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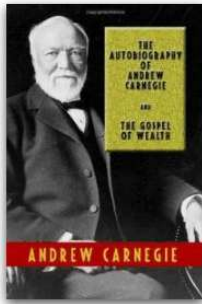
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Wayne Swan, Clive Palmer and the gospel of wealth

POLITICS

Binoy Kampmark



'The problem of our age is the proper administration of wealth, that the ties of brotherhood may still bind together the rich and poor in harmonious relationship.' Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth*.

Australia's Treasurer, Wayne Swan, is flirting with populism. His target is a large one: Australia's mining, and to be exact, the big three, Andrew Forrest, Clive Palmer and Gina Rinehart.

His [article](#) in March's *The Monthly* is one of sentimental reflection: 'A decade ago, as I waited for my order outside a Maroochydore fish and chip shop, a tall, barefoot young man strolled past wearing a T-shirt that read: 'Greed is good. Trample the weak. Hurdle the dead.' Australia was the radical experiment, the egalitarian social laboratory where wealth 'made it to the bottom'.

Swan's essay does have certain overtones regarding wealth. Bertolt Brecht, in his adaption of Peter Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, suggested two types of crime when it comes to a bank: founding one and robbing one. The latter is illegal because it breaks the law; the former is a tolerable theft. How much is society willing to tolerate?

Policy is not often made along such Brechtian lines, even if Swan is suggesting that it is. What matters to Swan is the dilemma of maintaining the idea, however illusory, that Australia remains the equal country. Australians, he urges, pride themselves 'on being a nation that's more equal than most'.

Egalitarianism, he argues, spurred on the stimulus packages of the Labor government, an effort to prevent economic dislocation. The 'middle class' society, as Swan refers to it, is what requires protection, though he can't resist political posturing: the idea that Australia still retains its 'egalitarian social contract' fixed by 'a fair and flexible industrial relations system'. (He then, contradicting himself, admits that there is economic disadvantage in pockets of Australian society.)

Swan's criticism is valid insofar as it's a warning about how various disproportionately powerful groups can unduly influence policy. Government's role, after all, should be a protective one.

The paradox here is that the 'vested' interests Swan has taken issue with are the ones that have been, if somewhat artificially, the creators of Australian wealth: mining, and, at points, banking. The latter's influence is particularly acute, given that some members of the banking 'big four' decided to avoid Reserve Bank policy on interest rates altogether. Swan might have made mention of that.

Mining, by virtue of its sheer power and prestige, has assumed the mantle of the untouchable, so much so that taxing its proceeds, at least to some, is deemed an unpatriotic act. Swan alludes to this when he speaks about 'vested interests' who have amassed such wealth they 'now feel they have a right to shape Australia's future to satisfy their own self-interest'.

An example of this can be gathered by the remarks of Western Australian Premier Colin Barnett. For Barnett, mining is beyond the meddlesome policies of government, an attitude that suggests total abdication to the forces of the commodity market.

'It's inappropriate for a Treasurer of Australia to be making personal attacks on individuals, whether they be wealthy or not.' The illusion of the egalitarian society must be maintained, smudges avoided, wrinkles hidden. 'Can I assure the public they [Swan's remarks] have no undue influence with the West Australian government.' The public are evidently not there to be protected.

In a country that lacks practitioners of Andrew Carnegie's *Gospel of Wealth*, a measure of balance towards wealth, one that entails responsible public policy and private initiatives, is required.

For Carnegie, who amassed his fortune in the age of the American robber barons, philanthropy was the responsibility of those with money, the means by which excessive quantities of wealth might be redistributed. Money, after all, did not come from nowhere.

The gospel, however, holds no purchase among the Palmers and the Rineharts. Indeed, Rinehart's father, the mining magnate Lang Hancock, showed little love for the human race, enticing 'no good half castes' to a central point for the collection of welfare checks, only to 'dope the water up so that they were sterile and would breed themselves out in the future'.

A balance has to be sought. Mining companies, given the enormous influence they have in Australian society, have responsibilities in managing their wealth. Governments are perfectly entitled to force that claim.

This is not to suggest that mining companies are inherently Brechtian 'criminals', though their behaviour might sometimes suggest that. Atlas Iron founder David Flanagan prides himself and his fellow miners as responsible tax payers and employers. 'And we get the same benefit as all other companies, and we get the same concessions as all other companies and we want to contribute to a health system' (ABC Sydney, 6 March).

What is lacking in Swan's polemic is where one goes after the pie has been distributed, equally or otherwise. When the mining magnates have nothing to mine, what then?

The debate should be taken further — to see how Australian wealth can be created in a world with limited commodities. The dangers of the banana republic,

amidst the mining triumphalism, remain all too apparent, but that is a terror few, including Swan, are willing to contemplate.

Flattening the Church

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. Even with the passing of half a century, among Catholics there is still contention and ambivalence about the legacy of this momentous meeting.

Many of a conservative bent see the need for reforms to be reined in, and a return to a more traditional Catholicism. At the other end of the spectrum, progressives argue that reforms didn't go far enough, and the promise of the council was never fully realised.

They say this is particularly the case with the role and place of the laity. Council teachings flattened the hierarchy of the Church, speaking of it as 'the People of God', a community of clergy, religious and lay people all sharing in the 'priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ'.

The man featured in this interview on Eureka Street TV is firmly in the progressive camp. Robert Fitzgerald is a prominent lay leader in the Australian Catholic Church, and a distinguished public servant, who has served at the highest level in a number of government bodies.

The interview took place at a recent conference in Sydney about Catholic lay leadership where he gave the keynote address, 'The time has come — but are we willing?' He argued that as lay people now run most of the Catholic educational, health and welfare institutions, this lay leadership needs to be more formally recognised by the Church and extended further into parish and diocesan roles.

Fitzgerald has degrees in law and commerce from the University of NSW. He practiced as a commercial lawyer for over 20 years, including stints with large law firms and in his own legal practice. Following this he was Community and Disability Services Commissioner and Deputy Ombudsman in NSW, and since 2004 has been a full-time federal Productivity Commissioner.

He has been involved extensively in public policy over many years, including appointments to the National Competition Council, the Ministerial Advisory Council on Social Security and the Commonwealth Inquiry into the Definition of Charities. He also chaired the Commonwealth Taskforce on Franchising Regulation and the Franchising Code Administration Council.

For over 30 years he's had volunteer leadership roles in numerous community organisations and charities, including time as president of the Australian Council of Social Service and the NSW Branch of the St Vincent de Paul Society, as chair of the National Roundtable of Nonprofit Organisations and JOBfutures Ltd, and serving on a number of boards of community and not-for-profit organisations.

In 1994 he was made a Member of the Order of Australia, and in 2001 was

awarded an honorary doctorate by the Australian Catholic University where he is now also an Adjunct Professor.

Women chained to the human dairy farm

COMMUNITY

Catherine Marshall

Women have fought the long, hard fight, marching into battle with a baby tugging on one heel and a man hanging off the other. And while the man has largely loosened his grip, the baby — how can we blame it? — never will. Many women are still forced to submit, if not to patriarchy then certainly to maternal instinct.



And in a somewhat cannibalistic response, their contemporaries have taken offence at those who dare to favour motherhood over career success.

Childbirth and breastfeeding — the only jobs that can still be done exclusively by females — are casualties of these destructive, so-called 'mommy wars', in which liberated women fight among themselves about which is the single best way of being a woman. These magnificent biological functions have spawned the new feminist battlelines: natural versus medicated birth, bottle versus breast, stay-at-home versus childcare.

Much like the educated women of the 18th and 19th centuries, who outsourced the 'distasteful' job of breastfeeding to wet-nurses, modern mothers are being encouraged to regard childcare as some kind of scourge, a shackle designed to hold them back from complete fulfilment.

Simultaneously, they are urged to attend to their appearance so that their visages are pleasing to their male counterparts: Botox, silicone, Brazilian waxes and intensive gym sessions ensure that women remain relevant in an appearance-obsessed world.

It's no wonder they find themselves torn asunder in an oedipal tug-of-war between those who demand their attention most: men and babies.

France's 'foremost feminist thinker', Elisabeth Badinter, claims in her book *Conflict: The Woman and the Mother*, that the frequent inclusion of babies in the conjugal bed quashes intimacy for the parents and freezes out the father. The act of breastfeeding, she says, has usurped women's sexuality and reduced them to the status of chimpanzees. And the La Leche League's ideological 'fatwas' are responsible for holding women back from professional success.

In short, the pleasure that women might derive from their own bodies, both sexually and in their maternal expression, is excised from this feminist argument; simply, they exist for the enjoyment of men rather than the nourishment of babies.

Badinter, who in an earlier book argued that the maternal instinct doesn't exist, interprets the trend towards long-term breastfeeding and natural parenting as an

unfair competition in which the mothers who discard their careers and focus instead on their children are the winners, while those who outsource childcare and climb the corporate ladder are cast as bad mothers. An inversion, in a way, of 18th and 19th century French society, except that career wet nurses didn't have feminists speaking up on their behalf.

Her criticism extends to legislation that gives Western European women extended maternity leave, implying it deliberately holds women back in their careers and locks them into the role of an all-hours, mobile milk bank.

For Badinter, the rallying call for a return to breastfeeding equals a rejection of the feminist gains she and her peers fought so hard to achieve. Mothers, she fears, are being pressured by breastfeeding activists and essentialist feminists into making motherhood the core of their feminine identity.

But real life doesn't always dovetail neatly with socio-political theories: there are mothers who have worked and breastfed, mothers who have stayed home and bottle-fed, mothers who have done any combination or pure form of the above, and women who, through circumstance or choice, have not experienced motherhood at all.

There are women who rejoice in the ideal of being centrally defined as mothers, and those who work as mothers-by-proxy, providing childcare services to women who wish to fulfil their career ambitions. And while they are not well-paid, these women are secretly exalted, for childcare is truly worthy when the carer is being paid for her services.

Perhaps this devaluation of the role of woman as mother is where the real problem lies. Ultimately, arguments such as Badinter's are unconstructive; they simply replace the straightjacket of domestic subservience with one of career success, rather than encouraging women to identify for themselves a lifestyle that appeals to their own ambitions and instincts.

But in the US, millions of new mothers are heeding Badinter's call for a prompt return to work — not because they're radical feminists, but because inadequate maternity leave forces them out of the maternity ward and back into the office.

Jill Lepore, a professor of American history, laments the way in which the competing demands of family and career have increased the burden placed upon women and prematurely disjointed mothers from babies they long to feed. She says in a *New York Times* article that, in the US, 'Strenuous motherhood is de rigueur. Duck into the ladies' room at a conference of, say, professors and chances are you'll find a flock of women waiting ... for a turn with the [breast pump]. Behind closed doors, the nation begins to look like a giant human dairy farm.'

Lepore's view is diametrically opposed to that held by Badinter: breastfeeding mothers, she says, are being forced back to work too quickly and she fears that babies are beginning to experience the breast at a disturbing remove, via the

pump and bottle rather than skin-to-skin contact.

While pumps are undeniably useful, they pose some difficult questions: is it the mother, or her milk, that matters most to the baby? Lapore fears that, with pumps now so sophisticated that they work 'less like pumps and more like babies', women are in fact becoming their own wet nurses.

While Australia can now boast universal maternity leave, Lapore raises a valid point: the herding of women into lactation rooms is one way of ensuring that messy women's business is kept out of the public eye. And one can't help wondering what Elisabeth Badinter would make of this regression to a shameful, secretive practice so redolent of centuries past.

The truth about airborne asylum seekers

POLITICS

John Menadue

The Coalition's one-liners and slogans don't make for a credible refugee policy. Neither does recycling failed policies of the past, like Nauru, which was a failure at the time and cannot be repeated.

The Howard Government policies did stop the boats, but asylum seekers continued to come by air at a rate of about 4000 per annum. In the last 10 years, 76 per cent of asylum seekers coming to Australia came by air.

The trend of asylum seekers to Australia in the 2000s followed very closely the trend to other OECD countries. What drove the numbers of asylum seekers was the ebb and flow of persons fleeing from Iraq, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. The Howard Government policies had little influence on the outcome.

The Nauru 'solution' cost \$1 billion over five years and all but 45 of the 1637 asylum seekers imprisoned on Nauru, who were found to be refugees, finished up in Australia or New Zealand.

The Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship has said very clearly that what meagre success Nauru may have had in the past, it cannot be repeated.

Further, Nauru can play no part in an essential regional arrangement. It is not a transit country as Malaysia is.

The Coalition again proposes temporary protection visas. But these visas resulted in the past in families risking their lives because the holder of the temporary protection visas could not sponsor family. The result ten years ago on SIEV-X was the drowning of 288 women and children.

The Coalition says it will turn the boats back to Indonesia. Indonesia will not accept this and the RAN says that it is too dangerous and will give priority to rescuing people at sea.

The Coalition has said that 'the more boats that come the better'. This cynicism has been reflected in two recent statements by Scott Morrison. The first was to criticise the meagre Government support for vulnerable asylum seekers in the community and second, by suggesting that asylum seekers were bringing infectious diseases to Australia. Surely we are a better country than this.

The High Commissioner for Refugees has warned Australians about 'populist explanations ... and fears that are overblown'. He clearly had the Coalition in mind.

One-liners and slogans don't make for a policy that is humane and also protects our borders.

When cancer is funny

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

50/50 (MA). Director: Jonathan Levine. Starring: Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Seth Rogen, Angelica Houston, Anna Kendrick, Philip Baker Hall, Matt Frewer. 100 minutes

'I don't think we added humour to something that isn't funny,' Seth Rogen told *The Guardian* last year. He was referring to *50/50*, the new comedy in which he co-stars as Kyle, the best friend of 27-year-old Adam (Gordon-Levitt), who has been diagnosed with a rare form of spinal cancer. 'I think most [cancer] movies remove humour from something that at times is very funny.'

Cancer might sound like highly unlikely comedic fodder. But the film has authentic roots: its screenwriter Will Reiser based the script on his own successful battle against cancer, and the support he received from friends such as Rogen. 'In our experience, Will didn't lose his sense of humour,' says Rogen. 'We just wanted to show the reality of it, which to us was a mix of tragic and funny.'

50/50 straddles this line with honesty and sensitivity. The tone often changes from comic to dramatic from one scene to the next. But the two elements hang in balance rather than jarring. This is evident even in the casting: Gordon-Levitt's heartfelt performance as the introverted everyman grappling with the reality of his mortality provides a perfect anchor to Rogen's often crass and buffoonish humour.

The film follows Adam from his diagnosis through the hazards of chemotherapy to still more hazardous surgery. Along the way he encounters the world's worst doctor (who delivers bad news as if he's muttering to his dictaphone); befriends two fellow chemo patients (one of them dies — such is life and cancer); and tries to dodge the overbearing advances of his mother (Houston).

He begins sessions with a young therapist (Kendrick) whose lack of experience tells on her; Adam is impervious to her platitudes and forced empathy. Yet a sense of solidarity grows between them (because he is 'new' at cancer and she is 'new' at therapy), which tends towards friendship and even romance. This subplot is cute, but somewhat awkwardly realised, considering the ethical questions surrounding a therapist becoming personally involved with a patient, even once therapy has ceased.

At the heart of the film is Adam's friendship with Kyle. Rogen's patented loveable buffoon character is played here mostly for crass humour as he encourages Adam to use his illness as a sympathy card to attract women, or as an excuse to use drugs. Still you can never escape the suspicion that he genuinely has his friend's interests at heart. This suspicion is eventually confirmed in moving fashion.

50/50 inevitably gets weepy. The image of a terrified Adam telling his oblivious Alzheimer's suffering father that he loves him, then instinctively reaching for the comfort of his mother before he goes into surgery possibly never to return, could be unbearably mawkish. But the humour and humanity in the film mean that by this point, we genuinely do care. We've laughed, now we cry. Such is life.

Feminism by the numbers

NON-FICTION

Barry Gittins

K-K-Catherine of Aragorn is a stubborn sort, a Catholic *bastionista*. Still, Henry VIII ain't an easy chap to please. Girls, stillborn births, cot deaths, all nudges him sideways, see, pushing Cath *mark I* out of bed 'n' holy headlock. Harry's eye then spies something beginning with 'A', Anne Boleyn, sister of his *bitofallright*, poor ol' Mary. (Poor ol' Mary, gives her all, can't take a trick.) 'Right', says Harry; Anne pays a coquette's lip service, and various pontiffs and potentates block annulment and divorce. 'I'll take my racquet and balls and send off the old bat meself,' Harry declares, pushing himself to the head of the queue, rogering the wee chasm twixt church and state. Harry squires off Anne (that's Anne *mark I*) before she, too, non-delivers the baby boy jackpot. Not for want of banditry. 'Who's next?' bellows Harry, manfully sweeping Jane Seymour off her feet and Anne's head off her shoulders (delicate sword work, all the way from Calais). Sovereign bullock, primordial Lord of lusty hubbies the world o'er, Harry feels his oats, raises doughty anchor and sets sail for greater vistas. The monarch's dalliances dwindle as Janey's spirit espies lands past Albion. (Bye Jane ...)
Bit sad, though, Harry does all right: Jane cashes out with royal heir, Edward VI.

Still counting sacrificial sheep?

(Poor ol' Mary, lurchin' with a bellyful of lower class lovin'.)

Fourth girl takes a stand, Anne of Cleves (Anne *mark II*, now with added Protestantism).

Harry assesses Teutonic precision. A sniff, a pinch, a grunt, then he takes his leave. 'Not for me; try harder', he counsels his counsellors, fingering his blade.

Who'd wanna marry Harry? Better off as Herod's pig, or teacher's pet!

Europe's blue-blooded belles step back: Annulled Anne is now Harry's dutiful, loving sis.

One-eyed snake, spying assassin 'n' 'Vicar of Hell', Sir Francis Bryan, lobs up K-K-Catherine Howard (*Cath mark II*) for Harry's smash. New balls, new lease of life.

But Cath'd rather be groom Culpepper's missus. Harry pairs 'em in headless harmony.

Wearied unto death, Harry stumbles 'pon K-K-Catherine Parr (*Cath mark III*), who learns

a woman survives theological debate with an arsehole by rapidly grovelling for life, liberty and the terrifying yet gainful pursuit of headedness.

(Poor ol' Mary lives and loves; never royally wedded yet never regally deaded.)

What do Harry's sorrowful spouses learn us, in this supposedly enlightened time?

Cath mark I: Stick to your guns (if the emperor of Spain's your nephew) *or*
Anne mark I: Extend your plunge (you'll still be trumped, or trumped up and done over).

Jane: Give 'em boys (and look out for childbed fever) *or*

Anne mark II: Give 'em toys (and learn to play your cards right).

Cath mark II: Try for discretion (blow 'em if they can't take a joke) *or*

Cath (mark III): Make your confession ('I am but a woman').

Harry was a bastard. Ruthless, cranky, vaingloriously wanky.

He was spoiled for choice. A crying shame his women weren't.

Benefits of Australia's UN Security Council bid

POLITICS

Benedict Coleridge



Since Kevin Rudd's resignation as Foreign Minister there has been plenty of speculation about the future of Australia's bid for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. While many people view the bid as worthwhile, it remains [controversial](#) among a vocal minority, with the Shadow Foreign Affairs Minister, Julie Bishop describing it as 'extravagant' and distracting 'from core foreign policy interests'.

Nevertheless, the Gillard Government has reiterated its support for the bid, and although the new Foreign Minister Bob Carr had previously expressed scepticism, since the announcement of his appointment to the ministry he has publicly endorsed it.

This will disappoint those who [oppose](#) the bid. These critics have produced a range of arguments, which have then been wheeled out by the Opposition in Parliament. One is that pursuit of a seat on the Council distracts from Australia's primary interests in its immediate region and vis-À-vis China.

However, the bid rests on a broader conception of Australia's interests and the accompanying conviction that it is important that Australia's 'interests' are not reduced to the affairs of our immediate region.

People often talk about Australian national interests as if each interest exists in isolation and as if they are confined within the Asia-Pacific. But, just as nation-states are increasingly integrated into multilateral forums of governance, so national interests are increasingly interrelated — defence, human rights and trade all intersect.

Australia has a tapestry of interrelated interests, many of which are centred outside its immediate region. Transnational issues such as people movement and refugee settlement cannot be managed effectively without global coordination and discussion. So the 'Australia within its region' mindset is both limiting and outdated.

The Asia-Pacific region is not quarantined — it hosts vital international trade routes and is now the scene of heightened strategic competition between the United States and its allies and North Korea and China.

In Australia's immediate region, the presence of 'foreign' powers is growing, with Russia entering into [significant arms contracts](#) with Indonesia, France ramping up its military commitment to New Caledonia, India expanding its naval capabilities and China investing large sums in countries like [Fiji](#) .

Australia will have to engage with all of these powers and one way of doing so is

to be privy to their deliberations in the Security Council.

A further argument made by opponents of the bid is that it will force Australia to make public and controversial diplomatic choices, especially in scenarios involving disagreement between China and the United States. Were Australia on the Security Council during a crisis such as the recent vote on measures against the Assad regime in Syria, Australia would have to take sides, to the chagrin of whoever it opposed.

These critics argue that shying away from a place on the Security Council would avoid 'nightmare' scenarios of this sort and allow Australia to maintain a balancing act between China, its largest trading partner, and the United States, its major ally.

But this is merely to delay the inevitable. Australia will have to make hard choices in the event of tensions — whether economic or military — between these two powers.

When it comes to controversial security issues such as military action over Taiwan or international action against violent regimes it is impossible for Australia not to take a position. In an increasingly contested region where security threats are growing, would it not be better to be privy to and capable of exerting influence over the deliberations of the permanent members at the Council rather than await their decisions from the outside?

At the very least it would enable Australian diplomats to be closer to important diplomatic discussions.

The cost of the bid has also been a cause for negative commentary. Upward estimates place it at around \$35 million. But when put in perspective that is not a large figure — when the annual defence budget is over \$20 billion, \$35 million to ensure Australia has a voice at the pre-eminent security forum in the world does not seem exorbitant. In fact, it is about half the cost of one of Australia's 24 new F/A 18 Super Hornet fighter jets.

The question is asked, what is the return on this investment for the Australian taxpayer? But not every policy has to be subjected to this question, as if taxpayers are merely shareholders seeking monetary returns on their investments. Policy can be driven by the desire to make a contribution. Australia's bid to join the Council derives from an ambitious vision of the contribution Australia can make on issues of global importance.

In recent months the flaws inherent in the Security Council have been made very clear — the vetos of Russia and China against international action towards the Assad regime in Syria have aroused anger and cynicism about the effectiveness of the Council. That is understandable. Diplomacy can often be slow and tedious, and sometimes achieving multilateral action proves impossible.

But despite this, as a forum for discussion and dialogue, the Council matters —

it allows for positions to be made clear, the first step towards achieving consensus on pressing issues.

What is more, the influence of the Council in conferring legitimacy on the use of military force is undeniable. Recall the debate about the 2003 invasion of Iraq: the absence of UN Security Council support raised the political and diplomatic costs of the operation significantly.

Similarly, it is worth thinking about how the 1999 INTERFET intervention into East Timor would have proceeded without the legitimacy bestowed by a UN Security Council resolution. The Security Council is not 'one more forum' that Australia might join on a whim — for all its flaws it plays an extremely important international role.

The bid may fail — after all, it faces stiff competition from Finland and Luxembourg. But even as a statement of intent it is worth it.

A seat at the UN Security Council would allow the Australian community via the Australian Government to speak out more clearly on issues of moment, and it would allow Australian diplomats to keep their fingers on the pulse of important discussions affecting global diplomatic norms and Australia's regional security.

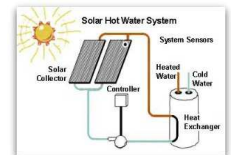
What's more, it might provide Australians the motivation to think through more clearly and consistently the kinds of values we wish as a nation to inform our engagement on the world stage.

Cold showers for unprincipled Labor

POLITICS

Zac Alstin

Given the events of the past few weeks, most people could forgive Julia Gillard for wanting to stay out of hot water entirely. But instead the Government has been roundly criticised for its announcement last week that its solar hot water rebate scheme would come to an end — effective immediately.



Australia's solar hot water system manufacturers expressed [shock](#) and dismay at the abrupt decision, while the Opposition and the Greens were united in their criticisms of the Government's handling of the scheme. Greens Senator Christine Milne [lamented](#) : 'It is not good governance. It is ad hoc. It's poor planning. And it's undermining the jobs of the future.'

She was echoed by Shadow Minister for Climate Change Greg Hunt: 'Nobody could prepare. That's not responsible management. They did it with home insulation. They did it with Green Loans. They did it with Green Start. They did it with solar panels. And now they've done it to the solar hot water sector.'

To be fair, if it were up to the current Opposition (Malcolm Turnbull and Direct Action Plans notwithstanding) the solar hot water rebate scheme might never have started; and if it were up to the Greens, it might never have finished.

Even so, the criticisms from both parties ring true: lest we forget the mistakes of the past, Labor's fresh start had, within a day, been tarnished by a move guaranteed to upset everyone involved, in the name of nothing more than an arbitrary budget surplus deadline.

For those whose primary concern is the environmental benefit of schemes like the solar hot water rebate, the abrupt ending of the scheme in aid of a budget surplus can only imply that Labor's commitment to renewable energy is flexible at best.

For those most worried about economic management, the closure of the rebate scheme without warning to consumers, manufacturers and installers likewise suggests the Government cares more about the appearance of economic rectitude than the reality of sound management skills belied by this clumsy move.

The worst part is that the Government must surely have anticipated the strong negative response to the announcement, yet chose to go ahead anyway. Does this suggest steely determination, aloof arrogance, or sheer desperation?

Only time will tell whether the money gained from the early closure of the scheme will be worth the public disappointment, mistrust, and perceived mismanagement in this minor debacle.

If the Government had made its decision for the sake of some noble goal, the public might forgive the lost opportunities and damage to business. But if it's simply to claw back as much money as possible toward the promised surplus (a promise that must now be kept for the sake of Labor's economic reputation), this is robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Not only in budget terms, but also in terms of Labor's public image. This all serves to reinforce the impression that Labor has lost its principles.

A principled environmentalist might keep the subsidies going despite the economic costs. A principled free-marketeer might drop all subsidies, and let renewable energy technology prove its own worth in the market. There is room between for a response that balances environmental concerns against economic ones, but what kind of principle lies behind a decision to wrong-foot a whole industry naively trusting in a 30 June deadline for the end of Government support?

At the very least, we might hope that a principled Government would keep its word on matters like the expected end-date of a rebate scheme. Failing that, it would strive to do right by the industries and employers who had accepted the Government's initial plans in good faith, only to [discover](#) that: 'This government makes investment decisions very risky.'

In the grand scheme of things, this is not a big deal. But even minor issues contribute to the impression that this is a Government without firm principles to guide its day-to-day behaviour, let alone its direction for the nation.

Church transparency key to protecting children

COMMUNITY

David Cappo

The [report](#) of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry is being read by many people, not only in Victoria but throughout Australia. It is a report par excellence that raises the benchmark on the work of government and community service organisations in the protection of vulnerable children.

The three authors, Philip Cummins, Dorothy Scott and Bill Scales have made a contribution to the needs of vulnerable children in Australia that demands firstly our deep gratitude to them, secondly implementation of their report by the Victorian Government, and thirdly the attention of the Commonwealth Government as well as other state governments.

A new and high benchmark has been set with a clear plan presented to achieve it. Our positive response to the report is our civic duty.

My interest was drawn to this report particularly because of my work in social inclusion and as a social worker in the 1970s in the City of Elizabeth, working in the child protection system of the South Australian government, as well as my role in the mid 1990s coordinating the developing of the Towards Healing document and the Integrity in Ministry document for the Catholic Church in Australia.

This new report is not simply about Victoria's statutory child protection system. It gives 90 recommendations and additional findings to reform the various systems that connect with vulnerable children. This is where its strength lies; it is about a total systems reform and the development of a preventative strategy and high level interventions to respond to increasing levels of need.

It understands the interconnectedness of issues such as family violence, alcohol and other substance misuse, mental health problems, intellectual disability, parental history of abuse and situational stress. And it understands that the response to these issues must also be interconnected.

Much is said of the need for a decentralised focus on services for vulnerable children, the setting up of Area Reference Committees and the co-location of services. This report is refreshing in its clarity about where roles and responsibilities for child protection and the care of vulnerable children lay.

It says 'the relationship between community service organisations and the Victorian Government should be viewed as a long term collaboration, not from a joint partnership perspective. This long term relationship should be based on a model that recognises that the Victorian Government is ultimately responsible to the Victorian people for the overall policy leadership and accountability for the structure and performance of the child, youth and family support and service system.'

In a very balanced and careful manner, the report affirms the role played by community organisations in child protection, suggests that there are some gaps in performance in some government and community agencies, and reaffirms the importance of accountability, monitoring and evaluation.

It points to the need for building the capacity of both government agencies and community organisations and the provision of more adequate funding mechanisms. My sense is that the report is indirectly offering a moment in time for some community organisations that are no longer able to cope with the increased complexity of child protection issues to now leave this field to others.

The issue of mandatory reporting always produces much debate in the community, although it should be clear to most how important it is to have a broad based mandatory reporting system. Dealing with the increased reporting that a broad based system produces is in part what this report addresses.

Of particular interest to churches in Victoria is the recommendation that would require a minister of religion and 'a person who holds an office within, is employed by, is a member of, or a volunteer of a religious or spiritual organisation that provides services to, or has regular contact with, children and young people' to report 'a reasonable suspicion' of physical or sexual abuse of a child or young person under 18. The sacrament of Confession is exempt.

Such mandatory reporting for clergy and church personnel is already in place in South Australia. It should be in place in all jurisdictions throughout Australia. I trust the churches in Victoria will embrace this recommendation. It is about a commitment to transparency. And it is about a further public commitment by all churches to child protection and minimising risk for children. Any equivocation on accepting this recommendation would be viewed with disdain by the general community.

Last of the cat poems

POETRY

Karl Cameron-Jackson and Mike Hopkins

The feral cat

Fresh blood dripping from your snarling mouth
your shoulders bunched, spine high-arched
you glared angrily at me as I drove past in my car.
Icon of primeval hunter, you crouched by the roadside
teeth burgeoning in crushing, crunching jaws
tearing flesh from a fresh-killed victim with razor claws.
Boldness imaged your new freedom
in an expanding heart that lusted
solely to hunt ... stalk ... kill prey.
You are growing wiser
stronger ... faster ... wilder.
But no-one seems to care as you accelerate
the ethnic cleansing of endangered species.
Man captured you four millennia ago
then genetically re-programmed you
to be a Temple guardian.
Once a feared predator, Woman softened you
to become a furry thing that purrs
then silent, sits upright in windows.
With fresh blood in your mouth you are no longer CAT
house-trained to please, now you kill wantonly
revel in the fear you invoke in others.
In this wide, old land filled with soft-skin fauna you wait
brutalising towards your earlier shape where unfenced
National Parks provide a space to kill, free you to become.

Man was created, just like you to run free in the killing-fields
called 'War', where we can become unrepentant predators?
Is this what God meant you to be?
To revert to what you once were?
As we lust for more power and grow wiser, stronger
faster, wilder and less inhibited, do we revert like you
and not redeem the better qualities of soul we aspire?
Karl H. Cameron-Jackson

Last of the cat poems

Please, not another cat poem
no more couplets for cuddly companions
unless to recount the leftover birds which litter the lawn
whilst puss sits inside with blood on his claws
and purrs satisfaction
I plead with you desist from that paeon to pussy palship
save to summon up that stench in the yard
which neighbourhood moggies love to bombard
with tom spray and cat shit
I beg of you no more veneration of feline affection
but to catalogue each Australian creature
which through cat predation wobbles and teeters
on the edge of extinction
I implore you, no more tributes to Tabby Tom and Persian Cleo
except to decry the midnight caterwauling
the screeches, the wails, the quarrels appalling
below my bedroom window
Not more T. S. Eliot like whimsical narration
unless to promote the wearing of flat cat hats
with fur flaps and tails which help to combat
the proliferating kitty population

No, no not even a moggie haiku
until we bid the last cat in Australia farewell
with a tolling not a tinkling bell
a ding dong dell
an obituary, a eulogy, a remembrance will do
Mike Hopkins

Infanticide and the spectre of eugenics

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

For many, it would have been alarming to read on Friday that 'killing newborns is morally the same as abortion and should be permissible if the mother wishes it'.

As [reported](#) in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the idea is that around a third of infants with Down syndrome are not diagnosed prenatally, and mothers of children with serious abnormalities should have the chance to end the child's life after, as well as before, birth.

There is a lot that could and should be said about such a proposal, except that it is not a proposal, but merely a 'reasoned argument'. Arguments don't have legs unless they're greeted by popular acclaim, or perhaps contempt.

There is a danger that expressions of community outrage at the idea of infanticide could put it on the agenda for serious discussion.

Indeed that has perhaps already occurred in this instance, in which case organised community outrage could be appropriate. A lack of such an expression would then be a poor reflection on our society if we accept that the measure of a civilisation is how it treats its weakest members.

Julian Savulescu, who edits the British [Journal of Medical Ethics](#) says the two Melbourne academics who wrote the original [article](#) putting the argument for terminating newborns did not seek to 'present the Truth or promote some one moral view', but 'to present well reasoned argument'. He added that 'if others made a similarly refined case for recriminalising abortion he would also publish that'.

To an extent, his point is a good one. It's that academics operate in a laboratory of ideas, and it's their task to experiment with a variety of arguments in their attempt uncover the truth.

However some arguments are like dangerous viruses that should not be allowed to escape the lab, and their justification for infanticide seems to have done just that. It's therefore legitimate to suggest that this could be a matter of professional negligence.

A frightening example of a dangerous idea that made it out of the lab and into Victorian Government legislation is that of eugenics, the science of improving the race. It was [promoted](#) by a number of Melbourne academics such as the influential and well respected Professor of Anatomy at Melbourne University Richard Berry.

State Parliament unanimously passed a bill legalising eugenics in 1939, but it was never enacted due to the embarrassment of the Holocaust. The bill aimed to institutionalise and potentially sterilise groups such as Aborigines, slum dwellers,

homosexuals, prostitutes and alcoholics, as well as those with small heads and with low IQs.

Actually the very point about taking a stand against infanticide is that it is a form of eugenics, which by definition has no place in a society that cares for its most vulnerable.

Sex, lies and adoption

POLITICS

Lyn Bender



The father of my children was adopted at birth, and as a psychologist I now counsel many who have been part of the adoption triangle. The stories that reach me convey a sense of being robbed and abandoned. While for some there is gratitude for the life that has been 'given' to them by their birth mother and subsequently the adoptive parents, there is commonly also a pervasive rage.

The jury is now in. The Senate Inquiry into Forced Adoption has revealed heinous practices.

These included denying the mother any sight or knowledge of her baby and being told the baby had died, or the baby being cared for in a nursery with minimal attention being given to facilitate 'bonding' with the adoptive parents. Ignorance was no excuse: even in the '60s English psychologist and child development expert John Bowlby exposed this kind of care as dangerous for infants.

There is now a [call](#) for a national and unambivalent apology. As with the Rudd apology to the Stolen Generations it needs to be unstinting and refrain from justifications.

You may not have noticed, but The Royal Women's Hospital has [already](#) quietly apologised to single women who gave birth in the hospital from 1945 until 1975 and who were forced to give up their children for adoptions.

The findings of a study by historian Shurlee Swain, 'Confinement and Delivery Practices in Relation to Single Women Confined at the Royal Women's Hospital 1945—1975' have a ghastly Dickensian ring. Young single new mothers were subjected to unsympathetic prolonged labours, denied access to their newborns, encouraged to adopt by social workers and not offered other options or information.

As the Senate inquiry has shown, these horrendous practices have resulted in a lifetime of grief, hurt, shame and anger for many women. Teenage mothers received little or no emotional support and many were instructed to forget about the whole experience. There was a stigma surrounding conception out of wedlock and families hid or denied the truth about the lost babies.

Many women who were forced into a 'choice' to relinquish their child have gone on to lead double lives, carrying internal scars while concealing the 'illegitimate' births from partners and subsequent children. Some later sought reunion, but this has not repaired the loss and rupture of so many years.

This angst has also been bestowed on many of the adopted children. Some have told me that although they felt loved and cared for by their adoptive parents they still felt different, isolated and confused. Many have been lied to, and revelations about their birth were devastating.

Some adoptions have not turned out well. We learn our patterns of love from our earliest caregiver, usually our biological mother. When early bonding and attachment is disrupted or fails, the development of strong attachment may remain impaired for a lifetime.

Upon reunion with their biological mother many report the joy of instant recognition, but also of the sadness of irretrievable loss. The years of separation cannot be restored.

Out of the most horrifying experiences we may collectively learn important truths. What are the truths bequeathed to us by this squalid chapter in our history?

Last century the adoption policy was born out of ignorance, prejudice and lack of empathy. It was premised on the espoused beliefs that there were right and wrong, rigid rules about suitable and unfit parents. These reflected the bias of the day about the sanctity of marriage, the superiority of sex within these bounds and the irresponsibility of young women who had sex outside marriage.

Men were largely allocated a minor role as providers of economic stability and respectability, or as an absent progenitor who was driven by that old male urge.

The pregnant girl had failed to exercise her responsibility of saying no and was treated as 'sinful'. Many of these girls, as young as 14, absorbed the notion that they were bad and unfit, and the kindest thing they could do for their child was to surrender it to a good couple. The solution to these 'unwanted' pregnancies was seen to be to supply the 'right' sort of family.

We now know that loving, well-supported parenting provides the best environment for children. This may be in single, gay, partnered, married, religious or non religious, white or Indigenous families (or families of any race for that matter). Stigmatising the circumstance of the birth or the class of the parents and the ensuing isolation is enormously damaging.

Adoption can be an option, but it is best when it is an open process and is not incited en masse by poor policies and welfare and social systems imbued with prejudice and ignorance. Deep human bonds are best nurtured in the compassionate care of both mother and child.

We need a pulpit perspective on Papua

HUMAN RIGHTS

Susan Connelly

Members of regional parliaments are increasingly alarmed at the continuing violence in the Indonesian Papuan provinces and at the seeming inability of the Indonesian Government to administer these territories without a large military presence. The refusal of permission for journalists and many aid workers to enter the provinces is a growing cause of concern.

On Tuesday 28 February the Australia-Pacific chapter of International Parliamentarians for West Papua (IPWP) was launched at Parliament House, hosted by the Greens and attended by some parliamentarians. It is worrying that acting Minister for Foreign Affairs Craig Emerson told Labor MPs not to attend (a rightly ignored by some of the more lion-hearted, including Laurie Ferguson).

That the Greens organised the meeting and that Labor recognises West Papua as an integral part of the Indonesian Republic are not sufficient reasons to expect Australian MPs to ignore the serious human rights abuses on our doorstep.

Letters to our Government by frustrated Australians are answered for the most part by reminders that we recognise the territorial sovereignty of Indonesia, that internal security is a matter for the Indonesians themselves, that the situation in West Papua and Papua is improving, that Australia is dedicated to the promotion of human rights everywhere and that we continue to train the Indonesian military because they are our partners in the region and we help to raise their standards.

This official line fits the Australian-Indonesian partnership, but ignores the Papuan people. The rights of nation-states are not absolute, and where there is engagement in systematic maltreatment of people, no matter where, the rest of the world has an obligation to protest.

There is noble rhetoric in claims that Australia condemns human rights abuses and urges investigation of them. But this is not the experience of the Australian-East Timor relationship.

The previous Australian Government dismissed the findings of the 2005 CAVR Report on the crimes against humanity in East Timor as containing 'errors' (read: accusations against Australia). Official Australian comment on this very large human rights document thereby evaporated, and the recommendations concerning Australia have languished ever since.

After such inaction, what evidence is there that the Australian Government deplores abuse of the Papuan people, or urges investigation into allegations, as it claims in its official answers to letters? Who is urging investigation of crimes against humanity committed in West Papua? Who asks the concrete questions? Where are the reports? Who actually does this work?

More power to the members of the IPWP, and may more Australian parliamentarians give some leadership here after they look into the massacres, the torture, the sham trials, the military abuses and the money trail.

However there are more players in this saga. Where are the churches? There are a few groups and individuals who anguish about the Papuan people, as there are in Parliament, and who see such concern as an obligation flowing from the Gospel. What leadership is offered by the churches? Does the Papuan situation ever make it to the pulpit?

The parallels between the treatment of the West Papuan people and that given to the East Timorese are compelling. How can these things continue on our doorstep?

One of the reasons is the impunity that Indonesia enjoys, shown in the complete lack of responsibility taken for what happened in Timor-Leste between 1974 and 1999.

That period saw the violent deaths of 183,000 Timorese men, women and children, which occurred as a result of the brutal Indonesian occupation. The establishment of an ad hoc Human Rights Court and a Truth and Friendship Commission in its wake brought no one to justice. No one has been held accountable. This has resulted in a further vacuum of human responsibility in West Papua.

Australia might claim some small refuge in ignorance regarding Timor, but as we now know what Indonesia did there and how responsibility has been successfully evaded, we cannot claim any wide-eyed innocence regarding West Papua.

Picking the scab of colonisation

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

John Falzon

There's a deep wound in Australia.

There's a gash in our story.

It is a wound that is known by different names:

Colonisation.

Dispossession.

Coercion.

Control.

It is still with us.

The wound is fresh. It is not yet healed. It is not even yet a scar.

The wound of colonisation is a wound in the heart of the First Peoples of this land.

To the people in high places who say that the wound does not exist, we say we know it does exist.

To the people in high places who say that the wound is an Aboriginal problem, we say that the wound is not an Aboriginal problem. It is a wound in the heart of Aboriginal families but it is not an Aboriginal problem. It is an Australian problem. It is our problem.

The policies that the Government wishes to enshrine as legislation today are policies built on the falsehood that the wound does not exist or that the wound exists but that it is an Aboriginal problem. They are policies that treat Aboriginal people as if they are the problem. They are policies that are imposed from above rather than coming from the wisdom of the people on the ground.

They are policies that do not treat the wound and cannot heal the wound.

They are policies that deepen the wound.

They are policies that continue to harm, to hurt, to humiliate, to degrade, to punish, to control. Like all forms of colonisation they deny the full humanity of those who are subjected to them.

They are policies that have been shamelessly trialled on the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory and that are now to be imposed on other so-called areas of disadvantage across Australia. The degrading trail of internal colonisation continues, discriminating one moment on the basis of race and the next moment on the basis of class.

The 'Stronger Futures' legislation might strengthen the futures of the powerful but it is an attempt to weaken the dignity of those who are subjected to its control.

As Elaine Peckham put it: 'We don't want the Basics Card. We want basic rights.'

I would add: we don't want social control. We want social justice.

Back in 1993, Mick Dodson explained what social justice means to him. He said:

'Social justice is what faces you in the morning. It is awakening in a house with adequate water supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and send them to school where their education not only equips them for employment but reinforces their knowledge and understanding of their cultural inheritance. It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health: a life of choices and opportunity, free from discrimination.'

You don't build a community up by putting its people down.

You don't build an inclusive society by locking people out or locking them up.

The injustice of the policies that we are taking a stand against today is that they treat people as if they are nothing.

In being here today we are saying that we are on the side of the people who are treated as if they are nothing.

We are saying that the strongest future for our nation lies in knowing that together we can be everything.

Getting intimate with the da Vinci robot

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

'Why is it called da Vinci?'

When I ask the surgeon this question, it is rather late in the day to be seeking information, but it's a small point that has intrigued me during the weeks leading up to my tryst with da Vinci Robotic Assisted Prostatectomy. I have been thoroughly educated during those weeks about the various options available and this is the one I have chosen.

By the time I get round to asking this, the hour has come. I'm standing around in the operating theatre chatting to my surgeon. Wearing one of those flowing white hospital gowns that tie in a bow at the back and looking slightly distraught despite my studied attempts at a casual-nothing-fazes-me equanimity, I look like a Roman senator who's just made it to the Ides of March meeting but is still unsure about the order of business.

'That's it there,' says the surgeon, 'that's the da Vinci robot.' He waves a cheerful arm in the direction of what struck me then as a large, chunky structure which Field Marshall Erwin 'Desert Fox' Rommel, or Major General George 'Blood and Guts' Patton would have instantly recognised, but I wouldn't vouch for the accuracy of my recall. The bustle of gloved, white-clad, masked and plastic-hatted people in the operating theatre was alien territory for me and, I have to admit, more and more daunting.

'Why is it called ...' I started to ask again, but my query was lost among a new round of instructions. Even my smiling, affable surgeon was getting right down to business. He explained that they would be putting an adhesive on my back and that it might be a bit cold. This happened even as he spoke: invisible hands parted my gown and stroked my spine with stuff that was exquisitely cold. At the same time, the surgeon pointed out to me a peculiar sort of valley in the smooth surface of the operating table.

'Put your bum in there,' he said, 'wiggle round till you're comfortable then lie back.' I knew very well that when I lay back, securely anchored by my bum in the space provided, the adhesive would hold me in its grip. I also knew, from earlier briefings, that the reason for all this was that, once anaesthetised, I would be tipped upside down and that the da Vinci would have its way with me while I was inverted, damn nearly vertical.

I knew this, but I tried not to think about it because my imaginings, unimpressed by adhesives and bum holds, always had me crumpling ignominiously head first to the floor at the feet of the da Vinci which, outraged, would then take who knows what umbrage. It *is* a bloody robot after all. Haven't these people seen *The Terminator*?

In the nature of these encounters, I was soon wheeled along to have a pleasant chat with the anaesthetist — a lovely woman whose mask, gloves, gown and hat could scarcely obscure what I immediately recognised as her innate humanity — in the course of which she painlessly introduced something into the back of my hand and ...

Suddenly it was four hours later, Rommel and Patton were barnstorming off to new adventures, I was horizontal — had I ever *really* been upside down? Surely that was a surgeon's twisted humour — and flowering with tubes. 'Hello there,' says a sympathetic voice, 'you're back then.'

Well, yes and no. I had just been through a bruising tussle with the da Vinci robot. The operation, as my surgeon would tell me a little later, had been 'excellent' and a 'complete success'. Later still, and more importantly, he would report that the pathology was all 'clear'.

And it was, as he had promised, 'minimally invasive': I had five small punctures, as if I'd been in a knife fight and hadn't landed a blow, each covered by an up-market version of those circular band aids we used to put on youthful scraped knees and knuckles.

Stuck to me or inserted here and there were some additional adornments which, while they might usefully add to the picture for something like the *Robotic Surgeon's Monthly* or *The da Vinci Surgical System Newsletter*, need not detain us now and would in any case be out of place in *Eureka Street*, where the trajectory of inquiry is physically and spiritually somewhat higher.

'Why is it called the da Vinci method?' I asked my surgeon at last as we concluded our final consultation.

'Oh,' he said, with a dismissive gesture, 'it's just that the machine itself is Italian. Da Vinci is the registered Italian trademark.'

Disappointing. I'd been thinking that I might emerge from my da Vinci meeting with the promised five small holes in my gut, a space where the prostate had been, and a mysterious, enigmatic smile.

Polite parents of violent children

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Carnage* (M). Director: Roman Polanski. Starring: Jodie Foster, Kate Winslet, Christoph Waltz, John C. Reilly. 79 minutes**

Booze and civility make uneasy bedfellows, when politeness is used to conceal prejudice and resentment. Edward Albee's 1961 play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* didn't so much lay this fact bare, as stake it to the earth and sacrifice it to the gods of chaos.

In it, the middle-aged daughter of a university president and her history professor husband invite a (much younger) prodigious biology lecturer and his wife over for what is ostensibly a polite social gathering. Fuelled by alcohol, the gathering degenerates into a series of cruel mental and emotional games, both between and within the couples, that occasionally cross the line into outright abuse.

Polanski's *Carnage* (based on *God of Carnage* by French playwright Yasmina Reza) is a worthy successor to Albee's blackly comic benchmark. It, too, sees two couples — lawyer Alan (Waltz), his wife Nancy (Winslett), wholesaler Michael (Reilly) and his author wife Penelope (Foster) — meeting in the name of civility but abandoning it as prejudice and resentment (aided by scotch) gradually slip the leash.

Like *Woolf*, *Carnage* takes place in a single location, in Michael and Penelope's flat in moneyed Brooklyn. The searing dialogue and stampeding comedic performances are the film's hallmarks, but Polanski's controlled extrapolation of this diminutive interior is just as commendable. The camera shifts through a string of carefully composed shots that expose every corner of this, what seems to be Michael and Penelope's entire universe, in which Alan and Nancy are ill-fitting interlopers.

The reason for the gathering is that Alan and Nancy's son has hit Michael and Penelope's son in the face with a stick. The aim of both parties is to resolve the situation without resorting to bitter legal wrangling. But as with Australian author Christos Tsiolkas' *The Slap* this act of violence among children acts as a catalyst to exacerbate the characters' unease about a range of social and relational issues.

The performers prove that just because this is a comedy, it doesn't preclude serious acting. Watch the smug pride with which Penelope force-feeds her guests a decidedly unpleasant looking dessert; contrast this with her anally retentive anguish as she sponges vomit from the pages of an art book (the result of one of the film's most hilarious slapstick moments); and, later, with her fury when she feels judged by both of the men in the room. Other cast members run similar emotional gauntlets.

Only Reilly seems out of his depth. He is a fine character actor who in recent years has grown flabby on a candy-chain of broad comedies. To be fair he does nail the comedic demands of *Carnage*, but watching him go toe-to-toe with Waltz is like watching an Old English sheepdog trying to keep pace with a greyhound. Waltz, with his careful diction, haughty gestures and calculated smiles, perfectly characterises Alan's well rehearsed lawyer's charm and the prolific arrogance that flexes beneath it.

The comparison between *Carnage* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* is apt, but also unfortunate. The biggest difference between them also exposes *Carnage's* great weakness. Albee's play is divided into three acts, each named to reflect the degeneration of civility: 'Fun and Games' give way to 'Walpurgisnacht' (named for the pagan festival and evoking a gathering of witches) and finally to 'Exorcism'. As the name suggests, this final act gets nasty, but also offers catharsis and resolution.

Carnage, by contrast, is in desperate need of a third act (and at less than 80 minutes running time, it could easily bear it). We see how the degradation of civility lays bare the prejudices and insecurities of the four characters, but the credits roll at the peak of the hostilities. The lack of an 'exorcism' in *Carnage* is deeply unsatisfying. That said there's no question this is two thirds of a brilliant film.

Empathy after Labor's knife fight

POLITICS

Andrew Hamilton

The battle between the supporters of Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd was a nasty affair. Its protagonists, with the famously gracious exception of Anthony Albanese, deployed words as meat cleavers and baseball bats. It is hard to see that good will come out of it for anyone.

But its defects did again provoke wistful reflection about the qualities that might enable public conversation to contribute to an enhanced sense of human possibility.

Empathy is particularly important. It helps us to understand where others are coming from, even if we disagree with where they want to take us. If we are empathetic we can see the world from another person's perspective.

If we lack empathy, we will be likely to dismiss our more formidable opponents as idiots or brutes. This has consequences. If they are idiots, we can dismiss their perspective as unworthy of consideration. If they are brutes, to consider their perspective would put us at moral risk. Both attitudes are problematic.

The most significant problem with a lack of empathy is not that it is unkind to our opponents but that we ourselves are hobbled. Yet empathy seems almost invariably to go missing when people respond to forceful and opinionated figures of authority in churches or other organisations. They can speak of no one and of nothing else and have no energy to commend better views or better ways.

By dismissing their opponents as idiots or brutes they cede the field to them.

If we regard people with whose positions we disagree as idiots, we inevitably underestimate them and fail to recognise the coherence of their strategies. We also delude ourselves that once they have gone from the scene our own more enlightened views will prevail. They won't prevail if our opponents are more committed to their opinions and strategies.

If we dismiss our opponents as brutes, too, we simply give them power. We see ourselves as the helpless victims of their savagery, so failing to see the limits of their power, the extent of the power that we ourselves have, and the possibilities that are open to us. In most Australian organisations, even the most brutal of leaders are unable to use racks and thumbscrews on the recalcitrant.

Lack of empathy is a luxury we can afford if we have decided our dreams or our groups are no longer worth fighting for. But if we still believe they matter, we need to enter the world of our opponents, to see which values we have in common and which we differ about, and how we can lead the agenda.

In public conversation sympathy is also important. Empathy alone can be a cold

virtue. If we understand how our opponents' minds are working, we can use our understanding to destroy them. Sympathy leads us to identify with the humanity of the person whose mind we have entered. It will impel us to visit our political opponents in hospital and to support them in personal tragedies.

In public conversation sympathy also allows space for a larger perspective. To identify with the flawed humanity of another human being makes it difficult to see them as either perfect fools or perfect brutes. It enables us to recognise the personal and social factors that limit their capacity to do harm.

Inadequate though our candidates for national leadership may be, they do not have the makings of a Stalin, a Pol Pot or a Pinochet. Nor does our society provide the conditions under which such people could flourish.

In political conversation empathy and sympathy can temper policies that are economically or socially destructive. If we neither understand how people come to act as they do nor have the capacity to identify with them, we shall regard them as idiots or monsters. We shall then spend vast amounts of public monies on such counterproductive measures as locking them up and depriving them of responsibility. In short we shall ourselves act as idiots, to the detriment of our society.

A public conversation in which empathy and sympathy are deployed is not as exciting as one fought with meat cleavers. But both qualities are necessary if the conversation is to serve the public good.

Sydney and Melbourne archbishops of art

ARTS

Rod Pattenden

In a week full of the glitter of celebrity and the opaque mirrors of politics it seems appropriate to refocus on the big question of who will take up the reins of the [National Gallery of Victoria](#) .



This is no flippant question as culture in Australia is now big business. Finding yourself in proximity to its magic ambience will bring power, prestige and position well evidenced by the rise of philanthropy and major corporations aligning themselves with the apparent 'power' of art. Culture, it is believed, rubs off and becomes a sign of your educational status, your sense of national pride and your ability to engage the world of ideas that hover just above the masses.

Art is the most savoury of educational experiences and the most seductive in terms of financial ones.

Impeccable scholarship would have once been the only qualification to fill the role of Gallery Director at a major cultural institution in Australia. There was little regard to things such as charisma, political clout, or management brilliance. Now such appointments come with a horizon of expectations that would have been once reserved for the enthroning of an Archbishop or a monarch. A director of an art gallery is now a caretaker of national pride and community aspiration.

These cultural priests or gurus need to grip their always-full wine glass with all the inherent complexity of post-modern theory, they need to do miracles by turning simple material things into priceless objects, they need to convince the skeptical of their ability to skate upon thin ice, to walk on water, and turn fuzzy financial clouds inside out to reveal their golden lining.

Now that the Art Gallery of NSW has announced the appointment of Michael Brand as its new director, the pressure is on for Melbourne. Brand comes with well-deserved credentials, having worked at major institutions with vast resources such as the Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

Brand managed the difficult negotiations of returning works to their countries of origin that had been obtained through possible black market sources. He did this in a manner that garnered goodwill and in return obtained priceless works for loan, that had never been seen before in the US.

Clearly Brand has the political ability to fill the colourful socks of Edmund Capon who took the AGNSW from a provincial archive to a dynamic cultural institution filled with crowds seeking the enlivening air of cultural experiences.

No doubt, Melbourne had their eye on Brand. They would also have considered Timothy Potts, their former director who has done very well at the prestigious

Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. But in a strange twist last week, Potts was named as the successor to Brand in his old job at the Getty.

Such an offer at an asset rich institution like the Getty cannot compare to the NGV where rumours are surfacing about financial difficulties. The outgoing director Gerard Vaughan admits Australia's oldest cultural institution is facing 'tough times'. He anticipated 'smaller' 'blockbusters', an impossible thing to imagine given that state galleries vie for the ability to deliver the biggest and best.

In contrast, Brand found the AGNSW 'ambitious for the future', an outlook that clearly attracted him to the job. Rumours of new building plans are rife.

But down by the harbour, Sydney is about to witness the re-opening of the refurbished and expanded Museum of Contemporary Art. It will open on 29 March after a \$53 million dollar refit and expansion, which is credited to a unique collaboration between government, private and corporate donors, led by high profile MCA chairman, investment banker Simon Mordant, with a \$15 million donation.

This expansion, together with the upcoming Sydney Biennale, opening in June 2012, underscores the immense impact of culture as a form of social capital. The Sydney Biennale is now widely respected as one of the major contemporary art festivals in the world and a key destination for cultural tourists. The MCA will be a key venue for this global showcase of culture and ideas.

MCA director Elizabeth Ann McGregor would probably have some key advice for the NGV in their current search. It's clearly a job of impossible expectations, involving all the flash of celebrity and the smoky mirrors of politics. It involves fixing a price on how we remember our past, and how we anticipate our future as a diverse and creative culture.

UPDATE: The NGV's search has ended with the appointment of Tony Ellwood of the Queensland Art Gallery being announced this morning by Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu.

Catholic writers' agnostic appeal

NON-FICTION

Lucas Smith

Though I consider myself agnostic, a curious pattern, and a source of jest for my friends, has emerged from my reading. Most of my favorite imaginative writers are Catholic. And not just cultural or nominal Catholics but devoted practitioners like Graham Greene, Flannery O'Connor and Czeslaw Milosz, who wrestled unabated with all the demands of their faith.

This curious confluence is unintentional. I would enjoy a novel or book of poems and only later learn that the author was Catholic. But it has happened too many times to be coincidental. Why are Catholic writers attractive to one such as me, who is unable to take the final leap of faith?

Greene insisted he was not a Catholic writer but a writer who happened to be Catholic. This sounds disingenuous. It would be hard to imagine a more Catholic novel than *The Power and the Glory*. In his introduction to the Penguin edition, John Updike wrote of 'the Roman Catholicism, which infuses, with its Manichean darkness and tortured literalism, his most ambitious fiction'.

The priests in *The Power and the Glory* are ineluctably compromised: Father Jose has capitulated to state pressure to marry; the unnamed whisky priest has fathered a daughter and drugs himself with alcohol.

But Greene's achievement, and a marker of his faith, is his ability to 'distinguish ... between the man and the office'; the former, hopelessly flawed, the latter, indispensable. 'What he wanted now was [sacramental] wine. Without it he was useless.' Yet with the sacrament the whisky priest becomes a symbol of resistance to terrorised villagers who are well aware of his failings.

Catholicism is a strict system, yet preaches the forgiveness of all who fail it. The Church acknowledges the universality of human experience beyond the borders of class, race and other distinguishing factors.

There is something attractive about an absolute moral order in any time, but possibly more so in our frenetic and increasingly interconnected yet isolating world. And despite what many seem to think today, religious belief can be a friend of progress. According to Greene, 'Conservatism and Catholicism should be ... impossible bedfellows'.

It is currently fashionable to say, as Les Murray does in his essay 'Some religious stuff I know about Australia', that 'the religious dimension in man is quite possibly the most dangerous thing on earth'. But for Murray this is the strongest argument in favour of organised religion. The universal impulse to religion manifests itself in many ways, some healthy, some not. Catholic writers understand that this impulse, the source of human tragedy, must be actively

directed if it is not to destroy.

'My audience are [sic] the people who think God is dead,' wrote Flannery O'Connor, whose belief made her an oddity in evangelical Georgia, and indeed she made explicit the connection between her work and her religion. Almost all of her stories end in revelation yet they remain, like all good art, illuminating but not didactic. Her world speaks for itself, as it must.

An absolute moral order, as distinguished from a fanatical moral order, however it is obtained, also allows an imaginative writer to do more. This might seem paradoxical but it makes sense. When all ideas are equal, irreverence is rendered toothless. With no standard there can be no transgression.

As Evelyn Waugh said, 'all literature implies moral standards and criticisms'. The novel, if nothing else, is a world with its own, invented order. Its temporality and finitude impose order on it. It is possible to imagine a novel without order but impossible to imagine a reader for one.

As for Czeslaw Milosz, his Catholicism can be summed up in one poem. Born near what is now Vilnius in Lithuania, Milosz lived through the worst of Nazi and Soviet brutality, but his poetry meanders around the experience, rarely touching directly on it.

In 'Pierson College', Milosz is lecturing to his students at UC Berkeley. Louis is his childhood friend, lost in Eastern Europe's dismal last century. This is the end of the poem:

Quality passes into quantity at the century's end
For worse or better, who knows, just different.

Though for those students no Louis ever
existed and the old professor's passionate tone

Is a bit ridiculous as if the fate of the world depended
on truth.

A clear sense of a truth received from beyond themselves is a prerequisite to the consolation Catholic writers offer: that no one is irredeemable. What could be more attractive than that?

Jesus and his kids

POETRY

Various

Jesus calms the storm

I went with Jesus to the other side of the lake.

I didn't sleep all night.

The stars were rocks,
unshaven waves tossed and turned.

There was no going back.

Morning was a distant shore.

The middle of the lake was dark as midnight,
with a mood of moon in the sky

Only Jesus

Slept

Until I called him

How his eyes sang.

Peta Edmonds

Santa Caterina

Here's why I believe that indeed yes, a young woman in Italy once
Conversed at length with the One Whom No Name Can Encompass
In the year 1375 or so, by our calendar, although God knows which
Calendar the One goes by. He called her *dearest daughter*, you see?
That doesn't happen unless he really is a father. That's the real deal.
There's a fury of love for your kid, a tumult of feeling for which our
Words are flimsy. Like our words for the One. *Sometimes I pretend*
Not to hear you, he said to her, *but I do hear you*. Boy, I know these
Words. *Never lower your voice in crying out to me*, he says — *never*
Stop knocking at the door. I know this guy. He's a *dad*. His children
Drive him nuts and he would die for them without hesitation. This is
What I try to say to people when they say what's with the whole guy

On the cross thing, man, that's macabre, that's sick, you people look
At a guy dying of torture every day, you hang Him in your churches
And houses and offices, you carry a dying guy in your pocket, that's
Just weird, and I try to say he's a *dad*. He volunteered. You'd do the
Same for your kids. Sure He grumbled about it, in the garden. I have
Stomped down to the laundry room to snarl and throw shoes around.
But I go back upstairs because I love them more than I could explain.
They drive you nuts but yes you would die for them. I know this guy.

Brian Doyle

Enfleshed

Coming off the parchment,
Off the stone tablet,
Off the stained glass,
You stand at the crossroad,
Waiting to sup with us,
Forever bisecting
Our humanness
With Shekinah Glory.

Teresa Burleson

Gillard's guts and glory

POLITICS

Moira Rayner



This woman leader of ours is as tough as a stevedore. Necessarily, if a woman wants to win a shit-fight, which is what she did on Monday after a 20 month long challenge to her claim to be legitimately PM.

Gillard's right to political life has been challenged from within the ALP, because she got her first leg over the stile thanks to the ALP's affirmative action policies and the vigorous growth of the non-Party but pro-progressive political women's support organisation, EMILY's List [Early Money Is Like Yeast].

The depth of factional resentment is still profound. Even Gough vigorously and volubly (naturally) resented these vile, undemocratic initiatives, which I know, because he told me so when I was trying to get him to contribute to the Joan Kirner biography (a project I've had to shelve for now).

I was a bit shaken to hear my hero trot out the old canard that removing obstacles to would-be women parliamentary candidates results in unmeritorious appointments. Of course all those men of substance and authority like Kim Carr and George Seitz and union chappies are self-evidently brilliant men of the people.

I digress, but not far.

For these 20 months we have been bombarded by a concerted, personal and sexist campaign — yes, Bob Brown was right — based on the delegitimation of a perfectly normal politician who — unlike most of the incumbents — always sits down when she visits the loo.

She's made mistakes. She's no orator. She hasn't been any different, really, from a bloke in her position; except that she is the one that women wanted to be a woman in power, and that girls love to look up to because she can show that any girl can aspire to being as powerful as a bloke, and can achieve it, using exactly the same tactics as blokes in the ALP do.

Sure, she benefited with a hand over the stile onto the 'level playing field' of merit selection, but she fought as dirty as you have to, to stay on it, get in, and be where she is today.

Thanks to Kevin Rudd's challenge, sadly misbased on his personal assessment of his own radiance as a media performer, the story behind the deputy toppling the winner of the Kevin 07 election has shown just how flawed and preoccupied and vainglorious any keeper of top office can be.

This rough, tough former workplace lawyer came, as we knew she does, into

her own when she was on her feet, fighting for her political life, and for the first time since she put on the prime ministerial stilettos in 2010 I can sense the steel core within those blue suede size 36 heels.

She didn't need to scuttle out of The Lodge in a bodyguard's clinch with a smirking Tony Abbott jogging behind her. She could have strolled out with a hide thicker than body armour in a riot. Now, we can see, when it matters she's got guts.

I am left with just two questions. The first is, can or will she keep fighting until the next election? Enough has been written about her misjudgements and mistakes and failure to come over as 'sincere'. Abe Lincoln had the same problem, actually, and was ugly as a sackful of warthogs and with a tremor as well. All Gillard has to do is build on her remarkable wins in a hung parliament with bolshy independents and a no-no-no opposition.

The second is, is she going to be the role model we really need, for the young women of today and tomorrow. Is she, in other words, not Wonder Woman or Supergirl, but the Iron Lady?

Maggie Thatcher saw herself as a trail blazer for women, but eschewed 'feminism' and denied the reality of institutional blocks to women's equality. She didn't appoint women to her cabinet (well, one, who really doesn't count) and in many ways exemplifies what is worryingly wrong with modern women who mistake making it in a man's world, women's individual empowerment, and personal choices, with 'feminism'.

Gillard didn't come from the world of the elites who delight in the goodies handed out by capitalism, burgeoning free markets, and hugely successful investment fantasies. She knows that economic, social and political history and institutions and practices do, really, stifle women who want to breath the air of freedom and equality.

All those women who married well and got a boost into a nice job in journalism through Daddy or the well-placed husband (Thatcher was one of those, actually) or a radio job, or a board appointment may have 'made it' in a world designed for men, but only because they were tacked onto one.

Such women are popular with a certain kind of man, because they, like Thatcher, see no 'society' but individuals (oh, and families), and no responsibility for the other, but maintaining order and decorum.

I believe in Gillard, because I want to, because I believe she understands those obstacles and institutions, and because if she does not incorporate that knowledge in her newly refreshed leadership role, I'll slap her. Finally, Gillard, finally: guts and glory. And bugger your hairstyle.

All democracies great and small

POLITICS

John Warhurst

High-density strata title communities comprise a growing new form of local democracy.

The various components of these increasingly popular apartment and townhouse communities, including the executive committees elected to preside over them and the strata managers responsible for supporting the administration of the community, are often in the news. So too are the developers that build them.



The news is often negative, including various sorts of commercial malpractice, bullying and conflict between owners.

These communities provide a terrific introduction to the pros and cons of local democracy.

Strata title properties are ones in which the title is divided between a number of units, as small as two and as large as several hundred. The growth of medium and high density living in all Australian cities means that more and more people are living cheek by jowl in such communities.

One in five Australians may now live in strata title schemes. One estimate for NSW is that there are 60,000 schemes, including 600,000 units and many more individuals.

Not only must such people manage relations between themselves and their own properties, but they have to jointly manage common property such as the buildings, gardens, hallways, and parking spots, not to mention pools and spas and community living rules.

These modern style communities are just like old-style villages and towns. They include just as many people as many small towns dotted around Australia. But relations are more intensive. For the owners and tenants of strata title schemes this is where their lives meet politics and democracy. Their scheme becomes more important to them than most contact with local, state or federal government.

Surveys show that whatever the level of democracy, citizens exhibit similar characteristics. These include limited knowledge and interest, suspicion of office-holders, assertions of self-interest and communication difficulties.

In strata title democracy many participants know one other personally and live side by side. Strata titles also have a number of special characteristics, such as absent owners and transient tenants, making democratic processes more difficult. Often the tenants outnumber the owner occupiers.

But the characters of wider Australian democracy are evident in strata title

democracy. These include the good citizens, the articulate, the disadvantaged, the petty dictators and the squeaky wheels.

Like macro democracy the politics of strata titles is more about effective day to day administration than major contentious disagreements. But it is still a great introduction to democratic politics. The American political scientist Harold Lasswell 's description of politics as 'Who gets what, when and how' fits strata title politics beautifully.

There are great benefits in community living, including friendship, sharing and common purpose. But living in a world of developers, strata managers, owners, tenants and real estate agents is often difficult too. There is lots of inter-personal conflict.

Anyone who lives, as I do, in such communities has far greater insight into the various elements of the real world of politics. There are strata title lessons in democracy about participation, leadership and making hard decisions.

Most participants lead busy, distracted lives with little time to invest in community processes. Australian politics copes with such disinterest by imposing compulsory voting but there is no such remedy within strata schemes. Absentee landLords, whose ownership is an investment rather than a life-style choice, rarely pull their weight. Their tenants are treated like aliens with no voting rights.

The leadership lesson is not just about the quality of leadership by body corporate committees but rather about how few people volunteer to take executive positions. Community organisations already know this lesson. Sometimes there is no one willing at all who hasn't done the job before.

In macro politics those who stand for election deserve more credit than they are often given because they are an equally small minority.

The final lesson is about just how hard it is to make big decisions because there are always losers and winners, those who can afford fees and expenses and those who cannot, and the usual problem of not enough money to go around. No wonder there is frequent recourse to legal advice, tribunals and courts to resolve disputes. Then the circle is completed between micro and macro politics.

Dysfunction in the Church and the ALP

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

As an institution stricken with dysfunction, the ALP shares a bleak outlook with unions, churches and other organisations that are similarly sustained by shared ideals and belief systems, but are struggling. They all find it difficult to sell their values to a wider public and to recruit new generations of members.

There seems to be a tension between marketability and remaining faithful to the original charism or inspiration. In the past, these have worked in tandem, as they should. But it could be that the institutions have lost their nerve and no longer know how to be authentic, despite explicit and well-publicised attempts to be 'real'.

There is a defensiveness that shows itself in a culture of denial that rejects effective self-examination in favour of actual or de facto authoritarianism. In 2010 British Jesuit psychologist Brendan Callaghan [wrote](#) in *Thinking Faith* of a defensiveness that is also common in the corporate world:

All large institutions develop mechanisms of defensiveness. IBM, General Motors, Lehman Brothers — all have also paid the price for having developed an internal culture which made it impossible for those with responsibility to see the truth ...

Unthinking obedience and loyalty in the face of disagreement with authority can be a way of avoiding the pain and tension of conflict, doubly attractive if those in authority have arbitrary powers of appointment and promotion.

Callaghan's main interest is in dealing with the dysfunction that exists in the Catholic Church, with particular reference to sexual abuse. He traces the problem back to the Reformation and the post-Council of Trent seminary system which was structured by a need to defend received doctrine rather than play a part in the contest of ideas represented by the Enlightenment and the growth of scientific method.

He refers to the psychologist Erich Fromm's suggestion that we live with two conflicting tendencies: to 'move out of the womb' into freedom and responsibility, and to 'return to the womb', to certainty and security. The latter represents a gain of sorts, but it's actually a loss in terms of human development and fulfilled living.

It's not *Eureka Street's* purpose to transplant Callaghan's analysis of power structures in the Catholic Church to the Australian Labor Party. But members and observers of the ALP will recognise signs of the party's decline in that of the Church, and hopefully accept that both Gillard and Rudd forces have a particular job to do in order to make the party functional before the next federal election.

