciliation? Who supports reconciliation? People like you and many of

us as Aboriginal people. To then assume that because we are Aboriginal we would seek to dismantle a state or the nation is laughable, but it's also very, very destructive because there are people who assume that those who are different have dangerous plans. And why would they think this way? Because they are the descendants of people who acted in that way. Not all of them, but they come from a nation that was founded on massacre, genocide, removal, dispossession, oppression and the refusal of human rights. That is what they fear; having seen it done to others, they don't want that to happen to themselves. Now we have our own organisations that voice our needs and aspirations, we are assumed to seek the removal from this country of all people who are not indigenous. Yet if this were true I would have to see my very close sister-in-law taken away from me; I would have to see some of my aunties and uncles taken away from me; I would have to see one of my grandparents removed. What an absolute joke this idea is. What we are endeavouring to do is to take away the exclusive right of the observer, as European, and turn it around to say that we are all engaged in observing each other. And the observation that we make is that we are different.

It doesn't mean that we are dangerous.

There is a failure here to learn. There is a failure to absorb what we have seen in the past. That the Premier of NSW should be denigrated for having the audacity to make reference to history and what it can teach is problematic. Because it is within Aboriginal societies that we go back to history, and history is in the present.

I WANT TO MAKE just one concluding reference—to Monty Prior's book, *Maybe Tomorrow*, in which he writes of understanding and learning from each other. He describes what happened when speaking to some school children:

In this class a young boy got up and asked in a really snide voice, 'How come you Aboriginal people are so slow? You don't progress yourselves and you're lazy and you get drunk all the time.' Even in a situation when you expect a question like this it still hits you like a bullet. I asked him, 'What's your name?' This is how I get my breathing space after a question like that, I get my composure so that I can answer him constructively and not just fight fire with fire. You have to be the water to put out the fire. If you fight fire with fire everything burns. I went on, 'Let me ask you something,

can you speak an Aboriginal language?' He said, 'No.' 'Do you know an Aboriginal dance?' 'No.' 'Do you know any Aboriginal songs or stories?' 'No.' 'Have you read any books that Aboriginal people have written?' Every question I asked, he answered 'No.' By now I cleared myself of my anger and I went on to say, 'I can speak your language, I can do your dances, I know your stories, I read your books, so who is the slow one, who is being lazy? Aboriginal people were forced to learn your ways, here you are being offered a chance to learn, no-one is forcing you, you must do this for yourself.'

And I would add, it is a responsibility that we all have—to change the way in which we see each other and in which we observe each other and the way that we respond to the differences in each other. Only then can we all progress together in nationhood. ■

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# Strange and contradictory ways

## The involution of multiculturalism in Australia

PAOLO TOTARO

Would you believe it? We were moving towards a way of living that wasn't too bad, after all. The glue holding us together was the acceptance of our reciprocal diversity.

Forever scarred as a child by intolerance of diversity—fascism, and its most calamitous offspring, World War II; given by life the fortune to set up an institution to combat intolerance (the Ethnic Affairs Commission), I have been now invited to write about multiculturalism in these strange and contradictory times.

After completing this article, I met with staff of the Northern Sydney Area Health Service. One of them runs child-birth and child-rearing classes in Chinese. Another officer, an Australian-Armenian, teaches nurses who admit and discharge patients to assess people's capacity to cope in the English language when first confronted by teams of surgeons, and also on leaving the hospital. Three other staff members have written a book, *Improving Palliative Care in a Multicultural Environment* (1998), which takes into account final acts of respect for our cultural identity—the soul—when it is about to depart.

Compassion is still part of us and of our institutions all through our lives, I thought. While accepting differences, we also stress our common humanity: 'Someone born in Sicily and living with an incurable illness is indivisibly one patient' says the new book, starkly. It presents a profound idea that applies to every moment of our human condition.

It is compassion, the capacity to feel with each other, which is being killed in many of us now. The forces are the same, under different guises, as those that killed compassion in Italy of 1922 and in Germany of 1933.



**T**WENTY YEARS AGO, NSW Premier Neville Wran tabled in Parliament the result of a one-year research project by the Ethnic Affairs Commission: a 600-page volume called *Participation* (1978). It was a blueprint for reform in schools, courts, hospitals, offices, and it received widespread support.

The process was altogether new. A group of 13 women and men with 'woggy' accents, and including a token Scot, had been commissioned by the government to become a statutory body, the Ethnic Affairs Commission, and was given powers and resources to look into the affairs of the state as they affected the lives of immigrants—as it was grandly put. The commissioners, all but one former aliens, now citizens of Australia, were given trust and powers to participate in public decision-making.

The issue at stake was whether Australia's changing population was working well together. Specifically, whether the governing minorities—that is, government, public service, unions, political parties—were adapting themselves structurally to an increasingly complex community of taxpaying citizens—what was starting to be called a 'multicultural society'.

The Ethnic Affairs Commission of NSW (EAC) was eventually to be a prime mover, *un motore primo*, for the process of reform it had recommended, working in close co-operation with other new bodies the Wran government had set up: the Anti-Discrimination Board, the Wilenski Review into the NSW Administration, and special offices for Women and Aborigines. Links with unions, churches and the corporate world were also established. By emulation, similar commissions were set up in other states, with initiatives determined by the local political conditions. It is these differences that gave rise to diverse interpretations of multiculturalism.

**T**HE COMMISSION'S interpretation of multiculturalism was given in the opening words of *Participation*:

The Commission in this Report has attempted to look beyond the concept of multiculturalism seen only as a need to preserve the cultural heritage of Australians with a non-English speaking background. It sees as the fundamental issue the right of minority groups to achieve total participation in the Australian and New South Wales political and social systems.

Another inquiry, the so-called Galbally Inquiry, was commissioned by the Fraser Federal Government in 1977, shortly after the creation of the EAC. It was also to advise on how to improve the migrants' lot, but it followed a different principle. It suggested that multicultural Australia be maintained by a more provident application of welfare resources. This contrast extended to conceptions of multiculturalism, and in fact many of the otherwise good initiatives taken by Fraser (first and foremost the creation of SBS) operated on different premises from the start. The Galbally Inquiry regarded multiculturalism as a function of important but peripheral ethnic concerns, while for the Commission it was a determinant in the framing of central policy.

Multiculturalism, a complex, trans-disciplinary idea, was simplified by us in the Commission in order to communicate



it to as many people as possible. We saw it as a short-hand expression of the first goal of participatory democracies: *nobody should be excluded because of language, religion and other aspects of one's culture* from any of the community's opportunities. We did not really attempt to redefine multiculturalism beyond 'participation'. Definitions would not add to the essence of such a basic democratic ideal.

The alternative to multiculturalism was intolerance of diversity, which is the definition of fascism. Former Governor-General Sir Ninian Stephen expressed this with superior brevity in an address (1997): multiculturalism was the only intelligent way to address the reality of an ethnically diverse society. He added that if one needed a further definition, one was not ready to understand what it was all about. The same notion was expressed by the present Governor-General, Sir William Deane, in July this year.

For us, multiculturalism had to do with basic freedoms and with the right to be equally treated regardless of the culture one was born in, or had chosen. It was neither a point of arrival, nor of departure. It was but one moment in the tortuous passage towards a more civilised humanity, where a moral

code of compassion and inclusion would operate and inform the laws of the state. Sign-posting the past was the abolition of feudal states, slavery, ghettos, the empowerment of workers through unions, of women, of indigenous people, of children, and an awareness of the needs of all dispossessed.

Multiculturalism was a demographic reality. Over 45 per cent of all Australians were linked to recent immigration. Immigrants were mostly working class, and shared the concerns of other working-class Australians. Immigrants wanted, then as now, to share in our common language, as mastery of English is the key to succeeding in life and participating in society. Some immigrants just wanted to forget a past that included memories too horrific to hold on to, and they kept children unaware of both homeland language and memories. A few believed they were too old to integrate, and remained spectators. Many others wanted to give this beloved country more than their contribution through work: they wanted to pursue larger common goals, in politics, in unions, in managing corporations and the economy.

But for others there were barriers beyond those one reasonably expects in a competitive world. Participation was common sense to fair-go Australians. But the reality was not so easy. Most governing structures had few, if any, women, Aborigines or immigrants; the top echelons of the Public Service were a private-school, boys-only, club. The opposite of participation, 'exclusion', had been a recent reality of Australian Constitutional law.

Ten years ago, working in the Constitutional Commission with a group that included Tom Keneally and Peter Garrett, we showed how Aborigines had been expressly excluded from the Constitution. Section 51 (xxvi) provided that the Commonwealth Parliament should have no power to make laws for 'the Aboriginal race in any state'. Section 127 excluded Aborigines from the census, thereby excluding them from the 'people of the Commonwealth'. Section 127 was removed from the Constitution in 1967, only ten years before the creation of the Ethnic Affairs Commission. The words 'other than the Aboriginal race in any state' were removed also from section 51 (xxvi) in 1967. Section 25, permitting the states to exclude 'persons of any race' from voting and from being elected to Parliament, remains unaltered to this day.

State laws were replete with norms that excluded or allowed the exclusion of people.

The NSW Anti-Discrimination Board's first reports (released about the same time as *Participation*) tell the full story. But it was the behaviour of the political elites—those who chose candidates for elections, decided on electoral strategies, who recruited, promoted, and influenced voting—which caused the main blockage to participation. There can be no other explanation for the dearth of women, Aborigines and immigrants in parliaments and in the top decision-making jobs. But by the end of the '60s, things in Australia had started to change.

An awareness that there were increasing masses of non-traditional voters was seeping through. These people needed all the support other workers needed, but also a clear guarantee that the time of exclusion was over. But they *were* voters, and were clearly targetable with special messages and campaigns in marginal seats. This advantaged immigrants over Aborigines. Prime Minister John Howard never apologised to Aborigines for his attitude to them—first and foremost for rejecting, when in Opposition in 1988, the Labor proposal for a bipartisan notion to recognise the fallacy of *terra nullius*. But he apologised several times to Asian communities in 1995, for remarks he had made in 1988. Clearly Asians are much more visible and spread across electoral areas, than Aborigines.

**A** CRUCIAL ASPECT of the Ethnic Affairs Commission, expressed in the first paragraphs of *Participation*, was about making sure that immigrants' issues remained intrinsically connected to those of all citizens who shared in the Australian community. We wrote:

Above all, the Commission has related the right of minority groups to achieve total participation to people. It has set out to show the very real contribution made by immigrants to the well-being of the whole Australian community. It has tried to find solutions to their problems ... the problems they face in the places where they work; the difficulties they have in striving for better jobs or to gain promotion; the tragedy of unemployment, particularly among the young; the need to create equal opportunity and equal expectations in education for their children.

This paragraph anticipated the priorities that were to inform our work at the Commission: workplace conditions, continuing education to get out of alienating jobs and under-employment, and how to improve achievement at school. The issues

of the immigrants were the issues of the whole citizenry.

In the chapter on 'Law from an Ethnic Perspective', we examined—perhaps for the first time—the notion of citizenship in a multicultural state by affirming that:

All Australians are joined together by common recognition and acceptance of the authority vested in the organs of the Australian State under the prevailing legal and political orders. The same Australians, however, now differ greatly among themselves, in what it is fashionable to term their ethnic identity and character. This truth is of transcending importance for all aspects of the Commission's work ... We are familiar enough with what is implied in the single shared relation of all citizens to the Australian State. The implications of 'ethnic' or 'national' (or 'cultural') pluralism within this unity call for deeper understanding at the legislative level if the objectives underlying the Ethnic Affairs Commission Act, 1976 are to be fulfilled.

In his book, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (1992), the American historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr presented a different view and stated that:

Others may enjoy their ethnic neighbourhoods but see no conflict between foreign descent and American loyalty. Unlike the multiculturalists, they celebrate not only what is distinctive in their own backgrounds but what they hold in common with the rest of the population.

Of course, in Australia Schlesinger would be completely wrong. What unites people here is a willingness to prove a common allegiance to Australia by respecting the diversities within. If I felt free to speak from my sentimental Neapolitan heart, I would put it as allegiance to an Australia that is an accepting mother, not a narcissistic parent who only loves children who project a set image in the mirror. Multiculturalism is also a remedy against the narcissistic grandiosity of the nationalists.

**T**HE NOTION of participation was and is part of the Australian Labor Party's heritage, as it was for its European socialist and social-democrat counterparts. Inclusion is also a goal of the Liberals in the Locke and Hume tradition, as well as of the Agrarian Socialists, the antecedents of the Country/National Party.

As such, it was embraced by three Labor and two Conservative Coalition Premiers

of NSW, from 1977 to this day. And yet, Australia was, and still is, somewhat short of an ideal participatory democracy. The great majority of the citizens still play little direct part in government. And when John Howard came to power, he envisaged a country where there would be sport, not politics, on the front page of newspapers.

The school children who, on July 3 this year, quite sensibly and quite peacefully went out to protest against racism, 'because we are not yet of voting age', were met by police violence and the disapproval of many. For me, there is no age limit for passionately caring for our freedoms, which is quite distinct from voting age. Rosie, my 11-year-old grandchild, has asked to join other kids and protest against fascism. I will drive her to the meeting, with her parents' permission. It is all part of participating in a civil society.

When we wrote *Participation*, the term 'civil society' was not yet used to indicate that 'sphere of social interaction, not directly controlled by government, in which citizens engage with others and discuss matters of general concern' (Hindess 1993). But the ethnic groups had by the end of the '70s formed civil space where they felt comfortable. And they were becoming increasingly visible in the *politeia* through coalitions such as the Ethnic Community Councils. There was also a growing awareness of the media and how to gain access to it.

There weren't as yet any 'foreign' accents on radio and TV. I may in fact have been the first and only non-comic (hopefully) TV presenter with a really woggy accent, as the host of *Face the Press*, from 1991 to 1993 on SBS. And only rarely did one find—in those classic avenues for lay persons' direct participation in public dialogue, that are the Letters to the Editor—names that were not Jones or O'Brien. I must say at this point, that friends who migrated from the UK in those years assure me they also had some tough times at school and at work.

Yet, most immigrants were optimistic, because forms of oppression they had known elsewhere—deprivation of free speech, economic slavery, torture—seemed alien concepts here. And in Australia you did not die of starvation, education was free and accessible, people were compassionate and welcoming, and immigrants were allowed, indeed at times encouraged, to try and pull down barriers.

**I**N SEVERAL DOCUMENTS written for the federal government from 1977 onwards, an ideology of multiculturalism came to be



assembled. It somewhat obscured the simple notion of acceptance of diversity. It did give useful sociological insights to the national goal of reciprocal acceptance. But it became a dogma which came to be pitted against other, less benign, dogmas.

Ideologies are ways of rationalising politics in terms of abstract ideas. They are okay for a while, but then become doctrine, preconceived remedies, rather than the best solution for a problem at a given time,

not be helped to change if we adopt dogmatic stances relating to social cohesion, etc. ... In my adolescent days in post-fascist Italy, I had been taught that in the free and democratic society which we were at the time trying to build from the ruins left by the fascists, there was no absolute common ideal for all persons.

You still have to account for the dropouts, for the sidelines, the spectators,

the ideology to be a full member? If this is the reaction I have, what will it be for a person who doesn't understand the foundations of acceptance of diversity—and the jargon used in the documents? It seemed that the intellectuals commissioned by the government to write those policy papers were moving not at one with the population, but sideways, pushing it in directions the population did not or could not accept or understand.



supported by strong ethics. The obsession, possibly borrowed from American academic traditions, to reify ideas—in this case multiculturalism—in set definitions, rules and boundaries, is and was alien to me.

In an article in *Meanjin* in 1983, I wrote of an authoritarian, dogmatic streak in the notion that 'the process of multiculturalism in Australia ... can be achieved only through a commitment to certain ideals by all members of society'. I wanted to stress the difference of that approach from that of the Ethnic Affairs Commission. I further said that:

... there is a wide discrepancy between the utopian world of multiculturalism and the reality of the daily life. This reality will

in a participatory democracy. They are and will remain a minority. There is no need to punish them. And the doors should always remain open for them to join the rest.

Multiculturalism as defined in various Commonwealth publications, all well-meaning, all well-crafted, leave me with an ambivalent feeling. I have to test my character to see if I can put a tick against boxes in a set questionnaire. Am I a person who can tick 'fair go' among his qualities? Probably not. And anyway, how can I accept 'fair go' as a national emblem in the land of family trusts and of legalised tax evasion; where wealth was created on the premise of dispossession? So, why would I want to join the club called Multicultural Australia if I am without all attributes prescribed by

Yet, the policy of multiculturalism is supported by me, because it contains the profound message that diversity is an attribute of human nature, and has to be accepted and valued. I hope that future versions of the Commonwealth policy will be simpler and will keep in mind the need to be understood, if not accepted, by as many people as possible.

Gramsci, in his 'Essay on Intellectuals', wrote that for intellectuals to do their job at the service of others who have other skills (or maybe who are unskilled), they must be able to connect their knowledge to the 'feeling' which exists at a given time among the wider masses. If they cannot do this, they are ineffective, and form a caste. Do these words, which still resonate as quite

correct in my spirit, sound rhetorical in today's Australia?

Maybe Barry Jones, with his extraordinary insular definition of the 'seventeen' public intellectuals, with a complete exclusion of Aborigines, should take a leaf from Gramsci's Essay. And so should the self-appointed others who talk about public and non-public intellectuals. To me, Australia's multiculturalism is defined by school children who accept each other's cultural peculiarities in the school yard.

And who is an intellectual is now defined by the Aboriginal leaders, public intellectuals never pompous, never self-aware, and who always say what they mean. And a public intellectual at the time of One Nation is any person who can use reason against intolerance of diversity, who has learned the lessons of Italy of 1922 and Germany of 1933, and who will stand up with her ideas and be publicly counted.

**H**OW DO YOU broadcast the message that we know no civilised alternative to acceptance of diversity, and have it reach not only Paddington and Toorak in the large cities, but Ipswich and Geraldton as well? It is difficult, and is still the great dilemma of the Ethnic Affairs Commission.

The audiences' disposition varies in relation to the environment, to life experiences, to levels and type of education, to personality, and so on. What acceptance of diversity offers is not as easy to understand as the simple solutions of the populists: 'Keep them out. Close the borders. Make them become like us.'

The Minister for Immigration last year asked the Multicultural Advisory Council how cultural diversity could become a unifying force for Australia. The ensuing discussion paper, 'Multiculturalism: The Way Ahead', offers not one word of comment on John Howard's back-peddalling. One feels sorry for the writers, but these sort of papers have a worth if you perceive they are brave and push towards new understandings. Reading the paper added to my puzzlement at our current reality. We have a Prime Minister who avoids the 'm' word in public pronouncements, harangues Aboriginal leaders who offer their hand in friendship, dismantles multicultural structures, apologises to Asians, gives support to One Nation—and at the same time has a Minister of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and a Multicultural Advisory Council. Is the Prime Minister in denial? He worries

about Hanson, and never pronounces her name. Dislikes multiculturalism, and expunges the word from his lexicon.

President Clinton, in a recent major speech on immigration, eulogised cultural differences, but never used the word multiculturalism. Expect more of the same in Oz.

Of course, contradictions are everywhere. There are so many ways for societies to deal with the diversity within. In a scale that goes from genocide and diasporas to enshrining diversity in constitutional law, it is now debatable as to what level of acceptance Australia is headed towards. Racism belongs to our most primitive and unpredictable sides, easy to unleash—and



from there anything goes. The problem is how to identify racists, because, as a rule, they say they are not.

Laki Jayasuriya made the point that central to the 'new racism' which has emerged after World War II, is that exclusion is no longer justified in terms of 'race', but on such grounds as desirable cultural characteristics for social acceptability. 'Difference' is no longer constructed in terms of biologically determined group differences, but by culture and ethnicity. And more insidiously, added Professor Jayasuriya, these cultural differences are seen to contribute to a range of undesirable social behaviours and they are all the more important when they overlap with visible physical differences, such as skin colour or eye shape.

The current backlash against multiculturalism in the USA is based on the allegation that current immigration trends will ruin America's patriotism and distort its ethnic and cultural makeup. P. Brimelow, in *Alien Nation* (1995), notes that immigrants bring with them their own values and are unlikely to assimilate. Part of the difficulty is that not enough European immigrants are able to come back to the USA to 'shift the ethnic balance back'. 'Since the population of America has been predominantly English or white', added Brimelow, 'allowing too many people from Third World countries across the borders

will ruin America's foundation. By the year 2050, it is expected that white people will no longer be the majority.'

Does it sound familiar?

Yet perseverance has paid dividends. Anti-discrimination laws and affirmative practices are now in place. There seem to be plenty of Ng and Papadopoulos and not only among the cleaners. There is a palpable effort to be compassionate and forthcoming in schools, TAFE, universities, hospitals, courts, media, political parties. The Ethnic Affairs Commission is still there, a survivor of the recent upheavals, if with somewhat different priorities.

But monitoring to what extent the 'male clubs' have really changed, and how an unbalanced democracy has been rebalanced, requires an ever watchful eye—never so pressingly as at the current time. The issue is to see why there are still groups that don't quite make it to the top as groups, and what are the plausible reasons. One of the top priorities of the *Participation* report was to measure achievement of students

at school. We know that there are still huge disparities in literacy, retention rates and achievement, between young people in certain groups where class and ethnicity intersect, and the rest. But what we know about these young people when they leave school and go looking for a job is sketchy. We need to know more and quickly understand what to do. The creation of ethnic underclasses is certainly linked primarily to these factors.

Until recently, these issues were dealt with sensitively, as the Ethnic Affairs Commission still does, with a compassionate eye to the feelings of those exposed as members of groups with very high unemployment, underachievers in a competitive society. The collapse of that form of reciprocal kindness called 'political correctness', that the recently unleashed dark forces are trying emphatically to kill, ensures these issues are in for treatment à la Paul Sheehan.

Acceptance of diversity is now something for auction at election time. You can vote for a party that supports the idea that diversity is bad. What would then happen in the unlikely event they won office? Eliminate diversity? And how do you deal with the people who carry it in their genes? The question is rhetorical in Australia, yet the possible answers are chilling. Also chilling is the idea of democratic parties that have to do deals, even form coalitions, with fascism.



Our three main parties are each a coalition of people with quite diverse beliefs but with similar core values. They offer different political choices consonant with a civilised society, but they agree that intolerance of diversity is a value outside the realm of the ethically possible. As soon as the Prime Minister signalled tacit support for what Ms Hanson had said on Aborigines and Asians, profound internal dissension was created. In another country, where intolerance of diversity had broader emotional overtones, you would have seen crowds in the streets and the Prime Minister ousted. It happened in Italy to Scelba, a Christian Democrat who allied himself to a neo-fascist party. If I were a member of the great Liberal Party of Australia, I could have not stood by waiting for the PM to make his mind up about One Nation at the Queensland elections. I would have voted against him.

**P**ARTICIPATION MEANS also that the government has to give citizens the wherewithal to participate. This has been done in the last 20 years but two, both in the federal and state spheres, with generosity of heart and good management practices.

But important structures supporting multiculturalism have been destroyed at the federal level in the last two years. At the same time, retrograde steps such as the

closure of the CES and of large parts of the Adult Migrant English Service (presented as privatisation), and the trend to privatise important parts of TAFE, a crucial player in upgrading immigrants' skills (in states other than NSW), are having the effect of shifting taxpayers' dollars on to entrepreneurs, making services costly and less accessible. People become trapped in underemployment if they are unable to afford the upgrading of their own skills.

Of the many other benefits we would lose if the government officially declared multiculturalism obsolete, some are linked to our economic future. There are, for example, 130,000 international students today in Australia. Knowledge that Australia values multiculturalism as acceptance of diversity is an important guarantee for their well-being while in this country. The continuing internationalisation of higher and vocational education requires, according to Australia's Vice-Chancellors, environments which keep on being safe and friendly and that care for international students' cultural needs. Our publicly funded institutes of learning and research are basing their planning on these goals, because most Australians don't want to charge full fees to Australian students to pay for the increasing gap between what is needed and what can be afforded. And this is just for starters.

As a way of concluding this article I have thought of five benefits lost if we were to lose multiculturalism as a guiding policy:

- A sense of being relaxed and safe, the very asset John Howard extolled in coming to power.
- Mutual compassion and absence of fear and loathing when we meet in our streets, at work, in the schools, at play.
- A sense of being internationally more secure, by not projecting an aggressive, stand-offish attitude.
- A sense of being civilised, of not being back in an age when a man was wolf to another man, and where a different scent was a reason to attack.
- A sense of shared knowledge, passion or just fun with other people, on this continent, across this whole world, and of not being insulated in a buttressed fortress where the only rules are 'attack' or 'defend'.

The Ethnic Affairs Commission of NSW is still there—with the SBS, the only major survivor of the multicultural initiatives and experiments of the Whitlam, Fraser and Wran years in the public sector. And I feel a bit stronger in my dearest hope that we and our children may be spared what happened in Italy of 1922 and Germany of 1933. ■

**Paolo Totaro AM** was foundation Chairman of the Ethnic Affairs Commission, NSW, 1977–1989.

# Why women invented and must reinvent, the idea of a welfare state

MARILYN LAKE

**T**HE MEDIA has newly discovered an age-old social problem: the difficulty experienced by women attempting to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable—the onerous burden of mothering and domestic work on the one hand and the imperatives of paid work in the labour market, on the other. Women, it appears, are finding it all too difficult.

Thus did 'Sunday Life', the lifestyle supplement of the *Sunday Age* (19 July 1998) feature an article entitled 'Goodbye Supermum', which purported to tell us 'why women don't want it all anymore'. The

author found in her subject 'a tale of our times', a story of modern women exhausted by too much work and too many responsibilities, working mothers overwhelmed by the demands of children, relationships, domestic duties, professional commitments, social and financial obligations. Women were unhappy, stressed, dismayed and barely coping. No longer interested in having it all, these women were resigning from their jobs, or going part-time, working from home, bringing in a nanny or contracting out the cooking, gardening and cleaning.

Then there was the exemplary story of Penny Hughes, ex-president of Coca-Cola UK, a *Sunday Times* (UK) feature reprinted in *The Australian* (29 July 1998). Her decision to become a full-time mother had, we were told, infuriated English feminists now forced to come to terms with the death of Superwoman as an ideal. In fact, the story describes not the life of a born-again full-time mother, but one who has established an agreeable work/home balance, a life commensurate with being super-rich, if not Superwoman. Penny Hughes, who confessed her friends were

'green with envy', did seem to be able to afford to have it all:

Today she has what she calls a portfolio career, earning her more than £100,000 (\$280,000 dollars) a year for about 10 days' work a month ... This work is supplemented by lecturing the likes of Halifax, British Airways, M&S and Shell on subjects dear to her heart, including global branding and cutting edge management. 'The variety and quality of what I do now astonishes me,' she says. 'The nanny comes in for two and a half days a week and my husband works from home, too, so I am very flexible.'

For those with 'portfolio careers', a life at once globalised and privatised can be sweet indeed. For the majority, the contradictions are taking their toll, and growing numbers of Australian women and children live in poverty. The recent United Nations Human Development Report on world living standards showed that the gap between the rich and the poor in Australia is the second highest in the world and is widening; whereas the top 20 per cent of earners in Australia take home almost half the income, half of Australia's working couples earn a combined income of less than \$38,000. Australia ranked only ninth in the world in terms of gender equality and half the children of single parents, 90 per cent of whom are women, live below the poverty line.

Access to secure, well-paid employment is the precondition for material well-being, but this has always been difficult for most women to come by, and the story of defeated women battlers is, in fact, a much older one than the current media attention suggests. Over 100 years ago, labour journalist William Lane, contemplating the long hours of seamstresses in Sydney, was moved in his 1892 novel, *A Workingman's Paradise*, to describe women as 'the weary sex', made old before their time by the 'struggling toil that never ceases nor stays'. In the 1990s, as in the 1890s, women are forced to work much longer hours than men as they attempt to combine paid work with domestic responsibilities.

What is noticeable in the 1990s, however, is that the subjects of these reports on female exhaustion are now middle or upper class, not usually working-class women, and they tend to conceptualise their dilemma in personal, not political terms. Accordingly, the solutions to their difficulties invariably involve private accommodations to the market and the workplace, rather than political proposals

for collective social and economic change—the hiring of a nanny, rather than campaigns for expanded and improved child care centres. In the spirit of our privatising times, the contradictions in women's lives that once led to political mobilisations tend now to lead to an emphasis on individuals exercising freedom of choice within the market. But in a grossly unequal society such as our own, choice is really the privilege of the few.

But there are signs of a new awakening, as even the Labor party has begun talking again about the necessity of building up 'social infrastructure', attending to the social provision of health and education and expanded services for the aged and the young. And there is evidence that it is women who are driving this renewed commitment, reconnecting with a long political tradition that linked the welfare of women to the concept of a welfare state, a feminist tradition of politics that called for government intervention to secure the freedom and well-being of women and children and thus of the whole society. Interestingly, recent opinion polls suggest that women are less likely than men to support the trade-off between private rewards and social services offered by the Liberal Party's GST.

Ever since they gained the vote, Australian women have looked to the state to provide the conditions that would enable people to attend to their duties of care without forgoing the economic independence due to them as citizens. They demanded that the polity be imbued with the values of compassion and justice, rather than acquisitiveness and greed. They argued that the state existed to promote human welfare, that that was its very *raison d'être*. A welfare state meant one that recognised the implications of human interdependence and mutual obligation, that would not require its citizens to choose between self and others, between their right to independence and their responsibilities to those dependent on them. Feminists developed different ideas over the past several decades about how that human welfare could be best secured, but what united them all was the desire to bring into being a woman-friendly Commonwealth, the sort of society, as Bessie Rischbieth, president of the Australian Federation of Women Voters put it in 1924, that women everywhere dreamed of.

Feminists argued that, as citizens in a modern democratic polity, women, like men, had a right to the dignity of economic independence, that their family

responsibilities should not entail domestic servitude. They were moved by women's stories of the degradation of poverty and the humiliations of dependence. Recognising that the world of paid work was organised in such a way as to make it incompatible with the daily work of family care, feminists devised different strategies to change the world, so that everyone, men and women, might better combine their diverse responsibilities and enjoy their newly won freedoms as citizens. To secure the rights of maternal citizens to economic independence, feminists in the 1920s invented the idea of a welfare state as a state whose ethical responsibility for human welfare would extend to securing the freedom and economic independence of women.

**T**HE VIEW THAT it was women's political mission to establish a welfare state was clearly expressed by Ada Bromham, feminist candidate in the electorate of Claremont in the 1921 Western Australian election (the same election in which Edith Cowan, as an endorsed Nationalist candidate, became the first Australian woman to win a seat in parliament). In her opening campaign speech, Bromham told the 700 electors gathered in the Princess Theatre:

There were fundamental reasons why a woman was particularly fitted to fill a position in the legislature. A man government was a government of all the people in the interests of men, not because men intended it to be so, but because from generation to generation man had been trained commercially and it was his nature to put business first and human welfare second. Women put human welfare first and business second. (Applause.) Man was the creator. He thought and acted in terms of the wealth he created. Woman thought and acted in terms of the human beings she brought forth and cared for. (Applause.) So the community must have the voice of both men and women to make the balance true.

During the 1920s, Bromham joined other women activists in the labour movement and the non-party feminist organisations in arguing the case for motherhood endowment, for the state provision of an income which would enable mothers to attend to their time-consuming and important work of raising a family without forgoing their economic independence. It was a campaign driven by working-class women, who knew well the cost of the double burden of paid and unpaid work, the exhaustion, ill-health and breakdown of the class that labour



organiser Muriel Heagney referred to as 'the working mothers of Australia'.

The creation of a welfare state was defined as the main goal of post-suffrage feminist politics. Thus argued Millicent Preston Stanley (campaigning in New South Wales in 1925 in the election in which she would become the first female candidate to win a seat in parliament in that state): 'men's training tends to direct their interest to business ... Women's training tends to direct their interest to Social Welfare. To take care of Social Welfare women must be in

One Job'. Moved by the plight of women who were 'struggling to do the impossible—that is to rear their children decently and at the same time take their places in the industrial field as the breadwinners', she argued that if a woman chose motherhood 'she should be as economically free, as little dependent upon others as the well-paid woman who has climbed to the top of the ladder in the scholastic, commercial, literary or any other arena of her own choosing'. In a properly organised social system that attended to women's and

enquire into the feasibility of motherhood and childhood endowment, and their presumption led to this exchange between feminist witness Irene Maud Longman and a pursed-lipped Royal Commissioner, who asked:

Your theory is that the State should pay the wife for services rendered to the State?

Yes, we say that her services to the State are as great as those of the men, and therefore, that those services should be paid for as an independent economic unit.



Sydney street art: Ben Chifley in a reflective context.

parliament'. And four years later, the newly formed United Associations of Women explained the difference women's political power would make to national life in these terms: 'Woman's point of view is not the same as man's. Her sense of values is different, she places a greater value on human life, human welfare, health and morals.'

A welfare state would protect mothers and children even as it secured their freedom from a demeaning dependence on men. The idea that this was Australia's historic destiny was evident in the declaration by labour organiser, Lilian Locke Burns, that 'a properly organised social system' would be organised around the principle 'One Woman

children's welfare, women wouldn't have to choose between mothering and economic independence; mothers, like workers, were rights-bearing political subjects and like workers, they had a right to a living wage.

The campaign for motherhood endowment was a popular one among women, who united across classes and parties to urge the introduction of this revolutionary reform—revolutionary because in ending the dependence of the mother as wife on her husband it challenged men's conjugal rights to women's sexual and domestic services. Women put their case to a Royal Commission on Childhood Endowment and Family Allowances, appointed in 1927, to

Women could live apart from their husbands? ... That is an alteration of the existing conditions.

Yes. It is revolutionary, and that is what we wish.

Because the proposal of motherhood endowment undermined the rationale for men's higher breadwinner's wage, paid to all men regardless of whether they actually had dependants, the male opposition was strident. Men depended on women's dependence; they needed women to keep house for them and they refused to countenance the idea that single men were receiving the breadwinner's wage on false

pretences. The Royal Commission, in both its Minority and Majority Reports, took men's side, opposing motherhood endowment as driving a wedge between husband and wife, threatening a revolution in the family. The champions of women's independence would need to devise new strategies; they would abandon the politics of difference focused on the rights of the mother, seeking to encourage women to emulate the condition of men as workers. In the 1930s Depression, faced with escalating attacks on women's employment, feminists re-focused their energies on establishing women's right to work and the justice of equal pay. 'Women's right to work', wrote Muriel Heagney in her book, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, 'rests not on the number of her dependants, nor on the fact that she does or does not compete with men, but in the absolute right of a free human being, a taxpayer and a voter, to economic independence.'

**W**ORLD WAR II saw the widespread recruitment of women into paid work, thousands going into men's jobs in which they received higher rates of pay. The opening of new child care centres, as the nurseries came to be called, also encouraged women with young children to enter the workforce and shaped the new version of the welfare state as elaborated in the Australian Women's Charter in 1943, drawn up at a conference of representatives of 90 women's organisations. In this document, feminists set out at great length the conditions necessary to enable women (all women) to achieve equality in the post-war era. Central to this vision was the belief that 'economic independence develops character and a greater sense of responsibility, whereas dependent economic status denies liberty, opportunity and justice to the individual and is detrimental to both partners in the marriage'. To enable all women to enjoy economic independence, in or out of marriage, and to free mothers and homemakers from household drudgery, the Charter restated the earlier feminist proposal that mothers be remunerated by an endowment from the state and recommended, in addition, the establishment of Community Centres with public libraries, auditoriums, playgrounds, nursery schools, community kitchens, community laundries and meeting rooms. The Charter further recommended that the federal

government put in place a national scheme for promoting the welfare of children in conjunction with establishing a national network of child care centres.

Not until the 1970s, however, with the election of the reforming Whitlam Government, did this dream of a welfare state for women—which combined federal funding for community-based child care centres with the introduction of the supporting mother's benefit, greater access to higher education with the abolition of University fees and equal pay and opportunity in the workplace—begin to be realised. But when a new generation of working mothers began to experience the double burden of work made possible by the expansion of low-cost quality child care, feminists once again saw the importance of reducing women's working hours, but rather than arguing for an income



for the special work of mothering (although there was a 'wages for housewives' campaign) they came to place new emphasis on the need for men and women to share paid and unpaid work, thus calling for a reduction in standard working hours for all. This new vision of a welfare state, elaborated by feminists in the 1970s and 1980s, thus demanded the reorganisation of work, the regulation of working time as well as the expansion of community services.

**I**N THE 1970s, feminists pointed out that women would never be equal while work was organised on men's terms; and women could never work on men's terms because what distinguished men's relationship to work was their absenteeism from domestic responsibility. The inequality between men and women arose from their different relationships to working time, in particular the unequal distribution of paid and unpaid labour. Recognising that men's superior labour market position and earnings resulted from their absence from domestic life, feminists in England drew up an 'alternative economic strategy' based on a maximum 30-hour week, restrictions on overtime and the availability of community-based child care financed by the state in

recognition of government responsibility for human welfare. Similar ideas were advocated in Australia in the 1980s, but with little effect.

By the 1990s, with economic rationalism triumphant in Australia, the worker as utility-maximising individual was reinstated as the model in individual contracts and enterprise agreements that allegedly promoted flexibility, while all the time putting intense pressure to perform on individual workers fearful of losing jobs. In this context, the post-feminist working woman, like her male counterpart, made ostensibly private choices, seeking individual solutions to the intensifying contradictions of work and family.

Existing inequalities between men and women were institutionalised as the division between part-time and full-time workers. Part-time work was represented as women's own 'choice' even as the vast majority of men continued to work full-time and standard working hours rose for everybody. Currently, 95 per cent of men with young children are in the workforce, in jobs which, recent studies emphasise, demand an ever greater commitment of time. In the finance sector, for instance, between the mid-'80s and the mid-'90s there had been a 38 per cent increase in men working between 50 and 59 hours and a 19 per cent rise in men working more than 60 hours. Who is caring for their children and aged parents, planning the birthday party, picking up the prescription, popping in to check on the old lady next door, making the dentist appointment and staying home for the plumber?

The recognition that the very structure of work, its rhythms and ruling assumptions, entrenches men's power at women's expense has, it seems, been all but forgotten in these privatising times, yet it is surely still the case, as Catherine Mackinnon observed, that most jobs assume that the best applicant, gender neutral, will be someone who is not the primary caretaker of a preschool child. As Anne Phillips has pointed out with regard to active citizenship, 'the very notion of the active citizen presumes someone else is taking care of the children and doing the necessary maintenance of everyday life'. Meanwhile, women's already subordinate position in the economy has been exacerbated by the rolling back of the welfare state, because the baby, if not the buck, stops with them.



THE LIBERAL GOVERNMENT'S cuts of \$820 million to child care services have pushed the cost so high (estimated now to be around \$8000 a year per child) as to prevent thousands of women from earning even a small income of their own. A survey conducted by the National Association of Community Based Children's Services in late 1997 revealed many centres had closed, fees in others had risen and the number of staff declined, 4000 families had withdrawn children from child care, with mothers either leaving the workforce or resorting to informal, often poor quality casual care. 'In a market-driven economy', the report concluded, 'where the cost of care is pushed beyond the reach of working families, the only solution for non-profit services is to reduce costs and ultimately the quality of care if they are to remain affordable'. An inquiry by the Senate Community Affairs References Committee attracted hundreds of submissions from women forced out of the workforce, having to return to sole-parent benefits or deferring university courses. In April 1998, the government announced that operating subsidies were to be withdrawn from before- and after-school care, even though 40 per cent of women not in the workforce, but who want to be, cite lack of child care as their main obstacle.

The hope that men would voluntarily share the care has proved unrealistic: in his new book, *Inequalities in Marriage*, Ken Dempsey provides clear evidence that men's participation in domestic work and the care of children has not changed significantly during the past 20 years. A survey in the mid-1990s showed that women who were employed full-time and who had a partner and dependants spent on average over twice as many hours per week (36 hours) on unpaid domestic tasks as men in the same circumstances (14 hours). And although a number of high-profile workplaces such as AMP have won awards for providing more family-friendly working conditions, the majority of employees in Australia suffer diminished award conditions, fewer leave entitlements and insecurity of employment. As the main providers of care, it is women who more than ever need a welfare state to assist them in their labour-intensive work. Few enjoy the 'portfolio careers' that pay for private nannies, and without state regulation and industrial awards, the wages and conditions of child care workers, formal and informal, will inexorably decline. In other words, collective provision and regulation are necessary not just to secure a just distribution of labour and reward

between men and women, but between women of different classes. The privatising of choice, like the privatising of care, is exacerbating old inequalities and producing new ones that need to be addressed by a revitalised feminist politics in a revitalised public domain.

MEN'S SUPERIOR labour market position and income levels rest on the fact that women—the other sex—have traditionally borne the burden of caring for home and family. A revitalised welfare state could create conditions for men and women to participate equally in domestic work as well as in paid employment. A new welfare state would combine statutory regulation of working hours, instituting a 30-hour week and abolishing the distinction between part-time and full-time work. There would be firm restrictions on overtime and work would be more equitably distributed between the employed and unemployed. Studies tell us that mothers want to work shorter hours, but don't we all? Fathers, sons and brothers need to be assisted by the state to fulfil their social obligation to share the care.

Fifty years ago, Simone de Beauvoir, in her examination of women's position in *The Second Sex*, observed that representation of the world, like the world itself, was the work of men. Thus, the fact of being a man was no peculiarity. A man was in the right in being a man; it was women who were in the wrong. Commentaries on working mothers still represent them as being in the wrong—stressed, exhausted, unable to cope—and feminists in the wrong for daring to suggest that women, like men, might 'have it all'. Critics of feminists are fond of saying that feminism has gone too far, but the current plight of overworked women, the poverty of single mothers, poorly paid families and their children, and media representations of women's general 'failure to cope' seem to me to point to the limits, rather than the excesses, of feminist achievements to date. To win justice for the many, rather than portfolio careers for the few, feminists must look to the task of reinventing a welfare state that would rectify the unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work, that would rescue women from their age-old condition as the weary sex.

We need to put on the political agenda the right to care, establishing both the right to be cared for and the right to care for others, without the care providers having to forgo remuneration and the rewards of participation in the workforce and civil

society. Paid work would be organised around a legal entitlement to care which will increasingly be invoked in terms of workers' obligations to older people, rather than children.

Australia might follow the lead of the European Employment Strategy, as agreed by the meeting of the Belfast Informal Council of Equality Ministers in May this year, which concluded:

Responsibility for the care of dependent persons still constitutes an obstacle to the full participation and advancement of women in the labour market throughout Europe. There is a gender imbalance in the entire approach to caring, with the persistence of the assumption that care is the responsibility of women.

Surveys showed that, in Europe as in Australia, most informal unpaid care was actually provided by women and it was almost exclusively women who took time off to care for dependants. The subsequent report on the different provisions for care among member states of the European Union pointed to the progress in some countries in legislating, particularly for children's right to services or benefits: in Sweden and Germany children over three are entitled in their own right to a place in a day-care centre. In Finland, if there is no available place for their child in a day-care centre, the parents are entitled to compensation. In general, government support for combining work and care in Europe falls into three categories:

- measures enabling workers to redistribute some of their time from the workplace to the home while retaining an employment contract (time off work);
- state financing, subsidising and regulation of care services to redistribute some care tasks from the home to the public sphere (services); and
- state financing and regulation of monetary benefits, including specific payments during leave, social security, social assistance and tax allowances or deductions (monetary benefits/tax rebates).

Together, these sorts of measures point to the desirable shape of a new welfare state, a woman- and man-friendly state in which, as Mary O'Brien fantasised in *The Politics of Reproduction* many years ago now, people might be producers in the morning, child-carers in the afternoon, and then with time to spare, critical critics in the evening. ■

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# Insider, outsider

ADRIAN CHAN

Australian society, as observed from the perspective of this inside-outsider, seems to be emerging into the light at the end of a long dark tunnel. Nevertheless, I have forebodings, for the recalcitrant forces will not relinquish their hold willingly. Indeed, 1998 seems to be moving towards a watershed: will we continue into the light of a new chiliarad or return to a dark tradition? I am optimistic because I choose the innocent faith that the people will triumph, and that the proclivity to exploit others is not nature but nurture. The alternative, barbarism, is unbearable.

## *An Australian tradition: the background.*

ON 1 APRIL 1998, the full bench of the High Court of Australia handed down a 5 to 1 majority decision reaffirming the power of the Australian Government to enact laws that discriminate against any 'racial' group. The seventh judge absented himself after he was reminded that, as a barrister, he had previously given paid advice against the appellants, the Aboriginal group, in their appeal against the Federal Government's Hindmarsh Island Bridge Act. The minority of one was Mr Justice Michael Kirby. From the perspective of history, the majority decision was not a surprise but a reaffirmation of a myth of Australianness. Nonetheless, it should raise serious concerns, especially to those versed in anthropology, biology, history, philosophy and politics. Indeed, to all who are concerned with the future of civil and civilised society in Australia.

While High Court decisions are characteristically based on the interpretation of the Constitution by the judges—and we have no reason to doubt the judges' knowledge of the Constitution—we do well to remember that the Australian Constitution was derived from an Act of the British parliament and expresses the values of the late 19th century. The 1 April 1998 decision of the High Court reaffirmed one of those 19th-century values, a value which has now been rejected by modern scholarship in anthropology and biology. While the decision reaffirmed the power of the Australian Government to make laws

that discriminate against any 'racial' group in Australia, no civilised person or nation today would try to order humanity into races, because 'race' is now acknowledged as an unscientific way to classify the world's population. Furthermore, the use of the term has been rejected by the United Nations Organisation (UNO). On the other hand, historians among us would readily agree that at the time of the founding of Australia and the framing of the Australian Constitution, racism was the emotional glue that bonded the disparate Australian colonies. It was also considered at the time a valid way to classify humanity. This led to the legislation for a White Australia Policy at the first session of the new national parliament and Prime Minister Billy Hughes' staunch defence, at the Versailles Peace Conference (1919–20), of a White Australia Policy as a way of maintaining Australia's industrial conditions.

To explain the inadequacy of race as a classifier of humanity would need another paper. Sufficient for this purpose is the fact that if we take any of the factors commonly used to categorise people into different racial groups, the variations of that factor *within* each 'race' is greater than the variations between the different 'races'. Yet even today there are people who still labour to resuscitate the cadaver of 'race' to categorise in a meaningless way, just as there are some who still argue for a flat earth.

Nevertheless, this categorisation became a way to define being Australian which led to the White Australia Policy. It was meant to exclude the Asians, mainly

Chinese, but also other non-white peoples, and its proponents straddled social classes. Space constrains me to select but a few pertinent illustrative cases. Late last century, when the labour movement began in different colonies, the workers in Victoria, rather than protect the exploited Chinese workers slaving in the sweat-shops of furniture manufacture, denied them the protection of their union and barred the Chinese from the furniture trade. In Queensland, the Chinese were also excluded from the newly formed Australian Workers Union as its founders sought refuge in patriotism by denying Australianness to the Chinese workers. These xenophobic actions were crowned by the new federal parliament in 1901 when one of its first acts was to legislate for the White Australia Policy. Before that, Britain had denied the colonial governments the right to such legislation because India was part of the British Empire and no part of the British Empire could legislate to exclude British subjects from other parts of the Empire.

At that time, the behaviour of settlers and governments was all too often heinous, denying even the human and legal status of Indigenous people by the invention of the fig leaf of *terra nullius*. This was an act of historical revisionism, for Arthur Phillip had found the Indigenous to be manly—hence the Sydney suburb so named. The invention of *terra nullius* dehumanised the Indigenous into the 'missing link', objects of 'scientific curiosity', decapitating them and exhibiting their heads back Home in England. Until the 1967 referendum, the



Indigenous people were effectively not even counted as part of the humanity that inhabited Australia.

*Impacts: international, national and personal.*

**B**ILLY HUGHES' position had economic consequences for the nation and brought trauma to those affected by it, certainly to those of Chinese descent. That year, after the death of his father, my grandfather chose 'civilisation' and took his young family away from the land of their birth to Hong Kong, a land where the people spoke a language foreign to his young family. The emigration of the Chan family marked an exodus of Chinese-Australians, for within 20 years fewer than 10,000 remained in Australia. Many of these émigrés were major entrepreneurs and flourished after being forced back to the land of their forebears, while some went to the Pacific islands, especially Fiji. In Hong Kong, émigrés established modern banking, manufacturing, and department store retailing, effectively contributing to the industrialisation and modernisation of that colony. Some even went as far afield as Shanghai and did likewise. One of the largest department stores in China, on Shanghai's Nanjing Road, was founded by Australian émigrés. Had they been allowed to stay in Australia, their entrepreneurial skills and connections would have been great assets, creating Asian and Pacific dimensions to the Australian economy, and enhancing Australia's economic profile in Asia and the Pacific. Instead, Australia was rejected by both Asia and Europe: in the last three years, Australia has twice been denied membership of ASEM, Asia-Europe Meeting.

The bitterness of their experience of racism in Australia, such as the denial to engage in business other than the most menial, led to their exodus and was indelible. Those in my father's generation, including most in my family, shunned Australia to their dying days. Yet, though these expatriates succeeded professionally and some even financially, they felt displaced in a colonial environment, and the next generation—my generation—was destined to 're-migrate'. This expectation was reinforced by the revolution in China. As some members of the Chan Clan were in Sydney, my family skipped a generation and returned to Australia. Most are engaged in the civilising business. Yet failure to behave in a way perceived as Chinese has led many of these 'displaced' persons, myself

included, to conclude that we are tolerated but not accepted. Behaving like a Chinese has always been a problem to those émigrés who never knew a Chinese homeland. They had tried to be Australians but were rejected and forced to emigrate. Seeking to regain an earlier identity, they found themselves, disagreeably again, in a British colony in Hong Kong.

I am reminded of John Howard's view, in 1988, about the problem of Asianness, and the oneness of Australia. Of course, if Asians achieved renown, they became *Australian*. A case in point is Dr Victor Chang, who was born in China and came to Australia as a student. He was always referred to as a great Australian surgeon, which he was. Victor and I must have been contemporaries, yet those who aspire to be social commentators seem to be required to adopt a Panglossian perspective, for I have been repeatedly construed as too negative and my criticisms lacking *gratitude*. That is, Chinese and other Visible Minorities—the inside-outsiders—have the choice to be assimilated or be a perpetual outsider. But such oneness not only impoverishes but also diminishes Australia, for such oneness would prevent Australia from escaping the dark tunnel into that chiliastic light.

*The enlightening spasms!*

**T**O BE SURE, Australian society had spasms of civilisation. In 1967, White Australia overwhelmingly voted for what they thought was intended to rectify the mistakes of the framers of the Australian Constitution, by accepting the Indigenous Australians into full membership of humanity and Australian society. But the politicians of the time, whether intentionally or not, worded the referendum in ways which were at least potentially racist. The ambiguity of 1967 has been reaffirmed by the 1 April 1998 decision of the High Court.

Indeed, Justice Mary Gaudron in the April decision called it a 'minimalist amendment' and said it could 'only operate to impose some limit on what would otherwise be the scope of Section 51 (xxvi)' of the Constitution, the Section being amended in 1967. Until the advent of the Whitlam Labor Government in 1972, all New Zealanders could come to Australia without a visa or passport *except* those of Asian background. Successive Australian governments ignored the protests of the New Zealand governments. Asians, it seemed, must remain the *others* in the definition of the Australian identity. On assuming the prime ministership, Mr Whitlam's first trip

abroad was to New Zealand where he formally rejected the practice of discriminating against Asian-New Zealanders.

When the *Mabo* decision overturned the myth of *terra nullius*, Sir Gerard Brennan said that myth was unjust by 'any civilised standard'.

But such spasms of civilised behaviour have been rare, indeed exceptional, certainly by the leaders of society. Sadly, since the *Mabo* judgment there has been a retreat from the standard set by that judgment.

Whether this diagnosis—that is, a retreat from the civilising impulse—is just can best be tested by allowing the people to decide, but politicians seem to fear what the people might say. A political hot topic since April 1998 has been whether there should be a double dissolution of the parliament over the Senate's rejection of the Native Title Amendment Bill. Such an election, we are told, would become what is popularly called a Race Election. As the Native Title Amendment Bill reduced the rights of the Indigenous, which the *Mabo* and *Wik* decisions seemed to have acknowledged, then an election on that Bill, a *race* election, would have given the people the opportunity to decide whether the 1967 referendum would be given some substance. What we see is that politicians of all colours openly profess that they are 'not racist', and do not want a *race* election. What is of interest is why our politicians are so desperate to avoid a 'race' election. Could it be that they fear that the result may show the true nature of the emperor's clothes—that 1967 was indeed a spasm and that too many of us are still racists? Or, would such an election show that the people are more civilised than their politicians? We do well to realise that, alone among the former white British dominions, the Australian parliament has never had an Indigenous member of its lower house. The Australian House of Representatives has been persistently Eurocentric, in contrast to the parliaments of other former members of the Empire. Of course, every member of the federal parliament would deny being racist to their last breath, if only for the sake of form.

While politicians may deny such accusations, one recent issue amply demonstrated its validity. In 1984, Professor Geoffrey Blainey, of the University of Melbourne, in a patriotic bout, launched an attack on multiculturalism in a series of speeches, articles and finally a book, entitled *All for Australia*. His theme was that 'the multicultural policy has, at times, tended to emphasise the rights of ethnic minorities

at the expense of the majority of Australians, thus unnecessarily encouraging divisions and weakening social cohesion. It has tended to be anti-British.' This was followed by a long anti-Asian imbroglio. John Howard echoed Blainey's sentiments. When, during the 1996 election, he was reminded of his remarks by voters of Asian background, he told them that they misunderstood him. Yet, in 1998, everyone in Australia understood that the significance of his statement was that it broke from the bipartisan policy on Asian immigration.

*To contain an enlightened people.*

**W**HILE THIS ANALYSIS is applicable to some Australian politicians, the Australian people have shown they are more 'civilised', to use Sir Gerard Brennan's term. Indeed, the good people who voted so overwhelmingly to support the 1967 referendum proposal thought they were voting to rectify an historic injustice. But they were hoodwinked and betrayed by those whom they had elected to represent them. The politicians' protestations and moral gyrations remind me of Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*: 'They should be *deputies* but they are *not* ... They have authority as the representatives of *public affairs*, whereas in reality they represent *particular interests*.' As far as I know, Marx had not been to Australia, but his prescience in this case is right to the point.

It is not the spectre of communism that is haunting the Australian politicians but the presence of a politically awakened constituency. In February 1998, this was made clear for all to see on national television. It was the political charade called the Constitutional Convention and, appropriately, abbreviated to ConCon, because the people were indeed doubly *conned*. Throughout the Convention, the main concern of the political leaders and their acolytes was to ensure the people be denied the right to elect their president. Armies of Aunt Sallies and Straw Men were put up, all allegedly to impress on the people the dangers of such a democratic practice. Among the insurmountable obstacles cited by politicians was the danger that such a president would become an alternate centre of power to rival the prime minister; and that such an elected president might impinge on the right of the Senate to block supply.

It is questionable whether these are obstacles at all. The elected President of Eire, Mrs Mary Robinson, has been universally acclaimed such a success that she was

invited to take the post of Commissioner for Human Rights of the UNO. As to the right of the Senate to block supply, if we are told the truth, that device merely represents the fear of the opposition of the day that they could not win an election in the political climate of the time. Solutions to the supply dilemma are readily found but were not even canvassed at the Convention.

*Moving forward: vox populus and an enriching salad.*

**G**IVEN THE REACTIONS to some recent events, the dread of some politicians is understandable. The recent spasms of civilisation by the High Court and the enthusiastic popular reception of the Stolen Generation Report must have constrained some of them to seek desperately to dampen and control the civilising spasms. A spate of union bashing? A few crumbs to the aged? A gush of righteous rhetoric? In spite of the oft-expressed concerns for the 'battlers' by political leaders of every persuasion, our political leaders, as the ConCon has shown, seem more concerned with controlling the wishes of the people than with allowing them to be given vent. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that the political leaders have shown little understanding of the nature of the Australian people.

While there is undoubtedly only one Australia, what is debatable is the Oneness of the Australian people. Long before the waves of immigration that began in 1788, there were more than 200 languages spoken in Australia by peoples who made up a richly complex society. Since 1788, infusions of more cultures have resulted in an even more multicultural Australia. The composition of the Australian population has enjoyed a process of continuing enrichment. The process can be likened to the making of a salad with the resultant whole always richer and more interesting than the sum of the individual parts. At times, some politicians tried to introduce a dull mess called assimilation. But in the past four decades, Australian society has experienced further enrichment by rejecting the 'melting pot' metaphor, and embracing even more varieties of culture.

This analysis advocates multiculturalism. It is a desperate defence because I believe it is the only option for the well-being of the future of our society. It is the only policy that will enable all to be part of the mainstream and have a place at the high table. It needs to be defended because the multicultural policy has become the target of attack in a bipartisan way for a decade, as

barbaric alternatives were being proposed. It is not an exaggeration to say that though Blainey in 1984 lost the intellectual argument, he succeeded in generating fear in some politicians. Multiculturalism, as the bipartisan policy and goal of social development, has degenerated into tacit and overt bipartisan avoidance and attack in public discourse.

This destructive process has been subtly bipartisan. Though John Howard has accentuated it by refusing to use the 'm' word since becoming Prime Minister, the destruction predates that silence. 'Illegal immigration now running at perhaps 10,000 a year', wrote Blainey in 1984. His words had the effect of accelerating the process of association—in the public mind—of illegal migrants with Asians or refugees.

A consequence of the Blainey imbroglio was the establishment of the (Dr Stephen) Fitzgerald Commission in 1988. Its report questioned the wisdom of retaining multiculturalism as Australia's social goal. Politically, it provided a shield to the Hawke Labor Government against the anti-Asian industry, and a diversion from the pain caused by damaging economic policies. Subsequent distortion of the figures on illegal immigrants reinforced the image of a refugee crisis based on a flood of 'boat people' and a continuing abuse of our immigration system. All this led to compassion fatigue in the Australian body politic.

It was against this background of racial and cultural tension that the High Court handed down the *Mabo* decision. By understanding the context, we can better appreciate the trauma to the political landscape caused by this civilising spasm. Asian-Australians, realising there would be no protection of their treasured multiculturalism, exerted themselves and became leaders in the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia. It was a heart-warming development. Twenty years ago, I went to my first annual meeting of the NSW Council of FECCA and saw no other Asian face.

We must come together multiculturally, or we will be hanged separately and monoculturally. Though 77 per cent rejected monoculture in Queensland, the major parties reacted as though the majority had opted for the opposite. People of good will must speak up, frequently and loudly. ■

**Adrian Chan**, a fourth-generation member of the Chan Clan, having taken an early ticket of leave from academe, now writes full-time.



*... Essay continued from inside front cover*

**N**OW, WHOSE BUSINESS IS IT to study such issues? Prima facie, it is a problem for applied ethics, or some related discipline. But at present, issues of that kind fall down the cracks between disciplines. Law is not applicable, since there is no legal regime permitting those suffering disadvantage of this kind to sue. Applied ethics itself, which has developed from philosophy with some input from law, has inherited those disciplines' phobia about quantification, and hence is in no position to handle the usually economic nature of the rights and losses involved. Economists study such matters, but typically in a 'big picture' way, and not from the point of view of inquiring how the individuals affected might be able to do something to recover their losses. Accountants have a good awareness of the nature of small-scale quantified gains and losses, but normally restrict themselves to costs that an entity will have to pay, not ones it merely ought to pay.

The problems can only be attacked by a fusion of the relevant parts of all these disciplines. Applied ethicists must embrace quantification, and create a 'computational casuistics', while accountants must measure not only the obligations that the present legal situation places on entities, but those that morality requires. They must create a 'moral accountancy'—which will be the same thing as computational casuistics. (The name 'casuistics' is taken from the art of casuistry, the application of moral principles to particular cases, on which there were many books for confessors in the period 1350 to 1650.)

**T**HIS HAS BEEN DONE BEFORE, and recalling a few historical points may help suggest how to restart progress. Aristotle's discussion of money and prices occurs in the middle of his treatment of justice, in which he goes into some mathematical detail on the different ways of calculating just outcomes in different cases. In the case of a partnership, for example, it is just to distribute the profits in proportion to the stakes invested, while when there is a matter of compensation for wrong, only the amount of the loss arising is to be calculated.

He goes on to say that the advantage of money is that it allows all such things to be compared. In the Middle Ages, the scholastics developed Aristotle's ideas, and caused them to have meaning in the courts. In those days, they thought that everything had a just price, normally the price

determined by the market. Selling something to an unsuspecting buyer for substantially more than the just price was wrong, and that moral thought was backed up by legal sanction. In ancient and medieval Roman law, one could ask a court to nullify a contract of sale if the price had been in error 'beyond half the just price'. Many subtle and powerful ideas were developed on how to find the just prices of futures contracts, annuities and insurances, leading eventually to the moral-legal problem whose solution created the mathematical theory of probability: what is the just division of the stake in an interrupted game of chance? One of the solvers was Pascal, who in his other writings dealt casuistry, the application of morality to particular cases, a blow from which it has only recovered with the rise of applied ethics in the last 30 years.

In the meantime, there have been successive waves of Calvinism, positivism, Marxism, utilitarianism, modernism, postmodernism and so on, all of which have tended to drive apart quantitative and ethical reasoning, and indeed, discouraged reasoning about detailed ethical cases at all. Of the major modern ethical traditions, only utilitarianism approved of calculation, and that was calculation of pleasures rather than of something specifically ethical, such as rights; in any case, the requirement to calculate was generally taken to be one of utilitarianism's weak points. Modern applied ethics has revived casuistry, but not its willingness to get involved with numbers.

**T**HERE ARE TWO MAIN ISSUES, or difficulties, with implementing any project that involves quantifying rights and making the answer have effect. The first concerns the possibility of measuring rights. Does it make sense to quantify rights with sufficient accuracy to make intelligible the demand that they should be recognised by a legally backed system of accounting? Secondly, is it at all practicable to create a legal regime that would enforce those rights? The natural scepticism one feels about both these matters is, it will be argued, unfounded. The technology to measure rights largely exists already in accountancy and environmental economics, while the international legal regime that is currently developing has the means to enforce any measurable right. It needs some more work, but only more of the same kind of thing that is happening already.

Doubts about the possibility of measurement of certain kinds of rights are

perhaps best assuaged by considering the one area where there has been a fairly determined effort to quantify moral rights for which no supporting legal regime existed. This is the field of 'environmental accounting', studied mostly by economists (as it has no legal significance, it has not been of interest to most accountants and lawyers). It began with the recognition that National Accounts, such as the Gross Domestic Product, were measures of economic activity that failed to take into account certain goods, and hence were mismeasures of progress. For example, depletion of a scarce natural resource counts as a positive item in the GDP. Thus the costs to future generations of unrestricted economic growth in the present were not measured. To use GDP as a measure of the Good is thus an instance of 'Great Leap Forward' pricing, the name taken from the response of the Chinese peasants to the Great Helmsman's demand that they increase the production of iron (they melted down their tools).

Economists attempted to devise a system of national accounts that would take into account environmental goods, as well as, for example, the health of populations, so that there would be a measure of whether economic 'progress' was actually improving the lot of humanity.

Accountants have been rather behind in this field, but as legal requirements to disclose costs of cleanup have increased, there has been a certain amount of work.

This is not to say that the economists have measured fairly. Environmentalists have not been keen to recognise all the benefits of normal economic activity. One needs also to measure the benefits to future generations of unrestricted economic growth in the present, such as expensive taxpayer-funded medical research with cures for the future, and the discrediting of Stalinist regimes. A focus on just one kind of good, that of the environment, leads to distortions as bad as those that gave rise to the demand for environmental accounting in the first place. *All* relevant goods must be quantified, if there is to be any plausibly rational attempt to calculate and balance rights.

Cost-benefit analysis has made a concerted effort at weighing all considerations relevant to such decisions as major infrastructure projects. There have been some reasonable ethical objections to some details of its methodology, which can weight

the preferences of the poor less than those of the rich, but the vigorous attempts in the field to weigh all considerations are admirable.

THESE INTELLECTUAL FERMENTS have largely passed accountancy by. While it may be admitted that the subject matter of accounting is 'equities', that is, rights or titles, the profession has traditionally adopted a conservative attitude to what may be quantified for display on a balance sheet. There has been a strong preference for recording tangible and saleable assets, for example, with a good deal of emphasis on what they cost and what they could now be sold for. But that attitude has tended to erode as modern business has created a demand for information on the true financial position of entities. There is regular criticism of accounting standards whenever a giant corporation goes under shortly after reporting a healthy profit, as happened regularly in the 1980s. While the principles of measurement in accountancy are controversial, the recent tendency has been to avoid artificial rules and to look for the expected future economic benefit arising from the assets an entity controls. 'Expected' has approximately the usual meaning it has in mathematical probability theory.

Some of what is now becoming standard comes close to the quantification of a moral obligation. For example, if a company is engaged in open-cut mining, and has an established policy of site restoration to a higher standard than that required by law, it must make provision on its balance sheet for that 'constructive obligation' as soon as the mining is undertaken. Failure to restore the site to the higher standard 'would cause unacceptable damage to the entity's reputation and its relationship with the community in which it operates'; it is going to have to restore the site, so must disclose its present obligation to do so.

FURTHER CLARIFICATIONS may be made by replying to various obvious objections to the project.

#### *Objection 1*

Rights are not the kind of thing that admit of quantification. Surely a right to life, or a right of a people to land, is not capable of being weighed in a balance, or subject to more and less?

#### *Answer*

It is not maintained that *all* kinds of rights admit of quantification. Some obviously do. One's right to be compensated by

someone who has stolen one's goods, or to be paid for one's work, is limited to a fixed amount, and that is unaffected by the cases considered in the objection.

But it is also true that there is pressure to quantify somehow even rights to life, when they conflict. When scarce health care resources or investments in safety are to be allocated, someone will lose out, that is, have their rights recognised little or not at all. It is usual to quantify claims somehow, in order to balance them—for example, when there is a need to allocate scarce health care resources. It may be alarming to hear health economists talking about the dollars needed per 'Quality Adjusted Life Year', but deviations from the results of those methods are also alarming. It is hard to see any superior way of proceeding.

What rights exactly can be quantified is a further question. Perhaps one cannot improve on Aristotle's opinion that quantification is appropriate in two areas: distribution and compensation. In that case, in a case like allocation of health care resources, it may be preferable not to speak of rights to life as themselves quantifiable, but rather to say that the quantification arises only at the stage when distribution of resources to support those rights is in question. Similarly, it may be that the intrinsic or aesthetic value of endangered species is not quantifiable, but quantification must enter when resources are to be diverted from other uses to save those species.

#### *Objection 2*

The quantification of 'rights', if it is possible at all, arises from something non-ethical. For example, if I promise you \$10, the quantification arises merely from what I said, while the ethics of the matter is founded on a general obligation to fulfil promises, which is not itself quantitative. So there is no need for any kind of 'computational ethics'.

#### *Answer*

That may be so, and in that case pure ethics need not consider quantification. But here we are considering applied ethics, in which we wish to look at the actual obligations that arise from ethical principles in particular cases (and compare those arising from different principles, if necessary). It is not true that because ethical principles are non-quantitative, the obligations arising from them also are. You might as well argue that because probabilities arise from symmetry, which is not quantifiable, probabilities also cannot be measured.

#### *Objection 3*

It is quite unrealistic to expect precise

measurements of anything so vaguely specified as one's right to clean air, or one's loss of self-respect through being unemployed.

#### *Answer*

*Precise* measurement is rarely relevant to action. As is well-known in probability theory, a very rough estimate is all that is needed in most cases. I don't know the precise risk of a crash when I get on a plane: maybe it's one in a million or one in ten million, but if I believe it has got to one in a few thousand, I sweat on takeoff.

As this example also illustrates, what is often needed is not so much a precise measurement, as a solid minimum. If I can show that an environmental good is worth at least a certain amount, that is enough to get its claims 'on the table', even if there is no hope of a precise measurement. And if precise calculations *are* needed to decide between two alternatives, it probably doesn't matter much one way or the other. But again, more entities can be priced exactly than was once thought. Options (the right but not the obligation to buy something for a fixed price at a future date) were once thought too speculative to price, but their exact pricing now keeps many mathematicians in comfort. Reasonably exact measurement is also possible in the area where quantification is most familiar in law: compensation payments for loss of future earnings, as evaluated by actuaries.

#### *Objection 4*

Some future outcomes are too speculative to measure even approximately, and if something cannot be measured with some reasonable accuracy, no-one is likely to take it into account when acting in the present.

#### *Answer*

The defence budgets of countries, and the advertising budgets of companies, are not observed to be small. Yet the outcomes of that spending are wildly speculative. The same is true of research and development budgets, which are large in countries other than Australia. Decision-makers in such cases are acting to insure against various small risks of large, perhaps catastrophic, loss. The risks and payoffs may be almost unmeasurable, but it is still necessary to distinguish between real or appreciable risks and completely fanciful ones.

As examples of quantities that might seem initially to be too vague, but are in fact priced reasonably, consider the goodwill of a business, and the intellectual capital of a research and development company. The goodwill of a business has a substantial causal effect on its future profits, so it cannot be ignored when the expected future



cash flows of the business are to be estimated. It can be measured approximately as the excess that a purchaser of the business is prepared to pay for it over and above the value of its tangible assets (including 'visible intangibles' like copyright). Microsoft has few tangible assets (and not a lot of goodwill, either), but it has 'intellectual capital' in the sense of a team of researchers with a track record of successful innovations, who can be expected to generate future profits. Microsoft's share price can be taken as an estimate by the market of what that is worth (after tangible assets, licences, etc. are subtracted). On one estimate, 94 per cent of Microsoft's worth is represented by such intangibles that do not rate a mention on its balance

environment, they would migrate to Russia, and take advantage of the free market in judicial decisions, the liquidation of business rivals, and so on. They do not do so, as they prefer to operate in countries where exchange is protected by legally backed moral codes against theft and fraud. A norm of fairness underlies exchange: 'to make exchange possible, we must make theft unfeasible'. The same point arises from the extensive work on modelling trust in exchanges through iterated prisoners' dilemma games, which shows the stability of tit-for-tat strategies in a wide range of circumstances. As one saying has it, 'when trust is betrayed, stakeholders get even'. Corporations worry incessantly about their 'image' of probity, for the obvious reason

little prospect for plans that involve an increase in legal control. In any case, the globalisation of business means it can escape the efforts of any nation state to regulate it.

*Answer*

This is a problem for an approach like that of Mark Latham's *Civilising Global Capital*, which takes the ways of capitalism more or less for granted, and asks what 'policy' prescriptions can restrain it from running amok. It is also a problem for the idea that it is the 'State' whose business it is to coerce business enterprises into internalising external costs. The proposals here should act at an earlier stage, and should act through liability at common law, not through action by governments.

How capitalism pursues profit depends on what the profits are. And what the profits are, if any, depends on the accounting. It is unclear, for example, if Bond Corp. ever made a real profit, yet it was able to 'buy' anything it liked—including its choice of auditor. If it could have afforded to buy only out of its real profits, it would not have been heard of.

Legislative control of business may have been weakening, but it is not so clear that legal control has been. The increases in legal control represented by such decisions as *Mabo* in Australia, and the class actions against tobacco companies in the US, have nothing to do with legislation. They depend instead on the common law reaching into the moral underpinning or core of its tradition of decisions. Whatever fads the highest courts of Western countries may be subject to, free market theory is not among them. Robust ethical theories seem to be more popular. In a remarkable speech on 'Commercial law and morality', Sir Gerard Brennan, later Chief Justice of the High Court, said:

Moral values can and manifestly do inform the law ... The stimulus which moral values provide in the development of legal principle is hard to overstate, though the importance of the moral matrix to the development of judge-made law is seldom acknowledged. Sometimes the impact of the moral matrix is obvious, as when notions of unconscionability determine a case. More often the influence of common moral values goes unremarked. But whence does the law derive its concepts of reasonable care, of a duty to speak, of the scope of constructive trusts—to name but a few examples—save from moral values translated into legal precepts?



sheet. The size of this figure indicates, if nothing else, the need for accountancy to take some risks over what it regards as measurable. Otherwise, it will be sidelined as an irrelevance.

**T**HAT COMPLETES the consideration of objections based on difficulties over quantification. We now come to those concerning the feasibility of any plans for morally restraining large-scale enterprises.

*Objection 5*

Capitalists are not nice people, and are not going to accept more moral rules. They are more than sufficiently challenged working around the few they already have.

*Answer*

If capitalists really wanted a deregulated

that other capitalists don't trust sleazebags. After the crash of the late 1980s, there were fears that Sydney's place as the commercial centre of Australia was at risk through its reputation for corporate fraud. Legal pressure on insider trading and similar frauds seems to be increasing (though that is hard to evaluate until years later). To return to the Middle Ages for a moment: when national governments were weak and knew little about business, capitalists created their own international legal regime, the Law Merchant, based on commonly accepted basic moral principles and business practice.

*Objection 6*

With all major political parties in the West captured by economic rationalism, there is

The complex maze of rules that makes up commercial law may seem an inhospitable domain for moral imperatives, but the opposite is true, according to Brennan. It is for the commercial lawyer to discern the moral purpose behind each abstruse rule, and advise his client's conscience of what is just in the circumstances, not merely what he can legally get away with. Of course, not all judges of the High Court agree with him.

The accounting profession cannot set its own standards in splendid isolation from legal opinion, since it must operate in a legal environment not of its own choosing. This became most evident through the legal cases of the early 1990s, when victims of the large accounting firms' view of standards sued for huge sums, sometimes successfully. In one of the largest cases, Deloitte's faced damages of \$340m for certifying Adsteam's 1990 accounts, which disclosed a profit of \$236m when the true figure was a \$244m loss. In other cases, the State of Victoria sued KPMG for \$1bn over its audit of Tricontinental, and KPMG settled for a reported \$136m. There were at least 21 such cases as at October 1996.

The ability of law to have an impact on complex financial matters is well illustrated by the move away from the legal support for artificial tax schemes that the Barwick High Court provided. 'Literal' interpretations of tax laws permitted endless schemes that subverted the intent of the law by appeal to its letter. Then the crucial section 15AA was added to the Acts Interpretation Act in 1981. It provided: 'In the interpretation of a provision of an Act, a construction that would promote the purpose or object underlying the Act (whether that purpose or object is expressly stated in the Act or not) shall be preferred to a construction that would not promote that purpose or object.'

In 1984, the revolutionary section 15AB was added, allowing recourse to external evidence such as Hansard as evidence of the legislators' purposes. Australia's tax avoidance industry, hitherto one of the most cunning in the world, never recovered from the blow.

There are parallels in accountancy. The standards contain a 'substance over form requirement' ('transactions and events should be accounted for and presented in accordance with their financial reality and not merely their legal form') and there is a long-standing 'true and fair' requirement. These notions are sometimes thought of by accountants as decorations surviving from the age of the dinosaurs, but gross departures

from them are subject to legal scrutiny. All these developments put paid to the impression that can sometimes be gained from both accountants and lawyers, that accountancy and law are very technical fields in which the common person's crude notions of the right, the true and the fair count for little. When the crunch comes, the courts prove to be as scandalised by technical evasions of what is fair as outside observers.

These considerations apply with minor changes in all major jurisdictions: commercial law is remarkably international. It is true that there are some countries where commercial law is a dead letter. But then, there is not much commerce to regulate in Somalia or Afghanistan, for reasons not unrelated to the breakdown of law in those areas.

#### *Objection 7*

The law has a poor track record of actually doing anything to restrain capitalism, or, at least, restraining it from harming anyone but other capitalists.

#### *Answer*

An interesting historical precedent that may encourage optimism is the gradual success of legal remedies in promoting industrial safety. Accidents and polluted work environments are one of the easiest means for a manufacturer to lessen costs, but the standard of workplace safety is high, and has been rising for at least 150 years. Legislation has played a part, but the role of common law damages is far from negligible. Common law has been important both in setting pre-existing standards of liability by employers, and in providing the matrix of interpretation for subsequent legislation.

More recently, and especially relevantly for a general project of internalising costs through legal means, has been the expansion of legal liability for economic loss. Until recently, the law was generally unwilling to recognise liability for purely economic loss, such as loss of income, suffered as a result of negligence (for example, in oil spills or incompetent audits). There has been strong movement away from this position in the last 20 years, and damages are now often recoverable in such cases. The law does not yet recognise a general duty of care in all cases of foreseeable harm, but the tendency to approach that limit is strong.

In the meantime, the aggressive law firms who specialise in class actions are continually forcing the pace. The firm of Slater and Gordon, for example, have been involved in the Sydney water crisis, pollution from Ok Tedi, asbestos, breast

implants, tobacco, peanut butter and the Christian brothers; their remarkable story is told in the recent book, *That Disreputable Firm*, by Michael Cannon (Melbourne University Press).

One should not forget either the legal regime that is gradually arising internationally from treaties, which has had some success in areas like protecting Antarctica. The speed of development of international e-commerce and internet gambling means that *something* dramatic will happen concerning international laws governing finance. It remains to be seen what it will be.

#### *Objection 8*

Attempts to find complex surrogate measures of environmental goods, subtle methods of valuing contingencies and so on are undemocratic. Policy matters about the environment and any other important matters ought to be judged by the citizens in the light of argument, not by alleged experts through measurement. Having experts in back rooms deciding such matters would replace public deliberation about ideas with a scientific paternalism.

#### *Answer*

This style of argument will appeal to philosophers and Americans more than non-philosophers and non-Americans. Even American philosophers, though, are grateful to the Food and Drug Administration's experts who test their food and medicines. If rights are quantifiable, no amount of talk about democracy will make them otherwise, and expert opinion as to the quantity of the rights will be part of the information that ought to inform the political (or legal) process.

In any case, the question of what rights exist and can be measured is separate from public policy issues about how to cause them to make a difference.

#### *Objection 9*

No-one is going to be found who is expert in these issues.

#### *Answer*

Australia is crawling with accountants and lawyers: many with glowing testimonials from the best schools and universities in the country. Here is an opportunity for them to do something useful instead of wasting their lives devising tax minimisation schemes. ■

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*Footnotes are available on request.*

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# Integrity: the long walk

*Antony Campbell continues his series of essays on an unconditionally loving God.*



*I have been talking about human experience—because that is all we have. I don't have any direct experience of God. I cannot speak for the experience of others. But none of us can touch and see and hear God as we touch and see and hear others. As the small boy said when urged not to be afraid of being alone in the dark, because God was there: 'But God doesn't have any skin on!'*

II

*I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever. (Psalm 89:1)*

**I**T WOULD BE GOOD TO GET STRAIGHT TO THE VISION OF FAITH offered by belief in a loving God. We can't paint that picture unless we are well aware of what we are doing and the limits involved. We need to look at three things and a fourth: the worth of our talk about God, the issue of our priorities, our appeal to ordinary experience, and fourthly our fear of God.

Few things are certain in theology, but one is sure. If we finally believe that at last we have got everything right about God, we can be sure that we're wrong. 'God' is a name we give to a relational being, but more than that. 'God' is also a name we use in faith to give expression to a wide and diverse range of experience. What faith names 'God' is a mystery that defies any attempt to get everything about it right. It helps to remember this when reflecting on our God-talk, our priorities, experience, and even our fear of God.

There are all sorts of ways of talking about God and all sorts of people who like to talk about God in different ways. I do not want to exclude anything that is valuable in faith to somebody else. On the other hand, I want to insist on the possibility that we may have to make a choice about what is primary in the language we use about God. There are various languages we can use to talk about God, there are various metaphors we can apply to God. If they conflict with each other—and if our human speech and thought is not to be too destructively incoherent—one of them may require priority over the others.

Lover, judge, and patron or benefactor are all metaphors that are used of God. Lover and judge are easy enough to understand. In human reality, they are opposed. One who loves is by definition biased; that's what it means to be in love. One who judges is by definition supposed to be unbiased; that's what it means to be a judge. James Joyce's retreat-giver (in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) presented God as both loving and judging. One of these has to have priority over the other. In Joyce's text, God as loving is primary while we are alive; God as judging takes over the instant we are dead. I don't find this solution respectful to God's love. It has an inconsistency in it that denies the love. For me, God's love has to have priority over God's justice. There is a place for God's justice, but God's love is primary. We have to take it seriously.

A patron is almost an outmoded term, restricted to royalty and sporting clubs. The reality, however, is still around. Religious behaviour has a lot to do with God as patron-cum-benefactor. In this sense, a patron is a protector and a figure who can provide influential support and assistance. Today's political lobbyists do not talk about their patrons, but they are interested in people who can wield influence on behalf of their causes. As I understand church history, patron saints were patterned on the patrons at court who exercised influence on emperors and kings. When we expect God to respond to our intercessions, to protect us, and to exercise beneficial influence in our lives, we may be treating God as a patron-cum-benefactor. And that's different from both a lover and a judge.

Using human language to talk about God has its problems—but we've nothing else. It is hard enough to get words and images to work for us in human situations, describing human experience; they let us down when we turn to God. The classic rules for the process of language about God are simple, but not all that helpful. First, whatever we experience as positive and good is affirmed of God, as belonging to God. Second, whatever is negative and not good is denied of God. Third, whatever is taken from human experience as positive and good, and so affirmed of God, has to be elevated or exalted to mirror the radical difference between ourselves and God. It is this third

*Above: Illustration by Hans Erni for Robert Graves' translation of The Song of Songs, Collins, 1973.*

clement that makes words and images fail. It is all three elements taken together that makes the process possible.



My struggle is for integrity and coherence in our talk about God. The language we use about God is a matter of choice; a choice we have either made for ourselves or inherited from others. For coherence, each of us may need to assess the priority we give to particular metaphors. For me, the primary metaphor is of God as loving. If judge and patron-cum-benefactor—and others—are to have their place, for me they must be subordinate to faith in God as loving. On the surface, it sounds acceptable; if we go deep with it, faith in God as loving does not come easily.

We will need to talk about mystery, but not yet. At this point, it is important that, in all the fragility and vulnerability and inadequacy of human language, we recognise faith's invitation to allow one image and one language to have priority for us. I believe we have to grow into and gently choose a primary metaphor. To allow the metaphors of judge and lover, for example, to subvert each other is to risk a destructive ambivalence in our relationship with God.

If we are to speak of God as loving, we have to be aware of aspects of the language of judging or of aspects of behaviour toward patrons or benefactors that are incompatible with the language and behaviour of one who loves. We may need all the metaphors to talk about God, but I do not believe it is healthy for us to have them on the same footing. Maybe sometimes we play them off against each other as a cover-up. Is there perhaps a fear in us that we need to cover up, a fear of accepting that we are loved by God?



I have been talking about human experience—because that is all we have. I don't have any direct experience of God. I cannot speak for the experience of others. But none of us can touch and see and hear God as we touch and see and hear others. As the small boy said when urged not to be afraid of being alone in the dark, because God was there: 'But God doesn't have any skin on!' In the exploration of our human experience God is disclosed to us. I read the Bible and experience myself attracted to an image of God or repelled by an image of God. I have to explore the totality of my experience to discover God and to discover what God is for me. Our experiences and our discoveries will be different. 'Gifts differing'—we are so very different and we should be grateful for it.

Should I turn to the church for a clear understanding of God? Confusion is there too. God is spoken of as a loving Father whom we beg for mercy. That is confusing, because I never asked my own father for mercy. Our loving God is described as 'God of power and might' and we petition God as we might a patron or a benefactor. In the Christian community, we may even ask saints to plead with God for us. I am confused, because I have never pleaded with someone who loved me. If they love me, they do what they can for me—without any pleading from me. I may need to ask, to let my needs be known. But pleading, no.

For a long time now, I've put language about God to a simple test. Does it square with a similar situation in human experience? I use this test particularly for language of love and forgiveness. We express our need to be loved, our gratitude for being loved, our sorrow for the hurts we inflict—but we do not beg. Humanly, we don't beg those who love us for their love

and their forgiveness. Should we of God? If we do, are we failing to accept the reality of God's love for us?

The touchstone of human experience is all very well, but we are not God. We say that God is 'utterly other'—radically different from us. We may not like it, but we do know that we are not God. So maybe what is not appropriate in human experience is appropriate to God. I have no problem with that. All I ask is that we run our God-talk by the test of human experience—and then think about it.

In human experience, love is a gift; we don't earn it. God's love too is a gift; we don't earn it. Being loved is not essentially a matter of being worthy. That love is gift is not pious jargon. People may find us lovable, but that does not mean they love us. Perhaps one of them chooses to love us; that love is gift. The others do not give it; one does. Loving and being loved is a highly complex experience. To those who love us, we are lovable. But we don't earn their love. They give it to us. What about God? In God's eyes, are we lovable? Does it make sense to talk about earning God's love and being made worthy of God's love? God's love is gift, given us.

Forgiveness is fascinating and just as complex a gift as love. Job screams at God: 'If I sin ... why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity?' (Job 7:20–21). Isaiah gives us this self-description from God: 'I, I am the One who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins' (Isaiah 43:25). Forgiveness is given by the lover, ultimately for the lover's own sake. Forgiveness is not merely a charity I extend to the offender; it is also and above all a gift I offer to myself for my own healing and my wholeness.

Can we earn forgiveness? Is there any point in begging for forgiveness? What is our own experience? Where love is strong, forgiveness can be there for us before there is any move on our part. Something special happens when forgiveness is given fulfilment by its recognition and acceptance. Sorrow and understanding can be involved in healing. The words needed may be 'I'm sorry'; and it may take time before it is clear that the words are real. But forgiveness is given, not earned. Healing may take time; the forgiveness is gift. Where there is love, the gift will not be withheld. Is that where we are with God?

We have to work with analogy and metaphor. We have nothing else for language about God. We have to run our language about God through the test of human experience. Thinking about it may convince us that things are different with God. But we have to think about it. We may have to realise that things are not so different and our attitude is inappropriate and something has to change. And we will probably spend our lives struggling with the issue of what is primary for us in our belief about God and how God relates to us.

Are we lobbying God for our favourite causes and, above all, for our well-being? Do we relate to God as our judge, favourable to us when we're good and turned from us when we're not? Do we believe in God as genuinely in love with us, rejoicing in our welfare and pained by our failures? Is our primary experience the overwhelming mystery that God loves us unconditionally? ■

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# Seen in a brilliant light



**The Oxford Companion to Australian History**, edited by Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre. Oxford University Press, 1998. ISBN 0 19 553597 9, RRP \$79.95

A COUNTRY SINGULARLY lacking in dramatic elements, Australia makes little demand for attention; nothing in it is the highest or longest or widest in the world. Mt Kosciusko would cut a poor figure among the Alps and the Murray River would hardly pass muster as a minor tributary of the Amazon. The animals are unique, indeed, but they are few and elusive and fail to impose themselves, and as for the trees, one needs to have a trained eye to tell one of the hundreds of varieties of eucalypts from another. The brilliance of the light drains the colour from the landscape and appreciation of its tones demands finer discriminations than the more evident colour contrasts of other countries. The haggard distinction of Australia is an acquired taste and given her isolation few but her native sons come to acquire it. But through the medium of the eyes and minds of the first Europeans to observe it, something of the fascination of the country can perhaps be communicated. Remote and little known as it is, Australia is no longer a land of mystery.

These are the words of Australian historian Kathleen Fitzpatrick, written at Melbourne University in 1957. They form part of Fitzpatrick's introduction to *Australian Explorers*—her selection of writings from the diaries and journals of Australian explorers published by Oxford in 1958. Although Fitzpatrick cast the explorers as romantic figures, this heroic depiction was accompanied by a dim view of the Australian environment. Australia was haggard and second rate—a land in which the finer sensibilities of the cultured European were forever condemned to exile. Like D.H. Lawrence at Thirroul, Fitzpatrick gazed on the strange land before her with a mixture of awe and repulsion. The land was ancient but new, unexceptional but unique, a shock of drab uniformity which eventually yielded to a harsh and always elusive beauty.

Forty years later, with the publication of the 700-page *Oxford Companion to Australian History*, an event unimaginable in 1958, Fitzpatrick's melancholy view of Australia has been turned upside down. The 'haggard distinction' of Australia has

given way to grandeur, diversity and fenced pockets of transcendental wilderness. For Australians living on the highly urbanised east coast, the word 'environment' has come to signify an imaginary Walden—a source of crystalline spirituality and pristine heritage.

Whereas Fitzpatrick looked to Europeans to explain away the mystery of Australia, we look to indigenous Australians. Our desire for reconciliation reflects a need to be reconciled not only with the past but the place in which we live—a way to put an end to the feeling of exile. The first image that the reader encounters in the *Oxford Companion to Australian History* is a map of Aboriginal Australia.

Fitzpatrick could not have been more wrong when she brazenly declared in 1958 that Australia was 'no longer a land of mystery'. The great irony of Australian history is that the more we come to know about our past the more mysterious our land becomes. When we had little or no history to call our own, our story was straightforward. Now, after four decades of

expanding scholarship and ever-increasing publications in Australian history, there is no shared national story.

Today, 'history' is often reduced to the level of mere perspective. The story you buy is the story you get. Just another one in the market place of ideas. As if truth were a quaint intellectual fashion propagated by men in tweed coats. The publication of the *Oxford Companion to Australian History* comes at a time when many historians feel themselves under siege professionally and adrift intellectually. Facing funding cuts and consumed by circular debates about the epistemological basis of their discipline, Australian historians are an endangered species. So goes the common refrain. To some extent, the tensions within the profession can be gauged by examining the backgrounds of the men and women who contributed to the Companion.

*The Oxford Companion to Australian History* includes entries ranging from 100 to 2000 words from over 300 contributors. Of these, a mere 30 per cent are currently working within traditional history departments in Australian universities. While a little over three per cent are historians working in other public institutions such as libraries and museums, almost 20 per cent of the contributors work outside institutions, either as retired historians or freelance writers. The remaining 50 per cent are sprinkled across a range of humanities-based disciplines including art, cultural studies, English, Australian studies and English. By far the largest contingent in this category is political scientists. They make up almost 6 per cent of the Companion's contributors. Just over two thirds of the contributors are men.

**A**S I APPROACH 40, I have often thought that working within a university as a political historian is good for my self-esteem. People are constantly approaching me and exclaiming, 'We need more young chaps like you!' Although the age of contributors to the Companion is not indicated, it is reasonably safe to assume that an overwhelming majority are over the age of 45. A fact which reflects the trends within the profession where the mean age of historians is on the rise. Yet outside the traditional boundaries of the discipline, both the nature and craft of history, and the career path of its practitioners, is becoming more diverse and unpredictable.

The index entry in the Companion under 'historical study' says as much. There we find Aboriginal history, public history,

environmental history, commissioned history, ethnic history, gay history, women's history, political history, sporting history, convict history etc. In certain ways this variety is indicative of the Companion's breadth and balance. Entries on lesbian history sit side by side with those on



military history. We encounter Gallipoli and Simpson the Donkey as easily as we find the Myall Creek Massacre and Yagan. The missing entry, however, is the one which explains how and why this fracturing of historical scholarship has occurred in the post-war period.

For example, why should a Companion to Australian History include entries under Vegemite, Phar Lap and television? In the space of 40 years we have moved from a situation where history was once seen as the study of political and social change to one where the history of the Hills Hoist is an equally valid intellectual pursuit. *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* could just as easily be labelled *The Historical Companion to Australian Culture*. As the scope of history has broadened, the questions asked by historians have changed and the meanings we derive from history have become more contentious and diffuse. While some of these themes are addressed by Kate Darian-Smith in her entry on post-colonialism, the Companion would surely have benefited from long entries under the headings 'History', 'Methodology and History' and 'Theory'. Their omission denies the reader a compact outline of the debates and sharp points of division which are so often alluded to in many of the entries. It would also have had the added benefit of explaining why the editors of the Companion chose to include some 150 or more entries on Australian historians—to date a much criticised feature of the Companion.

That the nature of history is in part a product of the individual bias of the author is a fact which dawned on historians long before the arrival of French post-structural theory. It is also a legitimate and important reason for including reference to historians in the Companion. One which, if placed in

the context of an entry on theory and history, would have made clear why history can never be separated from those who shape and give it life. Perhaps Oxford would have panicked at the sight of the word theory. Perhaps the reader is meant to survey every form of history included in the Companion and then piece together for themselves some explanation for the enormous shifts in purpose, method, focus, and the conclusions drawn by historians in recent years.

**I**N THE PREFACE to the Companion, editors Stuart Macintyre, Graeme Davison and John Hirst express their hope that the Companion will become 'the book of first reference for academic and general historians, students of Australian history, journalists and politicians, and readers here and overseas'. If the book achieves this aim it will be because the entries erect enough signposts to tell the reader how to find out more. The greatest strength of the Companion is that it provides a comprehensive guide to Australian historiography. There are one or two exceptions. Helen Irving's useful entry on citizenship refers to one book—edited by herself. Graeme Davison's entry on 'Marvellous Melbourne'—one which probably could have been included as part of the standard entry on Melbourne—refers readers to two works by Davison. While most contributors refer to their own work with appropriate brevity and modesty, some can't resist the temptation to review themselves. Alan Atkinson's fine entry on monarchy is spoilt at the end by a lengthy explanation of his own work which can only be seen as self-serving.

It's probably worth remembering that the first Oxford Companions were published in the early 20th century prior to the outbreak of World War I. They were usually self-authored and focused on biblical and classical texts or the writings of Shakespeare. The Companion's popularity in the publishing world accompanied the expansion of universities and the trend away from general education to highly specialised discipline-based knowledge. In the late 20th century, we encounter 'The Companion' or 'The Book of' with increasing and sometimes infuriating regularity. In seeking to provide a multi-authored overview of such a wide area as Australian History, the potential pitfalls are all too obvious. The quality of the writing may be uneven, certain aspects of history will be downplayed or overlooked, and in seeking to include everything there is always the risk of



blandness which often shadows the man for all seasons. On most of these counts the *Oxford Companion to Australian History* emerges unscathed.

The writing of most entries is lively and informative. It's almost worth \$79.95 to read Michael Cathcart's effort on exploration history—'the explorer risked his flesh in dark and sensuous lands. He could fill museum-cases with the corpses of exotic creatures and the artefacts of savage civilisations.' Cathcart's prose sounds like a trailer for *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Then there is Geoffrey Blainey displaying his talent for the bird's-eye view in his entries on climate and invention, and Donald Horne with his usual frankness on the Packers—'the Packer family have for three generations shown an aptitude for detecting new openings in the mass culture industries, a selective indifference to Establishment standards, a capacity to bully employees ... and a genius for pulling off coups in a vigorous pursuit of personal advantage'. Other contributors, such as Noel McLachlan, demonstrate an eye for bawdy Australian humour. McLachlan's entry on Dame Nellie Melba relates the tale of Nellie's 'shipboard bon mot' when a waiter offered her a rather limp jelly at table—'No thanks,' said Nellie, 'there are two things I like stiff and jelly's one of them.'

**D**ESPITE CONTRIBUTIONS from over 300 scholars, the *Companion* is carried by the erudition and commitment of its three editors. Stuart Macintyre writes with a measured and admirably detached elegance, having commandeered the majority of the longer entries on labour history and the tools of the historical profession, such as archives, books and historical journals. John Hirst's knowledge of Australia's parliamentary and democratic heritage is on display with incisive entries on democracy, conservatism, responsible government and federation, although it could have been exercised to an even greater extent with the inclusion of an entry on Constitutional Conventions. Yet of all the editors, the entries by Graeme Davison betray an extraordinary breadth of knowledge. Davison's entries on Canberra, national identity, time, weather forecasting and old age are evidence of his status as one of our finest cultural historians.

While the *Companion* will undoubtedly become an indispensable reference guide for students and teachers in the humanities, it still has significant failings. The desire to produce a *Companion* which surveys extant

publications on various areas of history sometimes leads to glaring omissions in content. Whereas Helen Irving's entry on citizenship, for example, departs from the editors' stated intention to refer to relevant publications, it does provide a valuable potted history of the development of citizenship in Australia. Tom Griffiths, however, who faithfully surveys the existing literature on environmental history, through no fault of his own avoids identifying the pivotal moments in Australia's environmental history. The result is an entry on environmental history which does not mention the crucial political role played by the protests against the Franklin Dam in 1982–83.

Although the *Companion* displays a sensitivity to environmental concerns which have shaped historical consciousness by including entries on the bush, drought, and forests, it fails to include major entries on the coast or the beach. While the Melbourne school of history is not renowned for its focus on surf, sand and sea, it is surely aware of their importance in providing the building blocks of many concepts of Australian identity. Fear of getting wet seems to be consistent throughout the *Companion*. There are no individual entries on the beach, the Bondi lifesaver, swimming, or surfing. All of which bear considerably more importance to Australian culture than an astringent yeast extract spread on toast.

In the arts and popular culture, the *Companion* is also found wanting. In their preface to the *Companion*, the editors state that the principle for including individual entries on artists is 'their role in shaping historical consciousness'. One unfortunate by-product of this approach is that artists whose work is not centred or employed in the context of national identity, or at least in stereotypical representations of identity, are omitted. Therefore we find entries on Peter Carey, David Williamson and Sidney Nolan but none on Lloyd Rees, Brett Whiteley, Geoffrey Smart, Helen Garner, Elizabeth Jolley or Frank Moorhouse. At other times, when the stated



focus on historical consciousness might be expected to result in brief entries on prominent artists, their names do not appear.

Paul Fox's entry on photography reduces the art form to moments which have captured 'the process of colonisation'. But where is Max Dupain, Harold Cazneaux, David Moore, Tracey Moffat or Axel Poignant? As much as any other artist, their photographs of urban and rural Australia in the 20th century have helped define and question images of Australian identities, Dupain's *Sunbaker* (1937) being one of the most powerful examples. Equally, not mentioning the role of photography in attracting sympathy for green issues, especially in urban constituencies, is a major oversight. As Graeme Davison points out in his entry on wilderness, the photographs of Olegas Truchanas were instrumental in fostering the concept of a sacred wilderness in Tasmania, as was Peter Dombrovskis' *Rock Island Bend* (1980), an image which was used to great effect in the 1983 election campaign.

Similarly, the editors have failed a generation of readers by omitting to include an entry on popular music. Glenn A. Baker, Bruce Elder or Lynden Barber could have provided 1000 words on the many ways popular music has shaped our national consciousness. Unfortunately, discussion of Australian music in the *Companion* reflects the old high-culture contempt for rock and roll. Surely Midnight Oil have had a more significant impact on the political, environmental, and historical consciousness of Australians than has Percy Grainger. Not to mention Goanna, Redgum, John Williamson, Yothu Yindi, Paul Kelly, Archie Roach and David Bridie. Warren Bebbington's entry on music lumps Midnight Oil in with a passing reference to Kylie Minogue and The Little River Band. As if derivative Eagles soft rock and formula pop cannot be differentiated from music which carries a uniquely Australian and political content.

Other biases in the selection of entries are difficult to fathom. We find an entry on the maverick casino king Jeffrey Kennett, but none on the contemporary politician who has done most to encourage the teaching, writing and reading of Australian history—NSW Premier Bob Carr. The *Companion* also finds room for entries on 'true believers', but then fails to give equal weight to the 'forgotten people' or the 'mainstream'. At other times, there is a shrewd sensitivity to the powerful appeal of particular Australian words and phrases such as the 'fair go'. But then when one looks for an entry on one of

the most significant—the ‘battler’—there is a black hole.

The editors also seem to have shied away from the word ‘intellectual’. Instead, intellectual history is dealt with under the heading of ‘ideas’. Yet when one reads Wayne Hudson’s entry, the word ‘intellectual’ is sprinkled liberally throughout. Why not place this entry under its more correct heading of intellectual history? Readers will not be offended. As for the recent controversy concerning Bill Gammage’s description of Ned Kelly as ‘only a fair bushman and horseman’, it should be remembered that Kelly was also a poor shot and a wimp. Kelly was often found taking refuge behind the nearest gum tree while fellow gang members did most of the fighting.

Reading the longer entries in *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, I realised that the volume was much more than an overview of our history. In many ways it represents a passionate plea for the discipline of history. In the prose of Stuart Macintyre and Graeme Davison, I sensed a lament for the passing of a particular way of practising ‘history’ which had nurtured and informed their own lives and careers. While both believe firmly that the knowledge and

understanding of history is an essential foundation of Australian citizenship, they also fear that the analytic and literary skills taught by history will be deemed irrelevant in the age of the computer and electronic communication.

Macintyre especially is concerned with the highly specialised and fragmented nature of historical scholarship—a proliferation of journals of varying quality devoted to history in some form, often characterised by self-referential writing, more in-house and desktop publishing, more commissioned history involving possible compromise of professional integrity, and hundreds of increasingly narrow doctoral theses of which only a handful will be published. More history, but a dwindling community of historians with common fields of interest.

LATE LAST YEAR, I attended a seminar at the Australian National University, with the grand title—‘Historical Consciousness in Australia’. Three papers were given, all by eminent historians, yet each dealt with the theme of historical consciousness by examining specific local concerns. If such a seminar had been held 30 years earlier, participating historians would have been

obliged to have addressed national issues.

Just as advances in technology have fragmented our sense of community, historical scholarship in Australia has tended to turn away from the big-picture themes which once characterised the writings of many historians now thought to be unfashionable. In the rush to include the previously marginalised and establish the legitimacy of new forms of historical inquiry, the discipline of history has become a loose gathering of tribes with no common language. Historians have forgotten how to tell a national story.

Our history is what we pass on to one another, the legacy of lives lived in communities bound together by the artifice of the nation state. The challenge for Australian historians is to find a way to put the nation back into history, to find the common language which will enable our histories to be shared, and to trace the lines of community without playing the role of servant scribe to the identity industry. And all of this with a sceptical eye. ■

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#### BOOKS

ROBERT DARBY

## Sphinx or wonder-woman

**Eleanor Dark: A Writer’s Life**, by Barbara Brooks with Judith Clark, Pan Macmillan Australia, 1998. ISBN 07329 0903 1, RRP \$39.95

ELEANOR DARK was one of the best and most successful serious Australian novelists of the 1930s. From *Prelude to Christopher* (1934) to *The Little Company* (1945), she published a dazzling succession of novels which moved from psychological exploration to social comment and political analysis, and which were greeted by both a fair degree of critical acclaim and reasonably good sales. The peak of her success came with an historical novel which departed from this pattern of development: *The Timeless Land* (1941) was published in the United States, became a Book of the Month Club selection, sold 133,000 copies straight off and brought her the staggering sum of \$15,000—more than five years’ earnings for a man on the basic wage. It was certainly far more than her literary aspirant father, Dowell O’Reilly, ever imagined he would make from writing.

Born in Sydney in 1901, Eleanor O’Reilly grew up in the progressive intellectual atmosphere fostered by her father, sponsor of an unsuccessful attempt to extend the New South Wales franchise to women in 1895, whose friends included John LeGay Brereton, Christopher Brennan and some of the ubiquitous Lindsays; other important influences were her aunt and uncle, Marion and A.B. Piddington, birth control reformer and radical liberal judge respectively. Eleanor’s life was outwardly uneventful: happy schooldays at Redlands boarding school; marriage at 21 to a lively and intelligent man 12 years her senior, Dr Eric Dark; settlement in Katoomba, where he had bought a medical practice, in 1923; lots of bushwalking in the Blue Mountains, gardening and housework; a child of her own (Michael, born 1929) to add to the stepson Eric brought from a previous

marriage; a visit to the United States in 1937; involvement in community politics during the Depression and the war years; trouble with red-baiters when the Soviet Union was no longer needed as an ally; travels in northern, central and western Australia in 1948; a seven-year stint on a Queensland fruit and macadamia farm in the 1950s; and, until the 1960s, always writing, writing, writing.

The success of *The Timeless Land*, followed by its less celebrated sequels, has ensured a distorted popular image of their author. Beyond the small circle of her enthusiasts, Dark has been known mainly as an historical novelist, the writer of a school text and perhaps an ABC television series, while her novels of psychological exploration, modernist experimentation and political ideas have languished in the shadows. The most radical of them, *Sun*



*Across the Sky* (1937), with its scathing exposé of the resource exploiter mentality, has had only one reprint—an unsuccessful paperback edition in 1962; so hard is it to find these days that even the authors of this biography had to borrow a copy. It is a pity that this and her other publications of the 1930s and '40s are not better known, but Australian readers have generally preferred the colour and personalities of distant history to novels of contemporary ideas, and we have never enjoyed a shared culture to the extent of, say, the Italians, where MPs used to quote passages from Manzoni's *The Betrothed* at each other. Yet the issues in which Dark was so interested—the emancipation of women, alternative marriage arrangements, the prevention of war, censorship, democracy, cultural literacy, the environment, justice for Aboriginal Australians, to name a few—are precisely those that have not only retained their relevance, but which have become more urgent in recent times. If, as Marjorie Barnard once asserted, no time is inopportune for a protest, perhaps it is also true that now is always a good time for a book about a protester.

TO HER CONTEMPORARIES, Dark was always something between a mountain sphinx and a wonder-woman: a doctor's wife who looked after her husband's phone calls, ran a few community groups in town, kept a large house and garden in perfect order, raised two children and wrote prize-winning novels in her spare time. Dark gave interviews readily, but she was reticent about her private life and rarely discussed her feelings. The comforts of her home and the loving relationship she clearly enjoyed with her husband aroused both the admiration of her less competent and the envy of her less fortunate contemporaries. After a visit to Varuna in 1940, Dorothy Fitzpatrick was moved to reorganise her flat in Melbourne along more elegant lines, and she wrote to Dark: 'I hope you don't feel disconcerted at my description of the domesticating influence which I feel you are ... having on me. We don't very often come into contact with really well-run households.' Marjorie Barnard, on the other hand, was rather jealous of the advantages which she felt her fellow writer enjoyed, always found fault with her books and finally let her pent-up resentments burst forth in an interview she recorded for the Australia Council in 1975:

People [i.e., writers in the 1930s] had to have a job, unless like Dorothea Mackellar

they had private means or like Eleanor Dark who had a devoted husband who did everything to encourage her. He built her a beautiful little study in the garden and relieved her of all domestic duties and practically stood over her and said 'Write, my darling, write.' It mightn't have been entirely good for her but she was able to give her time and all her energies to writing.

Much of the biography under discussion here might be read as a response to this point of view.

*A Writer's Life* is the first biography of Eleanor Dark to be published and, inasmuch as it includes extensive discussion of her novels, the first full critical account of her work since A. Grove Day's contribution to the Twayne World Author Series (1976). It is a substantial volume for an Australian biography, over 500 pages, including accurate and comprehensive references, a bibliography (though not, regrettably, a full bibliography of Dark's writing) and an unusually good index. The authors have been painstaking in their research, have brought a questioning intelligence to bear on the material and have told their story with verve and sympathy. I detected very few errors of fact for a book of this size, and the authors' analysis of Dark's work is always informative and suggestive. They are very good on the networks, literary, personal and political, in her life, though the world of leftist politics in Katoomba in which Eric played such a prominent part is not rendered with the vividness that Roger Milliss attains in his incomparable *Serpent's Tooth* (1984); sometimes, indeed, the town in which they lived for over 50 years seems to disappear as completely as it does in those Blue Mountain fogs and become nothing more than a disembodied name.

Less successful are the attempts to provide cultural and political contexts, which often have a perfunctory and potted feel to them. Its half-hearted history is the weakest aspect of the book, in which summaries that might be suitable for a high school text book take the place of a serious effort to provide relevant details drawn from the most reliable recent research. Despite its importance in Dark's thought (and its prominence in 1930s intellectual discourse generally), the discussion of eugenics (pp115–117) is disappointing, and the authors do not develop their insight that her views changed between the writing of *Prelude to Christopher* (1933) and *Waterway*

(1938). The brief description of political repression and press censorship in the early years of World War II is inadequate to the discussion of their effect on writers and politics, and the authors do not appear to have consulted John Hilvert's study of this issue (*Blue Pencil Warriors*, 1984). Conversely, a good deal of unnecessary information about well-known incidents and individuals is also provided. We don't need a summary of H.V. Evatt's career, nor to be told that 'Australian politics cheated him of his hopes' (p244), and we certainly don't need to be reminded that A.D. Hope called the prose style of *The Tree of Man* 'verbal sludge' (p406), especially as his full description was 'pretentious and illiterate verbal sludge'. Given the importance of ideas in Dark's life and writing, and her sensitivity to intellectual currents, the weakness in the book's coverage of cultural and intellectual history is unfortunate.



Eleanor and Eric Dark, wedding photograph, 1922

More positively, Eric Dark receives due attention, and the authors note that such an interesting figure—bushwalker, conservationist, medical reformer, polemicist, ASIO target—deserves a book of his own. I was amused to read that when Barbara Brooks and Judith Clark visited him in 1986 he asked them to make milk coffee with six teaspoons of sugar. When I interviewed him in 1980 he attributed his longevity to the mixture of marmalade and gorgonzola cheese he ate for lunch each day.

On the whole, the authors achieve a satisfactory balance between Dark's life and work and between the different stages of her life. Only her last 20 years seem to be dismissed rather summarily, but what can you say about a writer who is no longer writing? Explanations are offered as to why Dark fell silent after *Lantana Lane* (1958), but I do not find them entirely convincing. The authors suggest, for example, that she was 'out of key' with the 'nationalist' ethos of the 1950s, which demanded an ironic and detached stance from intellectuals (p375). But Dark had always been out of sympathy with the main currents of her time, and protest had always been the lifeblood of her work. Nor is it accurate to describe the 1950s as 'nationalist' (p372): it was a period of neo-colonial subservience, as the genuinely nationalist Dark deplored; national development was on the agenda

(as it has always been), but firmly integrated into the geopolitical priorities of our great and powerful friends. If the 1950s demanded anything from intellectuals it was enthusiasm for the Queen, technology and defence of the Free World. The puzzling thing about the hedonistic 1960s is why Dark's psychological novels, closely focused as they were on the minds of self-absorbed individuals, did not appeal more strongly to the 'me generation': too much angst and not enough pleasure, perhaps. More to the point, however, is the argument that those who regarded themselves as the first generation of professional writers in the 1930s felt alienated and adrift in the 1950s when the appreciation of literature was largely taken over by university English departments which valued very different literary traditions and genres. Dark's rejection by academe was sealed in 1951 with a hostile article in *Southerly* by G.A. Wilkes, by then well on his way to becoming the first professor for the suppression of Australian literature at Sydney University.

Writers of biographies, especially if their subject is herself a writer, are usually obliged to get on top of vast masses of documentary information—letters, diaries, notes, published books, interviews—and somehow

make it cough up a story. In the main, Brooks and Clark have kept command of their material with tact and tenacity, but there is one issue on which I think the evidence has overwhelmed them: housework. From her letters and diaries you would get the impression that the biggest thing in Dark's life was domestic obligation (cooking, sewing, cleaning), dominating her thoughts and devouring the time in which she should have been writing. Is this credible?

I think the authors could have done more to interrogate Dark's constant grumbling about housework. They worry and nag at the issue but mostly just let Dark's words stand without comment; thus, they note briefly that there was usually a maid working at Varuna, but they dwell on Dark's complaints about how difficult and unreliable servants were.

Brooks and Clark seem to want it both ways: on the one hand, they know the refrain cannot be taken at face value; on the other, as modern feminists, they are convinced of women's double burden and are reluctant to write anything that would undermine belief in her domestic oppression. The basis for their attitude is the proposition that women writers of the 1930s were doubly disadvantaged as writers because, as women, they faced a constant round of domestic obligations from which the male writers of the period were mercifully free. Despite its having become an article of faith in some quarters, there is little evidence for this thesis. The difficulties faced by writers at this time were not determined primarily by gender but by the economics of the publishing industry. With the exception of popular novelists like F.J. Thwaites and travel writers like Ion Idriess, no writer of this period could make a living from literature, and they were all restricted to writing in the time left over from paid employment, whether it was in the home, the factory or the office. Leonard Mann returned from a hard day's labour at the Victorian Employers Federation and, later, the Commonwealth Aircraft Factory to burn the midnight oil over his novels. Frank Dalby Davison did all sorts of odd jobs through the Depression and eventually got permanent work as a journalist with the Department of Labour and National Service.

Even the silvertail Patrick White had to work: he wrote *Happy Valley* while jackarooing on the frosty Monaro. How do Brooks and Clark know he did not have to darn socks (p163)? He certainly did the housework while living at Dogwoods and still managed to write *The Tree of Man*, *Voss* and a few other classics; nor does he appear to have had domestic help at Centennial Park. On the evidence of this biography, Dark had no trouble getting away from domestic duties and her demanding family to do research for *The Timeless Land* in Sydney and even to rent a flat there for two weeks (p219). Nor did they prevent her from 'shut[ting] herself in her study for days' to finish the novel in time for a publisher's deadline.

**D**OMESTIC DUTIES can be both a refuge and an excuse: a refuge allowing us to avoid the much harder business of writing when we are not in the mood, and an excuse when a project does not turn out as well as we hoped it would. In Dark's case it is clear that, for all the whingeing, housework did not inhibit her creativity or productiveness at all. She wrote prolifically throughout the 1920s, '30s and '40s, producing as much as anybody who enjoyed the magical time and freedom she complained of lacking.

It seems to me that she loved domestic duties—tending the garden, making jam, cooking for dinner parties, knitting, looking after the children—and that they were an essential part of a nourishing family structure that gave her support and encouragement, fed her creative imagination and brought love, companionship and security into her life.

Brooks' and Clark's somewhat uncritical response to Dark's complaints about housework occasionally lead them to take unacceptable liberties with the evidence. At one point (p210) they make the risky assumption (always the most dangerous temptation for biographers of writers) that the reflections of a fictional narrator in *Waterway* are Dark's personal comments on her own marriage. At another they quote Marjorie Barnard's green-eyed fantasy of Eric leaning over Eleanor ('Write, my darling ...') and they propose that the posture could imply control rather than support (p216). Perhaps it could, but since the scene occurred only in Barnard's imagination, to treat it as though it were a real event is not a legitimate manoeuvre.

How does one account for Dark's apparent obsession with the minutiae of daily life? Considering that most of the



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complaints occur in letters to acquaintances and colleagues, one possibility is that they were the stock recourse of a reluctant letter-writer who knew she had to say something, but was not sure what, and did not want to write about anything too personal. An interesting feature of Dark's letters and diary entries is their emotional reserve: they are businesslike, factual and unrevealing. Diary entries record the weather, major activities and her state of health, but they rarely offer any hint as to states of mind or thoughts about others; a significant exception to this rule is when Dark reports that she has been reading somebody's autobiography and finds it 'an embarrassingly nauseous self-revelation' (17 April 1940). When Marjorie Barnard visited the Darks she sent pages of thick description to Nettie Palmer; Eleanor recorded in her diary: 'met Miss Barnard on 2.59 train'; 'saw Miss B. off on 2.20 train' (Diary, 4 and 7 October 1940). Such laconicism may help to explain why many reviewers found Dark's work cold and dry; she often did appear to be interested more in ideas than people.

The authors of this biography comment on Dark's wall of secrecy, but I am not sure that they have entirely succeeded in getting past it. Throughout this long and absorbing book I found myself wondering, 'But what was she really like?' She wrote about sex and women's sexual desires with a frankness that was extraordinary—perhaps unique—for her time; did she like it herself? What sort of men did she find attractive? (Or didn't she?) Karl Schapiro was attracted to her but thought her ringlets made her look asexual. (She brought him breakfast in bed while he was a guest at Varuna, surely an unnecessarily generous level of hospitality and not a gesture one would expect from somebody who hated cooking.)

**A**PPARENTLY, Dark was a heavy smoker; did she drink much? What was the kidney problem from which she suffered? What food did she like? Did she win at the tennis and bridge parties she enjoyed? Did she and Eric eat cakes at the Paragon? (Her diary records that she had coffee and sandwiches there on 12 April 1940, so the answer would seem to be 'occasionally'.) Brooks and Clark are reflective and stimulating on why she wrote, her hopes for what her work might achieve and the reasons why she finally fell so silent, but there is a lot more to be said about big questions like those.

Still, a book which opens issues for

## Chợ Bến Thành: Richmond

Generous planetrees have embowered  
the slim ways to little Saigon  
in tigerland while

the Lunar Festival saunters along  
bubbling in crowds  
from durian to pork, and busy-back again.

Sundayesque, double-parked, lightly erotic in sandals  
I flower to the car radio's piano concerto,  
completed after somebody's death,

while the girls in chocked-high black heels  
are going high-pitchedly by  
and impish tots adhering to balloons;

now summer cottons toodle round the corner,  
moonily smiling amid the Mekong-slow  
drivers who can't drive

to parking-spots under the friendly trees.

Surely this is the lively Australian brand of city  
some of our dear fellow-citizens  
appear to hate.

**Chris Wallace-Crabbe**

debate is more valuable than one which seeks to close them off. One of its most welcome revelations is how good a writer of non-fiction Dark was. Her essays and talks, mostly unpublished, are a joy to read—logical, elegant, calm, hard-hitting, topical today in both their themes and stance. Wowers of both the left and right would do well to study her thoughts on censorship, while those who prate about the need for political leadership would be sobered by a reading of 'The peril and the solitude'. The concluding words of Dark's short essay on Caroline Chisholm, revealing so much of her humanist social outlook and her anti-chauvinist nationalism, are as relevant to the Centenary of Federation as they were to the NSW Sesquicentenary in 1938:

When we ask ourselves ... where we are heading as a nation, the story of Caroline Chisholm seems to point us, not to those dreams of 'empire' which were so freely predicted for us, but to a less spectacular

and not unattainable goal, where we might repeat with truth and pride the words spoken by an Irish emigrant nearly a hundred years ago: 'This is a fine, plentiful country—there is no person starving here.'

A review of Dark's contribution to Australian cultural and political thought would be a good starting point for those who deplore the absence of vision in today's politics and are concerned about the general popular disillusion with our political parties.

I hope the authors of *A Writer's Life* will go on to prepare collections of Dark's non-fiction and short stories. They would constitute the perfect complement to a biography which is sure to be both a stimulus towards and an essential guide for further, perhaps more deeply analytic, studies of this attractive and remarkable writer. ■

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## Z hits the spot

*The Mask of Zorro*, dir. Martin Campbell. Martin Campbell is the New Zealand director who spruced up James Bond (in *GoldenEye*) and was also responsible for the stylishness of the British telefilm, *Reilly Ace of Spies*, which established the reputation of his fellow countryman, Sam Neill. So it should come as no surprise that his *Zorro* is a glorious lark. But it is a welcome pleasure: after this year's Grand Parade of Retro Duds you had at least to flirt with the suspicion that inventiveness vacated Hollywood at about the time merchandising moved in. But in *Zorro* even the mask, handed out to all preview-comers, is more whimsy than hard sell. When Antonio Banderas first dons it, the accompanying chord has the twang of collusive satire.

Campbell has gone to basics: he's hired the right actors, the best horses and the kind of stuntmen that leave you breathless with laughter and delight—I clapped! The double act of Anthony Hopkins as the elder Zorro, Don Diego de la Vega, and Antonio Banderas as a pratfalling Zorro aspirant, Alejandro Murrieta, is as good as you could

wish. They play with such panache you could credit their moving on to *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*. Catherine Zeta-Jones barely contains herself as Elena, the ripe girl/woman beloved of both heroes and of the venal Don Raphael Montero (Stuart Wilson). And when fully robed she also plays a plucky Zola-esque heroine, rescuing an entire population of Mexican extras from violent death in the mines while the Dons entertain themselves, endlessly, with the best sword-play you've seen since Errol Flynn beat Basil Rathbone. The music is subordinate (well—as subordinate as castanets get) and splendid. The horses are even better.

—Morag Fraser

## But basic

*The Acid House*, dir. Paul McGuigan. This latest adaptation from the writing of Irvine Welsh (of *Trainspotting* fame) takes the form of a compendium of three short films, each taken from his collection of stories, *The Acid House*. The first, *The Granton Star Cause*, features Boab (Stephen McCole), a congenital loser turned into a fly by a vengeful and depressed God; in *The Soft Touch*, Johnny (Kevin McKidd), a

weak-willed and feeble patsy, is used and abused by all around him, but learns nothing from it; finally, in the eponymous *The Acid House*, a drug-abusing football hooligan named Coco (Ewen Bremner) swaps bodies with a new-born babe from a middle-class family.

All are set in the depressed working-class housing estates of North Edinburgh and, unsurprisingly, all tend somewhat towards the grim, despite the surreal touches. As you'd expect from Welsh (who also wrote the screenplay), they're full of unlikeable characters barely holding even to the margins of society, unemployed, hopeless, surrounded by drugs and violence and abandoned by the rest of their community. Fun stuff. There are the occasional doses of black humour to alleviate the gloom (for instance, a policeman extols the virtues of privatising state assets to Boab while brutalising him for vandalising a telephone booth—the officer is a British Telecom shareholder you see), but unlike *Trainspotting*, this humour isn't matched by much inventiveness in the film's visual style.

Perhaps because of their brevity and low budgets, each of the short sections has the feel of a student film, a superior one admittedly, but still lacking in that synergy of style and content that makes a film like *Trainspotting* or *Pulp Fiction* really sing; where those films' soundtracks added a whole new energy and dynamism to their narratives, in *The Acid House* the music simply seems to be there to plaster over the cracks in the film-making. It's a little unfair to compare *The Acid House* and *Trainspotting*, just because they both come from the same writer—every director has their own vision after all—but I can't help wishing the former had come out a little bit more like the latter.

—Allan Thomas

## Something is quite right

*Madeline*, dir. Daisy von Scherler Mayer. Smelly cheese, straw hats, idiot clowns and orphans never go astray in a good tale for children. Not to mention a little villainous wit and the odd silly French accent. The makers of *Madeline* not only appreciate the value of having a good laugh at the expense of the French but thankfully see worth in making a kids' film that doesn't resemble an extended Pepsi commercial.

This film version of Ludwig Bemelmans' classic *Madeline* picture-book series is



charming without being saccharine and artful without being pretentious. While it never matches the visual or literary potency of Bemelmans' books, the film manages to weave four of his six stories together with more than adequate grace. Madeline's famous appendix scar features along with her dip in the Seine, Genevieve the hero mutt, and Pepito the Spanish 'Bad Hat'.

The *Madeline* books, like *Tintin*, were conceived by their authors in the ideal form: their magic is inextricably linked to the quality of the drawing. While *Tintin* relies on an unreal tidiness, *Madeline* works with a glorious chaos that can never be captured by live action. Not even Jim Carrey could make the body shapes of the drawn Miss Clavel. However, intelligent art design and wise casting have gone some way to dealing with the shift of forms. Nigel Hawthorne brings a poignancy to the villainous Lord Covington (Cucuface), Frances McDormand handles the gliding figure of Miss Clavel with delicate sass, and nine-year-old Hatty Jones is appropriately small and grumpy in the title role. But sadly, while the house 'was covered with vines', 'the crack on the ceiling' didn't have 'the habit of sometimes looking like a rabbit'.

But I'm not complaining too loudly. This is a very good children's film, and will entertain adults and children alike well beyond its opening summer.

—Siobhan Jackson

## Bigger is better

*T-Rex: Back to the Cretaceous* (Imax cinemas), dir. Brett Leonard. The first thing you have to accept in Imax cinemas is that the technology is king. If you can do that without grumbling about the lack of subtlety or whingeing about character development then you are going to have a good, Luna-Parkish time, for about 45 to 50 minutes.

Imax movies are mostly documentaries, but *T-Rex* is a drama of sorts, a thin storyline that doesn't need any elaboration since it acts as a framework for dinosaurs to jump out of the screen at you and go AURRRGHHH! *T-Rex* is in 3D, and you have to wear black plastic headpieces. The experience is extraordinary once you get used to the lack of circulation to your skull ('Loosen it next time, stupid,' said my sister) since the action escapes the screen and swarms at you. You can't help flinching as rock chips fly at you, or a branch whangs

back at your face. Rock climbs become vertiginous in Imax even without 3D on the seven-storey screen: very little peripheral vision is left to remind you that you're in a cinema.

You have a sense of being there, almost able to touch things, bathed in a friendly illusion of peril in complete safety. But the most amazing thing I noticed was, huge as Imax is, how 3D restores the smallness of the human frame to the screen. Two-dimensional camera images flatten out faces and bodies and create that illusion of largeness that causes one to marvel at the smallness of actors met in the flesh. In 3D film that compact substantiality is restored, and it's worth seeing just for that.

—Juliette Hughes

## Barbed humour

*Life is Beautiful (La Vita È Bella)*, dir. Roberto Benigni. This is not just a very funny film, but also a profound film about the risks and gains of being very funny. For an hour or so, it is a delightful slapstick, with some darker undertones.

In the 1930s, Guido (Roberto Benigni) and his friend Ferruccio (Sergio Bustric) arrive in a Tuscan town, manage to find work and embark upon a series of high-spirited adventures. Guido falls in love with Dora (Nicoletta Braschi), a school teacher, whom he nicknames 'Princess'. They have a fairy-tale romance.

Like Lear's Fool, however, Guido is able, artfully, to confront realities which others avoid. In trying to impress Dora, for example, he performs a brilliant satire of fascism in front of her school. Guido happens to be Jewish. He finally manages to steal Dora from under the nose of her beau and carry her off on a horse. This is the end of the fairy tale.

The film jumps forward a few years. Guido and Dora now have a son, Giosué (Giorgio Cantarini). The family is sent to a concentration camp. Guido now uses humour for purposes of denial: he will go to any length to convince Giosué that they have actually come to a holiday camp.

I can't think of a comedy which gives itself a greater challenge than that of making fun *in* the death camps. Which is quite different from making fun *of* the camps. The script strives for a balance between pathos and farce. It doesn't always work but it comes mighty close.

—Michael McGirr SJ

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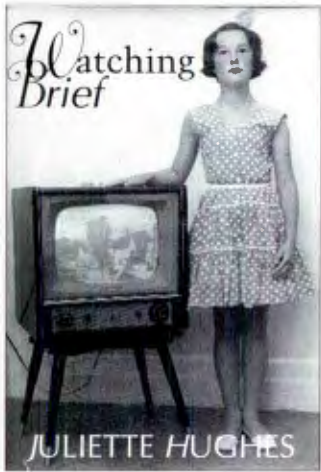
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# Bard of the box

*Nothing in his life  
Became him like the leaving of it;*  
—*Macbeth*, I.iv, 7

**B**UT THE REST of Malcolm's encomium does not apply to Dennis Potter, television's great dramatic pioneer, author of *The Singing Detective* and over 40 other works. He did not 'throw away' his life 'as

though 'twere a trifle'. Humphrey Carpenter's decent, thorough biography shows us a difficult, occasionally impossible man, but one who accepted death while knowing the worth of what he was leaving behind:

Below my window ... the blossom is out in full now. It's a plum tree, it looks like apple blossom but it's white, and looking at it, instead of saying, 'Oh that's nice blossom' ... I see it as the whitest, frothiest, blossomest blossom that there ever could be, and I can see it ... the nowness of everything is absolutely wondrous ...

There are those who say that Dennis Potter's greatest creation was himself, especially as he appeared in his last interview, with Melvyn Bragg. He had placed shadows of himself in so many of the plays that to see the man as he was dying was hardly a shock at first. The shock welled up gradually as you realised that yes, he was a human being, not an artefact whose constructs you could dispute.

There are moments one calls 'great television', and this was one. A good part of the significance of the occasion was his status as someone who had played omnipotently with images of his own life, now allowing the medium he had used for that game into his death.

Potter's strength was in always obeying that most important rule for writers: write about what you know about. And his life contained such extremes of suffering and joy, poverty and luxury, repressive conscience and orgiastic id, that he had to keep mining it.

His struggles with social and sexual repression mirrored that of the times: he lived in an extraordinary era when the working classes were allowed a chance at real education to move up the social ladder and form a meritocracy.

Crippled by psoriatic arthropathy, and eventually killed by cancer caused by the toxic drugs he had to take, he was an icon of classlessness, though he never renounced his background. Rather, he used it obsessively. Socialism was no longer a traitor's game for bored public-schoolboys—Potter and his contemporaries felt the need for social justice. (He would have been a Labour politician had his chronic illness not prevented him.) As a working-class boy who won grammar-school places and got into Oxford, he was able to see almost all sides, and though he became rich he never lost the childhood connection, never ceased to hate Thatcherism, yet loved to live well on his considerable earnings.

His sexual obsessions were, for many, harder to accept than his socialistic principles. His illness must have had something to do with it: it deformed his hands horribly, and caused his skin to flake copiously, often confining him to his home. He was also sexually abused by an uncle when he was ten, a circumstance continually referred to in his works. This is sometimes mentioned by Carpenter as a possible cause for his addiction to visiting prostitutes and

violent fantasies, despite his life-long, happy marriage and excellent relationship with his daughters. I am not sure whether Potter actually achieved the large numbers of paid sexual connections he frequently confessed to; it seems to me more likely that at least some of them were part of his imagination, fuelled by illness and neurosis.

The sexuality in Potter's plays (I have seen *Pennies From Heaven*, *The Singing Detective*, *Lipstick on Your Collar*, *Karaoke* and *Cold Lazarus*, so I am arguing from what I have seen there), is aesthetically justified by its context. There is an implicit or explicit political/emotional commentary that rescues Potter's loucheness from charges of misogyny and exploitation. I can't help linking Potter's plays with Joyce in this area, particularly the Brothel Scene in *Ulysses*. They are layered with experience and determination to speak the truth about the fears in our joys.

I feel that politics underlies a good deal of the animus against the sex in Potter's later work. He never ceased to flay the tabloids, Murdoch, managerialism; their house-carls were deployed to put the boot in. Potter may well have been the voice of the emerging socio-sexual revolution in the '60s and '70s, but the last 20 years of his life were spent beating against the tide of the sneaky counter-revolution that disguised itself in flash hedonism and financial rapacity. Carpenter quotes from Potter's 1982 Dublin lecture, 'Occupying Powers', when he made some observations on Rupert Murdoch's funding of a Chair in Language and Communications at Oxford:

Murdoch did not turn up for the ceremonial meal to mark the largesse ... But Rupert has a touch of pure cruelty in his make-up. He sent Kelvin Mackenzie, the sharp little weasel that edits that daily stink they call the *Sun*, and the maladroit fellow had to sit and chew and probably even dribble a bit between two professors. Well, that was one set of cutlery not needed on the crisp linen, I suppose. But

**T**I hope for the sake of all concerned that both the professors were from the Anthropology faculty. **T**HE RUSH TO TOPPLE his reputation and condemn his posthumous works, *Karaoke* and *Cold Lazarus*, was predictable. Just before they were broadcast, Ian Hislop of the *Sunday Telegraph* was the first hyena to snap, gingerly, at the lion's carcass:

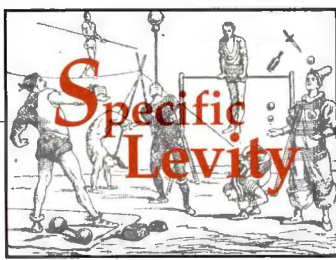
His reputation as the greatest dramatist the medium has ever produced always struck me as being inflated. ... He was used as a talisman for those who wanted to preserve a place in the drama schedules for something more than series about policemen and vets. While obviously sympathising with this argument, I kept feeling that any critical view of Potter had been lost.

What tosh. Nearly everything Potter wrote was accompanied by storms of criticism and controversy. He brought the life of the mind, heart and soul to a medium so much more used to trivialities. Now that he's gone we need another. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance critic.

**Dennis Potter: The Authorised Biography**, Humphrey Carpenter. Faber and Faber, 1998  
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*Eureka Street* Cryptic Crossword no. 70, January–February 1999

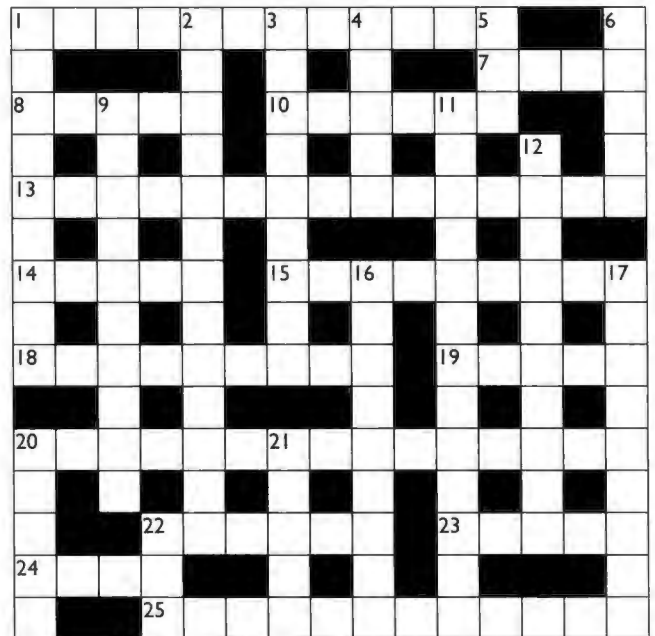
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

1. In the play-acting, dunce held son—which was not what was on the programme! (3-9)
7. Release a French act. (4)
8. Included in the props for the play, there could be some bunch of twigs to be used as a broom. (5)
10. Attack the accusation. (6)
13. Generous helpings at the end of the course—sounds like political justice?! (7,8)
14. Such luck to come across a laced coffee! (5)
15. That troublesome imp misses class often, filling the teacher with despair. (9)
18. Some grassy eminence for conservationist, Robert? (5,4)
19. Type of housing favoured by singles. (5)
20. Reception is poor? I claim static on a radio is a matter of getting used to the elements. (15)
22. Possibly gain an award for enduring such pain. (6)
23. Wrapped in wool, gingerly creep back into the shelter against the cold. (5)
24. Sister Angela icily includes mention of the secular. (4)
25. The conservatory could be a nice place for actors to relax. (3,5,4)

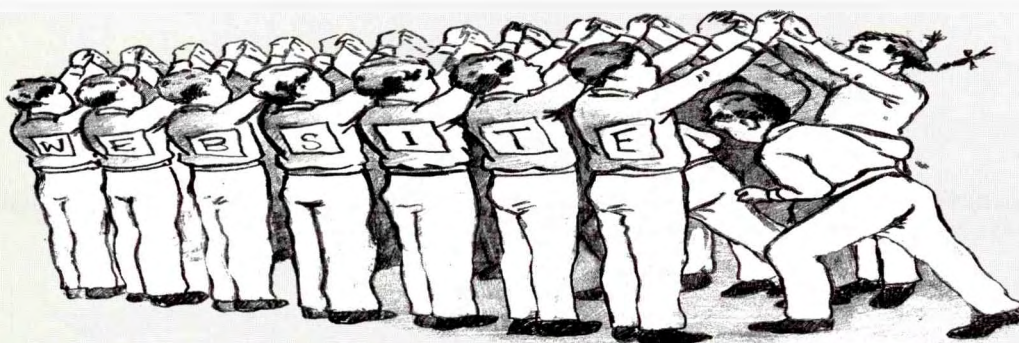
DOWN

1. Ruling dancing outlawed for over-stepping the line, perhaps? (2-7)
2. Grasp the scope of the field! (13)
3. Relocate typical nude (remove 'no date' sign) and place in Gallery beside 'The Gums'. (9)
4. As a matter of course, bend the philosopher in discussion, perhaps. (5)
5. What's owed is earned. (3)
6. Place where foremost loyal officers come up swiftly. (5)
9. Public transport returns to team leading national championship event. It's a sinking feeling! (10)
11. Perhaps CIA notes guilt of the suspect, using a form of sign language? (13)
12. Art, provided I return 24-across, is meretricious. (10)
16. Is one's personal worth reflected in the mirror? (4-5)
17. Girl in class heard to get the facts wrong. (9)
20. Headless specimen is more than enough! (5)
21. Doing a bit of a parody of chap in grey suit. (5)
22. Play a part in Canberra. (3)



Solution to Crossword no. 69, December 1998

C	H	A	I	R	S		C	A	P	S	I	C	U	M	
O		T		O	A		L	L	O		A				
A	C	H	T	U	N	G		C	R	A	W	L	E	R	
L		E	N	A		O	N	D		T					
F	L	I	N	D	E	R	S	H	I	G	H	W	A	Y	
A	S	E	I	O						A		R			
C	U	T			L	A	C	K	L	U	S	T	R	E	
E				A										P	
	S	T	A	Y	E	D	C	O	L	D			P	R	O
I		I			I		B	E	R		L				
M	I	T	C	H	E	L	L	L	I	B	R	A	R	Y	
M		M	O	E						I	O	L		G	
U	N	I	F	O	R	M			G	L	A	C	I	A	L
N		C		K		M			E		R		N		O
E	V	E	R	Y	D	A	Y			A	D	V	E	R	T

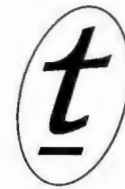


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