

Contents

- 1 **President's Report**
Stuart Macintyre
- A Religious Society?**
- 6 **Belief and Disbelief in Australia**
James Jupp
- 16 **The Apology, the Secular and the Theologico-Political**
Michael Fagenblat
- 33 **'May we each be faithful to the light that we have already gained': Some Perspectives on Modern Theosophy**
Jill Roe
- 41 **Religion and Social Cohesion**
Gary D Bouma and Rod Ling
- 51 **Metaphysics: A Once and Future Discourse**
Freya Mathews
- 57 **Academy News**
- Reports: Workshops and Roundtables**
- 64 **Australia and Climate Change Diplomacy: Towards a Post-2012 Regime. Policy proposals on Australia's climate change diplomacy**
Rosemary Rayfuse and Shirley Scott
- 68 **Climate Change Responses across Regional Australia: Social Learning and Adaptation**
John Martin
- 71 **Roundtable: Public Service Independence and Responsiveness**
Suzy Killmister
- 76 **CSIRO-ASSA Symposium: Integrating Social Sciences into the CSIRO National Research Flagships**

Volume 27 2/2008

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia was established in 1971. Previously, some of the functions were carried out through the Social Science Research Council of Australia, established in 1942. Elected to the Academy for distinguished contributions to the social sciences, the 466 Fellows of the Academy offer expertise in the fields of *accounting, anthropology, demography, economics, economic history, education, geography, history, law, linguistics, philosophy, political science, psychology, social medicine, sociology and statistics*.

The Academy's objectives are:

- to promote excellence in and encourage the advancement of the social sciences in Australia;
- to act as a coordinating group for the promotion of research and teaching in the social sciences;
- to foster excellence in research and to subsidise the publication of studies in the social sciences;
- to encourage and assist in the formation of other national associations or institutions for the promotion of the social sciences or any branch of them;
- to promote international scholarly cooperation and to act as an Australian national member of international organisations concerned with the social sciences;
- to act as consultant and adviser in regard to the social sciences; and,
- to comment where appropriate on national needs and priorities in the area of the social sciences.

These objectives are fulfilled through a program of activities, research projects, independent advice to government and the community, publication and cooperation with fellow institutions both within Australia and internationally.

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President's Report

Reviews

Winter is a season of reviews. We have two major inquiries, one into higher education chaired by Denise Bradley, the other into innovation chaired by Terence Cutler, and both have now released discussion papers. So too has the Australian Research Council, which is now responsible for the evaluation of research performance.

These mark the first stage of the new Federal Government's undertaking to lead an education revolution, making good its predecessor's under-investment in universities and tackling the deficiencies in the national research effort. There was limited funding for such a revival in the recent federal budget, but the outcome of the present reviews is likely to make the case for a major increase in support. It will also set new directions for teaching and research in higher education, with major implications for the social sciences.

The Academy thus has a vital interest in the outcome of these reviews. Social scientists are heavily involved in them and many have made submissions, individually or through disciplinary associations, as has the Academy.



Review of Higher Education

The Bradley review commissioned by Julia Gillard as Minister for Education, Employment, Workplace Relations and Social Inclusion is the first major review of arrangements for Australia's universities for a decade. The discussion paper it released in June provides a comprehensive account of a system under strain.

It is large, with a million students enrolled in 39 universities, but demographic projections suggest that future growth is likely to depend on increasing the participation rate — the restricted enrolment of students from low-income and Indigenous families is marked. The growth in enrolments has outstripped staffing — student/staff ratios grew from 12.9 in 1990 to 20.3 in 2005 — and as Graeme Hugo has shown, replacement of an ageing workforce will be a major challenge. Public funding in real terms has fallen, so that Australian universities rely heavily on student fees, especially from international students, with a heavy strain on their facilities.

The picture of research arrangements is equally stark. Higher education expenditure of \$4.3 billion on research and development sounds healthy, but two-thirds of this is made up of expenditure from general university funds and the contribution from business (just 6 per cent) is remarkably low. The proportion of expenditure directed to basic research is declining, and the paper notes that universities still have to subsidise the cost of research undertaken with national competitive grants. Simon Marginson's work on the challenge to Australia's international research reputation as other countries invest heavily is acknowledged. Clearly the national research effort relies heavily on the capacity of academics to combine teaching and research (for comment on many of these issues, see *Dialogue* 1/2008).

The paper characterises Australian higher education as an industry made up of 'enterprises in a market, albeit enterprises that still have a strong sense of their public benefit role'. This is a generous judgement. The picture that emerges from the discussion paper is of a retreat from public education burdened by intrusive regulation, and short-term expedients to deal with just some of the more troubling consequences.

The paper asks many questions and gives little indication of the decisions it is likely to reach. It is guided by the review's terms of reference, which are notable for their economic perspective. The Bradley committee is charged with assessing whether the current system is 'contributing to the innovation and productivity gains required for long term economic development and growth', and 'ensuring that there is a broad-based tertiary education system producing professionals for both national and local labour market needs'. This narrow remit is softened slightly by an additional reference to 'supporting and widening access to higher education, including participation by students from a wide range of backgrounds'.

Not surprisingly, the Bradley committee works with the concept of higher education as a creator of 'human capital' for a 'competitive, knowledge-based global economy'. It sees universities as the 'intellectual base for new knowledge intensive industries', though it goes on to add that 'higher education in a modern democracy does more than this' through enhancing social inclusion, promoting international engagement and 'engendering the love of learning for its own sake and the passion for intellectual discovery'.

The brevity of these allusions contrasts with their prominence in the earlier reviews of Keith Murray and Leslie Martin, or even in the 1988 statements by John Dawkins — though the consequences of that blueprint indicate that affirmation is not in itself a safeguard. Much will depend upon the means whereby the ends are to be secured. Still, I welcome the reminder that universities have a larger purpose

Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA)

In June the Australian Research Council released a consultation paper for how it proposes to conduct an evaluation of Australian research performance. This is to replace the earlier Research Quality Framework, in preparation for which universities and academics expended such time and effort. The decision of Senator Kim Carr as the new Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research to adopt a simpler exercise and entrust it to the ARC was well received.

The Minister also affirmed the integrity of the ARC, reassuring researchers who had been deeply disturbed by the previous government's surreptitious interference in its decisions and removal of its board. Most fellows will be aware that he has created an advisory committee to strengthen the ARC, and along with my colleague Ian Donaldson, I am a member; this recognition of the importance of the humanities and social sciences extends to a number of other committee appointments. I would have preferred that a statutory board be re-established to restore the arm's length relationship between government and the principal research body, but we do appreciate the improvement in its status.

At fairly short notice the ARC has designed a system of research evaluation designed to make use of its existing expertise and avoid the costly duplication of effort involved in the earlier RQF. It proposes to use eight discipline clusters, one of which will be

Social, Behavioural and Economic Sciences (though a number of our disciplines, including history, law, linguistics and philosophy, will be in the Humanities and Creative Arts Cluster). The unit of evaluation will be disciplines, as identified by the Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification. The evaluation will use three indicators: research activity and intensity (staff numbers, Higher Degree enrolments and completions, and research income); quality (based on publications analysis and income); and applied research and translation (where measures are likely to be specific to the cluster). At least initially, the outcome will not determine the allocation of block grants for research to universities.

In its response to the consultation paper the Academy expressed its appreciation of the improvements made to the earlier RQF, not just in simplifying the process but also in improving the design and nomenclature — the earlier idea of distinguishing quality and impact was not only impractical but likely to baffle non-Australians for whom impact is a measure of quality. We are concerned about the uncertainty of funding implications, and preference for disciplines over schools and departments — some important areas of research, such as gender studies, have no ANZSRC recognition.

The greatest area of contention is the heavy reliance on ranking of journals and citations for publication analysis. The ranking of journals was undertaken by the Department prior to the involvement of the ARC. It began with disciplinary associations, groups of deans and others preparing rankings of journals in their fields. The four academies were then asked to collate the information, and on the grounds that it was better for us to assist the practitioners we did. Our Academy was guided by the advice provided to us by the practitioners but changes were made after we submitted that advice, and a number of disciplines felt justifiably concerned by the changes.

For understandable reasons, the rankings are generous to Australian journals. Much of the best research in the social sciences works with Australian problems and Australian data, and it is best suited to a national journal. But anyone who looks at the rankings will find so many leading international journals ranked so low as to threaten national solipsism. It is hard to see how reliance on these rankings will secure one of the objects of the exercise, to make informed comparisons of the quality of Australian research. For that matter, it is hard to see how analysis within disciplinary indicators is going to provide a basis for comparison between them. Similar problems bedevil the reliance on citations. As currently configured, the principal databases provide a poor capture of Australian social science citations in a number of disciplines.

Beyond this, there are inherent problems in relying on journals and journal citations for many of the social sciences, where books and book chapters are primary forms of publication. An Indicators Development Group is to consider appropriate measures for specific disciplines, but our submission suggested ‘there is no immediate substitute for an expert panel that assesses “scholarly reputation” for books and book chapters’. Accordingly, we argued that ‘a viable method has to include actually reading some books and book chapters that are proposed as influential within a discipline’.

National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS)

Running alongside the development of the research evaluation, Senator Carr commissioned a new Roadmap for Australian Research Infrastructure. The previous Roadmap was developed after the Howard government provided funding of \$542 million over seven years from 2004 for a strategy for major research infrastructure that

was heavily weighted to science and technology. An Exposure Draft for the new Roadmap was released in July and one of its features is the inclusion of a new 'capability' for Transforming Arts, Humanities and Social Science Research. We welcome this recognition of what it describes as 'the important and pervasive influences' of the HASS disciplines.

A Working Group chaired by Graeme Turner helped prepare the statement of the priorities for these disciplines, and a fellow of the Academy, Graeme Hugo, was a member of the Group. They have suggested the need for a substantial enhancement of digital resources, including improvement of access, analysis and linkage of social science data bases. Moreover, they emphasise the contribution of HASS research to the other NCRIS capabilities in population and biological health, terrestrial ecosystems, marine environment and biosecurity.

The Academy welcomes these proposals. Some of us might think that the non-virtual components of our research infrastructure might be in need of attention, notably the large collections in museums, archives and libraries.

The reiteration of HASS involvement in the other capabilities takes us back to the efforts of the two Academies to broaden the national research priorities when they were promulgated in 2002. That endeavour brought some rewording of the ambit of the priority areas, but left the social sciences in a subordinate role to scientific and technological priorities. The inclusion of HASS as a capability in its own right provides a far more auspicious basis for the linkages that NCRIS seeks.

Innovation Review

Alongside these reviews is one of particular importance. It is concerned with Australia's innovation system, and is charged with identifying the principles that should guide the participation of the public sector in innovation. This will involve developing innovation priorities to complement the existing research priorities, improving the system of support, removing obstacles to innovation and considering how its government might be improved. The Expert Group conducting the review is chaired by Terry Cutler, and includes three fellows of the Academy: Glyn Davis, Steve Dowrick and John Foster.

All this makes the meeting of the National Academies Forum on 26 August particularly important. It was timed to follow the release of a Green Paper for the Innovation Review, and involved Senator Carr, Terence Cutler and representatives of all four academies. I am writing this President's Report ahead of the Forum, but am confident that it will be a major symposium carrying forward the discussion on which government policy will be based.

The same holds for our Annual Symposium, which is being convened by Janet Chan and Leon Mann to pursue the central idea guiding government policy, that of innovation. It's a heavily freighted term, innovation, and drives research policy in the OECD, its member countries and their universities. At its heart lies a conviction that the production and application of knowledge is the key to success in the knowledge economy, and universities are a crucial component of research and development.

But while there is a clear correlation between investment in research and economic growth, economists are still debating the nature of the relationship. There is a common tendency for governments to concentrate on mechanisms of technology transfer, and to overlook the highly contextual complexities of successful innovation —

complexities that social scientists are trained to analyse. There is a related tendency to think of the university as part of an innovation system that needs to be made more responsive to its requirements, and to overlook the distinctive qualities that make the university so effective in intellectual creativity.

For all these reasons I look forward to the Symposium, and to the outcome of the current wave of reviews.

For further information on Reviews, see:

http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/policy_issues_reviews/reviews/highered_review/

<http://www.arc.gov.au/era/default.htm>

<http://www.ncris.dest.gov.au/>

<http://www.innovation.gov.au/innovationreview/Pages/home.aspx>

Stuart Macintyre
President

Readers may be interested to learn that the following have been
Fellows of The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia for:

40 Years or More –

Emeritus Professor Ron Taft (elected 1964)
Emeritus Professor John Legge (1964)
Professor Harry Edwards (1964)
Professor Ross Day (1967)
Emeritus Professor Reginald Appleyard (1967)
Emeritus Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki (1967)
Emeritus Professor JD Bruce Miller (1967)
Emeritus Professor Alan Shaw (1967)
Dr Charles Price (1967)
Emeritus Professor Ronald Gates (1968)
Sir Bruce Williams (1968)
Emeritus Professor Keith Hancock (1968)

And a few for 50 Years or More –

Sir Zelman Cowen (1952)
Emeritus Professor Peter Karmel (1952)
Emeritus Professor John Barnes (1957)

A Religious Society?

Belief and Disbelief in Australia

James Jupp

Australia is not a deeply religious country. But all societies contain important populations who have faith in religions, even the 'secular postmodern' societies which worry the two Sydney Archbishops – Cardinal Pell and Archbishop Peter Jensen. We know from the 2006 Census that 11.2 per cent would not answer the optional question on religion and that 18.7 per cent stated clearly that they had 'no religion'. But this still means that 70 per cent described themselves as belonging to some religion or another, mostly variants of Christianity but nearly 6 per cent from other traditions.

Religion, data and the social scientist

Australia is fortunate in having a continuous Census record of religious affiliation for 150 years. The United States cannot officially ask such a question, as the courts have ruled that constitutionally religion is a private matter of no interest to the state, which is odd, as the US is more deeply religious than any other developed society. Britain had no such question after 1851 until concern about its growing Muslim population of 2.5 per cent prompted questions in 1991 and 2001. Australia certainly seems to have been more officially concerned about religion than many other English-speaking societies. Essentially this was because of the rift between Protestantism and Catholicism and the basing of many educational, health and welfare functions in the religious denominations. But it was also because influential politicians – including Sir Henry Parkes the 'father of federation' - were worried that Irish Catholics were too influential and threatened social harmony in a way which was not true for Protestants. The selection of immigrants for assisted passages specifically sought to reproduce the religious balance found in the United Kingdom. But South Australia, the paradise of dissent, still complained on at least two occasions in the mid-19th century that too many Catholics were coming.

So religious data has several uses, one of them political. Today, when public policy has privatised schools, hospitals, prisons and welfare so dramatically over the past decade, this information is more important than ever. Many of these public functions are in the hands of organised religion. The largest and most complex systems are controlled by the Catholic Church. Two out of three major hospitals in Canberra, for example, are now owned by an order of nuns. But the political dimension, namely fear of non-Christians and especially Muslims, is also important. If there is an 'enemy within', it is a good idea to know how many of them there are and where they can be found. But the odd feature of all this is that the Immigration Department, the main agency for changing the religious face of Australia, never publishes intake figures based on religion, only those on birthplace and nationality. This helps to disguise not only the numbers of non-Christians being allowed in, but also the number of Christian refugees from non-Christian states – both highly sensitive pieces of information.

What, then, is so special about religion that academics, officials and politicians often try to avoid discussing it? One reason is that personal beliefs are held to be

confidential; another is that religion and politics should not mix; a third that the whole subject is so combustible that it is best left alone; another is the opposite – that Australia is so secularised that religion is unimportant; and finally the bureaucratic argument that not enough people use the material to make it worth the cost of collecting it. But the question has survived at least since the 1850s and should be of more interest to social scientists than it seems to be. Public opinion polls no longer ask for religious identity as they once did. Academic texts on social and political tensions often avoid religion except (for political scientists) for the machinations of BA Santamaria a good fifty years ago. Then suddenly a group of amateurs kill themselves blowing up a sky-high monument to American capitalism and religion forces itself on public attention.

One problem for trained social scientists is that most writing about religion has been by the religious. They have made the 'leap of faith' which allows them to believe in the existence of a God and an afterlife, not to mention many other things not susceptible to empirical observation. Even so there is plenty of scope for analysing the activities of organised denominations, their interactions with others and their influence on society as a whole. Perhaps this is why historians have occupied centre stage in the sub-discipline of religious studies. Oliver MacDonagh and Patrick O'Farrell on the Catholic Church, Douglas Pike on South Australian Nonconformity, Hilary Carey on Australian religious history, Bill and Hilary Rubinstein and Suzanne Rutland on Jewish history and many others have created an excellent reserve of knowledge and understanding based on historical research and their own beliefs and allegiances. A major resource for broad research on religious issues is at Monash University, under the leadership of Gary Bouma.

What the plentiful historic accounts suggest is that organised religions and their supporters behave like other human organisations in many important ways. They can, therefore, be profitably studied by non-believers using the normal tools of social science research. However there is a reluctance to do so by Australian political scientists and sociologists who are either not themselves religious or are suspicious of belief systems which seem to have no solid basis in ascertainable fact. It is possible to conduct opinion polls on religious beliefs such as the existence of God or an after-life. But few do so in Australia; nor does it make much difference to the beliefs and actions of the religious, whatever the answers may be. There are certainly organisations like the Christian Research Association doing good research work from within the denominations and with a focus on such issues as the loss of youth to the church or the future of 'new' denominations like Pentecostalism. But this is essentially market research for the benefit of subscribers.

The religious field

Given the limitations on immigration data mentioned above and the marginal role of many social scientists in this field, the five-year Commonwealth Census remains as an invaluable instrument for research. It does have limitations, some of which are overcome by cross-tabulations which need to be paid for. Useful ones include religion with birthplace, language use, ancestry and similar indications of multiculturalism. Australian religions have only rarely originated in Australia, with the exception of the very small and declining traditional Aboriginal religions now practised by less than 10 000 people, almost all in the Northern Territory. Australia has followers of all the major and many of the minor religions of the world, but it has only rarely originated religions which are locally unique. The Australian Church, which flourished in Melbourne from

the 1880s to the 1940s was essentially the work of one man, Charles Strong, and died with him. He was, in any case, a Scottish Presbyterian minister who fell out with the conservatives in his thoroughly Scottish church. Recently several local Pentecostal churches have been successfully launched. But that is all. Essentially religion in Australia reflects and sustains immigrant origins in a multicultural society. The Census casts considerable light on this aspect.

The Census data has several limitations, although it is arguably the best in the world for tracing religious trends and locating religious strengths and weaknesses. One problem is that the question has always been optional and more than 10 per cent do not answer it. However, even that is interesting as this percentage is far higher than it was fifty years or a century ago. Many respondents can be assumed to be religiously untouched and not concerned that a higher power might have recorded their indifference. The 'no religion' answer of almost 20 per cent can be more meaningfully analysed, although it may mean different things to different people. For example, it is particularly high among Australian Chinese, yet Chinese religious worship has been established in Australia for 150 years and includes both traditional Chinese and Chinese Christian temples and churches created in the 19th century. As Chinese religion is not highly organised or centralised and is very dependent on family and local deities, it is arguable that many Chinese do not define it as a religion in the Western sense. This is obviously not going to be true for the relatively high numbers of British and New Zealand origin. Certainly England has been noted for years as relatively indifferent to religion and that is borne out by figures from some areas of English concentration, such as Elizabeth in South Australia.

Another problem with raw figures on religion is that they are based on denominational loyalties which may not reflect actual adherence. As the majority do not regularly attend church, describing themselves as Anglicans, Catholics, or Uniting Church (the three largest denominations) may not mean anything other than that is what their families have always been. The smaller denominations are more likely to give an accurate return of true believers. If people say they are Syrian Orthodox or Church of the Nazarene then they almost certainly are. Many simply reply 'Christian' which says little, but 'Born Again' at least suggests some Pentecostal affiliation. Denominations are a form of identifier as is ancestry. Australians who have never been to Ireland may describe themselves as Irish and those who never go to church may describe themselves as Anglicans. These self descriptions are still a good guide to origins if not to actual behaviour.

Denominationalism

Denominationalism is a predominantly Christian concept which applies inadequately or not at all to divisions within other religions. As it developed, Christianity emphasised hierarchy, discipline and apostolic succession. By the time it got to Australia it was already divided into rival organisations with their own distinctive names, beliefs, allegiances and loyalties. Early colonial returns already show divisions within Methodism, itself schismatic from the Church of England. Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodists were all recorded, along with Bible Christians. Not until the next century were they united into a single Methodist Church. The Church of Scotland divided at the Disruption of 1843. This was reflected in Australia with the Free Presbyterians enrolling most of those from the Gaelic-speaking highlands and islands. The largest number of distinct Christianities has been created by the rise of Pentecostalism in recent years. This has launched a religious market place of great

variety – almost literally as several of the new churches have been financially very successful, not least by marketing their music. Orthodox churches have also proliferated with the arrival of supporters from the Balkans, the former Soviet Union and the Middle East and divisions over allegiance to communist governments or anti-communist emigrants.

But this is all irrelevant for non-Christian religions, whose divisions are not effectively listed in the Census. Theravada and Mahayana Buddhists, Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, Hasidic and Liberal Jews, Vishnavite and Sivaite Hindus, although plentiful, do not fit into defined denominations in the Christian sense. This is partly because these divisions are not rigid, partly because worshippers can move between them, and partly because they are unlikely to make such distinctions in their own minds. This lack of strict boundaries may even apply between major religions when Buddhists may worship Hindu deities. Thus a dimension of religious variety is lost as non-Christian religions increase. But the variety of Protestantism is very well documented indeed and more varieties are recorded than ever before.

Religious adherence usually represents inherited traditions through families. Conversion, although not uncommon, is much less important. Some religions, like Islam, try to prohibit desertion. Some like Judaism or Hinduism make it difficult to join. While marriage between denominations was often frowned on in the past it was also quite common, though discouraged by the Catholic Church especially under pope Pius IX. More recent shifts towards Pentecostalism have broken these rigidities to some extent, although it is generally believed that these represent shifts between Protestants rather than major and irreversible trends. There is a market place in faiths but it is very imperfect. What is more common than shifts from one to another is shifts out of active religion altogether, especially by the young. It is this which is causing most concern to the religious at present and which some Pentecostal and charismatic practices aim to reverse. Most seriously affected are some denominations which have long been established in Australia and are fairly conventional in their services and appeals. These include Anglicanism, the foundation and largest religion from 1788 to 1996, but now declining relatively and absolutely behind Catholicism, from 39.7 per cent in 1901 to only 18.7 per cent in 2006. The Uniting Church, product of an amalgamation of Methodists, Congregationalists and some Presbyterians, is also losing the strong position once enjoyed by the British Nonconformists, from 13.3 per cent Methodists in 1901 to 5.7 per cent Uniting in 2006. Both are predominantly Australian-born and both represent descendants of settlers from Great Britain over past generations but few recent immigrants.

The Catholics hold their own as the largest denomination at 26 per cent, more than they had in 1901, but attendance at weekly mass has declined by more than half since the 1950s and there is a growing shortage of priests and novices. The immigration of many Catholics from Europe, the Middle East and some Asian states (The Philippines, India, Viet Nam) has helped to preserve numerical dominance but not to increase the base of active members. Many other small denominations have been dependent on shifting immigration patterns to sustain their organisations. Still, there are well over one hundred distinct denominations, most of them with their own dedicated buildings. Non-Christian numbers have risen from 1.4 per cent in 1901 to 5.6 per cent in 2006 and have produced a variety of very ornate temples.

Some social patterns

Effective social science analysis depends on the observation and measurement of social patterns. If religious adherence were spread evenly throughout the population there would be much less left to say. Obviously there is considerable variety within each state as well as a degree of uniformity across all of them. Dissecting the figures at the level of local government brings up some interesting and often puzzling patterns. One constant is that there are very few areas of Australia where one denomination dominates over all others – no urban or rural ghettos. In rural Australia there is a long established pattern of Catholics settling to the south of Sydney and Anglicans to the north. This is still visible, with the old town of Boorowa and the newer town of Griffith, the only ones in New South Wales where Catholic strength is consistently around 40 per cent. In general, however, Catholics and Anglicans share rural locations fairly equally. Exceptions are in the Lutheran districts to the west of Brisbane and more widely in South Australia and in smaller pockets of the Riverina and the Wimmera. Anglicans dominate the Western Australian wheat belt and most of rural Tasmania. The Uniting Church has inherited a large area of South Australia from the Methodists and a few areas from the Presbyterians in western Victoria. Essentially the religious balance has not changed in most of rural and provincial Australia for a century, away from the developing coastal resorts.

The residential pattern in the major cities mainly reflects the occupations and education of religious adherents. Consequently it changes if their social situation improves. Jews are among the most highly concentrated, but are no longer in the areas where they began to settle a century ago. The cities of Waverley and Woollahra in Sydney and Stonnington and Glen Eira in Melbourne now contain the great majority of Australian Jews. They have left their original settlements in the two City centres and St Kilda and Carlton (Melbourne) but now South African Jews are breaking into new territory along the North Shore line in Sydney. Catholics have left the inner-city working class districts like Surry Hills and North Melbourne and are found in majorities in most Sydney and Melbourne municipalities. But religious and ethnic groups are often mixed together, as are Muslims and Buddhists in Auburn (Sydney), while Fairfield (Sydney) and Dandenong (Melbourne) have large numbers of Christian Orthodox and Vietnamese Buddhists living in close proximity.

The occupational background of the major religions also changes over time and there may be wide distances between members of the same religion. For example 20.7 per cent of adult Buddhists are professionals but 13.2 per cent are labourers. The highest proportions of managers range from 12 per cent for Lutherans and 14 per cent for Jews to 10.2 per cent for Anglicans. But these are different occupations in fact.

'Managers' include farmers, which is reflected for the Lutherans but not for the Jews. The highest levels for professionals range from Jews at 37.9 per cent and Hindus at 32.5 per cent to 24.6 per cent for Baptists. The highest proportions of labourers are Buddhists (13.2 per cent) and Muslims (11.7 per cent), reflecting their origins among refugees and consequent difficulties in becoming established. The point is, however, that religion alone is rarely the sole indicator of social status, occupation or residence.

The overseas origins of nearly all Australian religions means that they have originated in foreign circumstances and may still be attached to foreign authorities. This is obviously true for the Catholic Church with its international networks, its final authority with the Pope in the Vatican and its European origins. The Anglican Church also descends from the Church of England and still accepts the nominal primacy of the

archbishop of Canterbury, although that is fading fast. The original Christian churches in the early days of modern Australia were all closely connected with different parts of the United Kingdom – the Anglicans with England, the Presbyterians with Scotland, the Catholics with Ireland and the Methodists and Baptists with England and Wales. This pattern repeated itself with other denominations entering Australia for the next two centuries. Roughly, one could allocate the current denominations in terms of their origins as follows:

<u>Origin</u>	<u>Numbers</u>	<u>Denomination</u>
Great Britain	5 866 833	<i>Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, Uniting, Salvationists, Brethren</i>
Europe and Ireland	6 002 244	<i>Catholics, Orthodox, Lutheran, Judaism</i>
North America	451 812	<i>Assemblies of God, Jehovah's Witness, Pentecostal, 7th Day Adventist, Mormons, Churches of Christ</i>
Middle East	438 133	<i>Islam, Maronite, Coptic, Bahai'i, Armenian, Antiochian</i>
Asian	602 495	<i>Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Chinese</i>
Indigenous & Pacific	12 498	<i>Aboriginal, Ratana</i>
Non-specific & Undefined	450 392	<i>'Christian', Minor Sects, Paganism</i>

Over time many of these denominations adjusted to Australian circumstances and weakened or terminated their overseas connections. There was also considerable 'triangular' movement: for example between Britain, the USA and Australia or between Australia, Pacific Islands and later back to Australia, or from Scotland to Australia to Korea and back to Australia.

These international links have had important influences on the beliefs and practices of religions within Australia. The Anglicans maintained the 'broad church' attitudes of the Church of England, despite considerable conflict over the years between Anglo Catholics and Evangelicals (which also reflected the English situation). Catholic bishops were drawn from Ireland and trained in Rome before coming to Australia. Most Muslim imams came from Arabic states and many could not speak English. The various Orthodox churches had close relations with Balkan states which led to serious rifts under communism between 1945 and 2000. The US American influence has been strong, with preachers and funds flowing between the mother churches and the Australian equivalents. This has greatly strengthened Pentecostal practices, belief in the imminent return of Christ and the millennium, and Bible literalism. The American churches mostly established themselves between 1830 and 1920 by evangelical mission work and conversion, not only in Australia but also in the Pacific Islands from which many of their converts have emigrated to Australia.

The 'unbelievers'

Since a change in the Census wording in 1971 there has been a steady rise in the numbers claiming 'No Religion', with the highest level and absolute numbers being in 2006. The Census does not indicate the level of religious activity, but other sources

suggest it is fairly low. The ABS General Social Survey in 2002 showed that 23 per cent of adults participated in religious activities in the previous three months. Women outnumbered men and those over 65 had the highest rates of participation. The National Church Life Survey, which is conducted parallel to each Census, shows a level of below 10 per cent for Christian church attendance on a representative weekend. This is still a large number, greatly exceeding the combined membership of all political parties and approaching that of the trade unions. At least half of those attending church regularly are Catholics. These substantial numbers do not, of course, satisfy religions like Christianity which aim to universalise their support. The smaller denominations have higher levels of activity and Islam and Pentecostalism also have high attendance figures.

While the category 'Not Stated' is a dustbin from which little can be retrieved, that is not so for the positive statement 'No Religion', which does show consistent patterns for some social characteristics. One is the preponderance of those with university qualifications. With over 600 000 non-believers holding degrees or above, this 'religious' grouping is larger than for any formal religion, with the Catholics well behind at 422 000, the Anglicans at 391 000 and the Uniting Church with only 143 000, of the 'big three' with over one million adherents. What is remarkable is the high number of graduates among the two Asian religions of Buddhism (80 000) and Hinduism (61 000). This reflects the high number of students from China, India and Malaysia and the impact of shifts towards skilled migration under the Howard Federal government (1996-2007). While some of these may return home in due course, there should be continuing changes in the religious composition of the professional classes in the near future.

These large numbers of non-believing but well educated Australians are not, on their own self-description, necessarily hostile to or even actively interested in religion. The numbers claiming to be agnostics, rationalists, atheists or humanists are quite small at about 63 000. Christian fears of 'New Age' growth are also unduly anxious. The combined strength of Paganism, Wicca, New Age, Nature Religions, Pantheism, Animism, Satanism and Druids was only 35 000, with Paganism and Wicca in the lead. This was a fragmented and individualistic collection, found mainly in the major cities and with only informal institutions.

Several broad generalisations can be made about non-believers, apart from their relatively high level of education. They are more likely to come from Protestant societies such as New Zealand, Britain, the Netherlands, the USA and Germany. They are very unlikely to come from Catholic or Asian societies with the exception of China. In terms of ancestry, which includes the locally born, by far the lowest levels of non-believers were Lebanese, Filipinos, Slavs, Indians, Sinhalese, Greeks, Maltese, Italians, Turks and Vietnamese. This is quite ironical as these are the very ethnicities often seen as least likely to fit into Australian society or to accept its values. Most come from societies where religion has been socially and politically important, even vital, as a basis for social and individual identity. Western democracies, including Australia, where this is not so, are well on the way to secularisation already.

The occupational and ethnic background of non-believers is reflected in their choice of residence. Over Australia as a whole there is little difference in the level of non-believers, with the exception of New South Wales, which is hard to explain. Elsewhere the level ranges from 24.2 per cent in South Australia to 18.6 per cent in Queensland, which is also the national average. Clearly Adelaide - the city of churches - is no

longer what it was and neither is Queensland – the Deep North. What Queensland still has is a concentration of fundamentalists. It has the largest numbers for the Anglican Catholic Church, the Apostolic Church, the Christian Outreach Centres, the Mormons, Church of the Nazarene, Full Gospel Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Wesleyan Methodist Church and (rather strangely) Spiritualism. What is unique and contrary to the usual stereotype, is that New South Wales has a level of only 14.2 per cent of non-believers. This is very odd except in terms of the large settlement in Sydney of Middle Eastern and Asian immigrants – or more fancifully by the strong conservative leadership of the Catholic and Anglican churches and of Pentecostalism. The low level of non-belief is apparent in Sydney and Newcastle as well as in the provinces. Melbourne and Adelaide are much more 'godless' than Sydney, which challenges one of the oldest social stereotypes.

At the local government area in the major cities, immigration has had a much greater effect than in rural and provincial Australia. Non-believers are uncommon among many immigrants, as argued above. This has meant that the level of non-belief in working class suburbs is much lower than in the more affluent areas. This does not necessarily mean that manual and industrial workers are more religiously active than the middle classes. Such information is lacking and runs counter to long term observations on religious behaviour going back well into the 19th century. But it does mean, for example, that non-Christian religions, other than Judaism, are much stronger in working class, Labor voting suburbs to the west of Sydney and Melbourne and the southeast of Melbourne. The impact of non-Christian immigration has been less marked on other cities, but there are smaller concentrations of Muslims and Buddhists in all the metropolitan centres. Superficially, at least, these districts appear more religious than the conventional middle class suburbs in eastern Melbourne or the Sydney North Shore.

This has led to the paradoxical situation that non-believers are found at above average levels in two locations; gentrified inner suburbs near universities (which is not surprising) and affluent conservative strongholds (which is). This corresponds to the high levels of non-belief amongst the university educated, who either live near universities if young or in affluent areas if older and established. Among Sydney local government areas with more than 20 per cent non-believers Leichhardt, Sydney City and Marrickville are all influenced by two universities; North Sydney, Willoughby, Manly, and Pittwater are all impeccably middle-class or even rich. In Melbourne the highest non-believing area in Australia is Yarra (30.8 per cent), a gentrified inner suburb with many graduates, teachers and professionals, and adjoining Melbourne City containing two universities. Otherwise disbelief is over 20 per cent in Stonnington, Maroondah, Bayside, Knox, Whitehorse, Booroondara, Banyule and Casey – all of them middle class suburbs mostly represented by Liberal politicians; in Nillumbik, an outer area favoured for alternative lifestyles, and in Frankston with the largest British migrant population in Victoria. On the industrial side of the city disbelief is only half as significant, with many Catholic and Labor strongholds and important Buddhist, Muslim and Orthodox populations. In both cities there are strong Pentecostalist churches in outer areas with large families. In both cities Catholics now form the largest denominational following in nearly all municipalities. The old divide between the social classes and the two main religions has largely disappeared.

Towards a Godless Australia?

Religions have developed different visions of the future, depending on whether they see themselves as universal or as peculiar to a region or a people. Jews do not think of Judaism as a world religion which will expand indefinitely until the human race is embraced within its bounds. Rather it sustains a set of traditions, many among the oldest in the world, peculiar to Jewish people but not normally available to others. Protestant Christians, on the other hand, have driven their denominations throughout the world in the belief that all who believe in Christ have potential access to salvation and everlasting life. This ambition has been shared by a multitude of different denominations, often in competition with each other as well as with other religions, including Catholicism. Orthodoxy, while not rejecting conversion, relates closely to ethnicities and national states. Hindus have seen themselves as the religion of India and the Indian diaspora, with adherents coming to Australia from India, Fiji and Malaysia, but not seeking to convert others. Conversion to 'Indian' beliefs has usually been undertaken by entrepreneurial gurus who have found their greatest success in the United States. Buddhism stresses individual understanding and devotion without a strong need to convert. Islam, like Christianity, also embraces all ethnicities and cultures and urges conversion to its faith by all others. Thus if there is a 'clash of civilisations' in Australia, many argue, it will be between Christianity and Islam, as previously it was seen as between universal Protestantism and Catholicism.

However that is not how things are likely to turn out. While Islam has grown rapidly since the abolition of White Australia in 1972, it still only attracts the support of 1.7 per cent of the population, or about the same as the Baptists and less than the Greek Orthodox. It is fractured by ethnic, sectarian and political divisions and lacks the central organising power of the Catholic Church. While it has a high birthrate its youth are subject to constant influences from their Australian surroundings, which their parents are often unable to control. Muslims are highly concentrated in limited areas of Sydney and Melbourne. When following the trends of other immigrant religions they will move outwards into suburbs where they will be a less important part of the local population.

Essentially Australia faces a multifaith future, in which the non-religious will be a major influence. Moral issues will be argued about between the religious and the non-believers and within the ranks of both. But the trend since the 1950s has been all in the direction of adopting laws, practices and attitudes less sensitive to religious susceptibilities. There will remain some important issues which will need some sort of resolution, but which will not lead to the domination of one form of religion over all others. These include:

- the extent to which religious schools, now educating one in three Australian children, are teaching beliefs and concepts incompatible with contemporary science and majority social attitudes;
- continuing discussion on the balance between public funding and support and public obligations;
- the extent to which religions of non-Christian or non-European origins are accepted as faiths in their own terms and with legitimate claims on the same support as Western Christian denominations;
- the willingness of religious leaders to adapt their beliefs and practices away from fundamentalist and authoritarian traditions;

- caution by politicians and the media when dealing with religious issues;
- the incorporation into multicultural policies, budgets and organisations of religious pluralism and issues;
- public policies encouraging inter-religious discussion and co-operation and incorporation into consultative processes;
- immigrant and refugee services designed to explain differing approaches to social issues, including gender and racial issues and basic political institutions;
- inclusion of religious orientation among categories in discrimination legislation;
- the need to amalgamate or otherwise sustain nonviable faith communities; and
- the need to strengthen interfaith trust and co-operation.

Essentially these issues can be tackled within an overall framework of multicultural and integration strategies which Australian national and State governments have been developing for many years and which have been of concern to the Australian Council of Churches and other multi-faith agencies. They will need continuing public education on the theme that religions do not generally threaten social stability and harmony but that intolerance within and between religions may do so. This may also mean avoiding the impression that any one religion is privileged over others or is true where others are false. Religion is here to stay in Australia, regardless of immigration or birthrate trends, but cannot and should not try to impose its values on others or be encouraged to do so. It should be respected but not unduly privileged. The religions themselves have an obligation to change with the times, which many have found difficult. Maintaining a harmonious multifaith society requires more than official intervention.



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[This article is based on research now completed for an ARC Discovery Project, DP 0663997, on *Researching the Social Roles of Religion in Australia*. All statistics are from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing, 2006.]

The Apology, the Secular and the Theologico–Political*

Michael Fagenblat

Re–imagining ‘the nation’s soul’

The Apology issued by the Commonwealth of Australia to its Indigenous peoples, on 13 February 2008, was a momentous event in the symbolic narrative of the nation. Without doubt it was the most significant event that sought to transform the ‘identity’ of Australia since the 1967 referendum. This is not to overstate its empirical effects, which are slight indeed, but to acknowledge that it is only on rare occasions that a nation-state, in this case the Parliament of Australia, exercises its sovereign power in order to re-imagine the basic character of the nation. The fact that parliament unanimously supported the Apology and the overwhelming endorsement that it received from Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians suggests that the people at large accepted the re-imagined characterisation of the nation. Even if it turns out that the Apology testified to our facile hope and attenuated conscience more than to our concrete capacities for righting historical wrongs, it nevertheless accomplished an extraordinary suspension, if only for a moment, of the symbolic shape of the nation so as to re-imagine it anew. Moreover, the spectacle of the Apology in public squares, mass viewings and collective witnessing across the country bore an unusual but undeniable spiritual fervour.

How are we to understand this symbolic reshaping of the national character that reconciliation and apology sought to accomplish? And how are we to explain the public euphoria that accompanied it? Only by way of Christianity. This is not to say that non-Christians, among whom I count myself, atheists and even anti-Christians did not embrace the Apology, nor that such people lack historical, moral and political resources for doing so. And yet the language of reconciliation, the exercise of sovereignty in the mode of contrition, and the re-imagining of a new identity on the basis of a hope for unity for the people cannot be entirely severed from Christian moorings. On the one hand, then, the Apology was a re–visioning of the national imaginary and a reshaping of national identity – ‘a new beginning’, ‘a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians’, as the Prime Minister put it.¹ On the other hand, it had a distinctly Christian tone, suitably and cleverly secularised but by no means detached from its religious element and inspiration. The Apology thus presents a watershed for understanding the role of religion in Australia’s political culture.

To be sure, neither God the Father nor His Son Jesus Christ was mentioned on that day in Parliament. The text of the Apology makes no reference to religion whatsoever. In his address to Parliament commending the motion, the Prime Minister referred to religion only twice, and both times elliptically, once to decry the churches’ involvement in facilitating the policy of assimilating Indigenous peoples into white Australia and once to honour ‘those who emerged from the Dreamtime a thousand generations ago’. The former reference to the churches’ complicity might even suggest that if reconciliation and apology manifested in a distinctly Christian way, so too the sin of rendering black into white, what Kevin Rudd called ‘the great stain’ on ‘the nation’s soul’, was derived from the Pauline proclamation of the *unity* of all people. Such a state, in which there is neither slave nor free, neither Indigenous nor non-Indigenous, does not presuppose or aim at a ‘neutral’ conception of unity but, on the contrary,

desires that there should be 'one new man in place of two' first and foremost because 'ye are all one in Christ Jesus'.² Of course the policy of brutal assimilation of Indigenous people into white Australia was not the fault of Christian missionaries alone. It was motivated by plain racism, just as it was derived from a colonial desire to 'civilise the barbarians'.³ However both the racism and the colonialism of white, settler Australia, even when they did not seek to convert Aborigines to Christianity, which in fact they usually did, bore signs of a Christian provenance and its hope for a unity that overcomes all differences of law and custom and the recalcitrant particularities of ethnicity and flesh. It might therefore be said that the Apology, insofar as it denounced the policy of forced assimilation, came not to praise the role of Christianity in mediating the fraught relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, but to bury it.

The Apology as a secular act?

Increasingly, however, here as elsewhere, the idea of a thoroughly secularised polity severed from its religious origins has come to look like a sociological, political and philosophical fantasy entertained for a short while by a relatively small number of elites. Most of the numerous reconciliation movements that have emerged in recent post-colonial times derive from and are indebted to the Christian heritage of their respective nations.⁴ That is certainly the case for Australia's reconciliation movement. If religious sentiment in the Australian public sphere has traditionally been consigned to 'a shy hope in the heart,' as Manning Clark called it, the reconciliation movement, culminating in the Apology, inscribed the spirit of the Christian heart of the nation onto the letter of its secular law. While I will be concerned mainly with the symbolic, theologico-political character of reconciliation and apology, it must be noted that the symbolic operation is grounded on an empirically Christian character. The latter has at least four major specifications. First, white Australia was led toward reconciliation and apology in large part by Christian activists, clerics and official churches. This is not to deny the immense contribution of non-Christian activists, historians, writers and politicians, only to highlight the prominent role of the churches in the reconciliation process. A pamphlet entitled 'Toward Reconciliation in Australia,' produced by fourteen Australian Christian Churches, was used almost verbatim by Prime Minister Hawke in 1988 in the first parliamentary motion on the issue, passed on 23 August 1988.⁵ Second, as of 2001, 69 per cent of Aboriginal Australians identify one or another form of Christianity as their own religion, whereas only 1.2 per cent report holding to traditional religions.⁶ Presumably the combination of these first two points facilitated a sufficiently common vision for negotiating the process of reconciliation. To these a third factor was introduced, namely, that the Prime Minister, who personally wrote and delivered the Apology, explicitly linked his perception of the wrongs suffered by Indigenous Australians and the need for the Apology to his personal Christian convictions. In the name of the remarkable Dietrich Bonhoeffer's 'theology of the oppressed' Rudd outlined his vision of a Christian politics intent on giving 'power to the powerless, voice to those who have none, and to point to the great silences in our national discourse' which this political theology ought to address, amongst which he specified issues concerning Indigenous Australians.⁷ In fact the Apology was formulated on the preceding Sunday when the now Prime Minister 'went to church in the morning, came back sat down in the afternoon and wrote it'.⁸ Finally, to state the obvious, while politics in Australia is generally regarded as taking place in a secular sphere, the polity itself, as of 2001, was composed of 68 per cent identifying Christians.⁹ While I will return to some of these points, my concern here is primarily

with the character of the Apology as an act of political theology, for if the sociologically Christian nature of Australia can be taken for granted, it remains the case that politics is considered to operate in a space neutralised of religion. I will argue, however, that no less than the empirical, sociological facts just mentioned, the symbolism deployed by the Apology was a rendering into the secular of an essentially Christian political theology. I am preceded here by the excellent work of Michael Phillips, who discusses the reconciliation movement generally, and Danielle Celermajer, who attends to the apology in particular, with acute insight.¹⁰ I therefore propose to build on their analyses by restricting it to subsequent developments, namely, the event of the Apology of 13 February and the role of political theology in the approach taken by Prime Minister Rudd. Moreover, there is an important tension between the theological symbolism of apology as compared with that of reconciliation, as we shall see.

Of course, relating the Apology to our Christian heritage is an affront to the idea that Australia's public sphere and political culture are essentially secular. However the latter view is flawed for at least two reasons. The first is generic to western secularism.¹¹ It contends that the so-called separation of public life from religious beliefs is in truth based on a decidedly Christian code of ethics. Historically, the notion of the secular (*saeculum*), goes back to the earliest years of Christendom and was deployed throughout the centuries to negotiate the borderlines between sacred time and political history. Theologically, it may also be that Christianity's emphasis on faith over works enables a separation between religion and politics that other religions do not.¹² Western secularism thus in some sense extends the historical and theological legacies of Christendom. But such a notion of the secular, even when modernised, does not so much clear the political ground of religion as it paves the way toward a common ground of Christian values shorn of contentious sectarian doctrine. The problem is that nowadays the actual pluralism of secular states includes many non-Christian citizens. As Charles Taylor has argued, this transforms the idea of a *common* ground of values into the hegemony of a Christian majority.¹³ As I write, and with great respect to Pope Benedict, the streets of Sydney have become a spectacle of the Catholic faith embraced wholeheartedly by the media and the Prime Minister. Were it not Christian, this sort of religious spectacle on the stage of Australian life and landscape, even on a smaller scale, would be simply unimaginable and would probably generate considerable outcry. One is left with a strong sense, which one always had, that the Australian public sphere is vigorously Christian. When asked on national radio if Australia is a Christian country, the then Labor frontbencher Kevin Rudd called this 'the great question of our age'. He then referred, with evident sympathy, to a book by Cardinal Ratzinger, before the latter's elevation to the papacy, which argued that much of the richness of *modern* Western culture 'come[s] from a Judeo-Christian tradition and an Enlightenment tradition' which, in Rudd's view, 'represents a sensible compact for the future as well'.¹⁴ Just over a year later, when the two men met for the first time, but by now the frontbencher was Prime Minister of Australia and the cardinal was Pope Benedict XVI, the latter candidly gave the Pope his own answer to 'the great question of our age': 'Australia is deeply shaped by and proud of this nation's Christian heritage *and future*'.¹⁵ Like many western states, Australia is not born out of, nor even borne by, a separation of religion and politics but by founding the political on a common Christian heritage and horizon.

It is precisely because of this *implicit* Christian ethic which shapes Australian public life that politicians wishing to address the nation as a whole, including its non-

Christian citizens, must eschew any *explicit* appeal to a 'common ground' of Christian values, for that will only undermine the imagined unity and identity of the nation. When it came to addressing 'the nation's soul' in order to call for 'a new partnership' for *all* Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous but also Christian and non-Christian, the Prime Minister thus cleverly avoided explicitly invoking Christian values in favour of 'universal human decency' and 'our most basic instincts of what is right and what is wrong' in order to further the idea of reconciliation as 'a core value of our nation'.¹⁶ Sheik Hilaly, for example, who would hardly be caught on the common ground of Christian values, therefore could and did applaud the Apology. Here too, however, the Prime Minister was deploying a second stratagem of western secularism, namely, appealing to an 'independent ethic' that claims to derive from no particular tradition. Was that really the case? Critics of the secular state often claim that what the state tries to pass off as a neutral and independent ethic is in truth a metaphysical doctrine of unbelief. This problem did not surface throughout the Apology, because no one was debating the philosophical *grounds* of 'basic instincts of what is right and what is wrong' and other allegedly independent moral values. Had those grounds been explored by the Prime Minister in Parliament there would not have been the sort of consensus that we saw. For while religionists and atheists of all persuasions might agree on 'core values' such as 'universal human decency' there is no way they would agree on the sources or foundations of these values. Some would call them 'independent' of religious traditions, based on human reason or sentiment alone, while others would source them in various religious beliefs and narratives, themselves incompatible with one another. In explicating the problematic status of the secular in this way Charles Taylor argues that John Rawls 'hit upon the best formulation for the modern secular state, which he called 'overlapping consensus'. Unlike the notion of an 'independent ethic,' which appears to some as but another metaphysical alternative to religious belief, the idea of an overlapping consensus aims to foster moral concord from *whatever perspective* and on the basis of *whatever grounds* its adherents entertain.¹⁷ As the Apology stated, 'whatever their origins,' Australians have 'an equal stake in shaping' their country. I take it that it was some such notion of the secular, as an 'overlapping consensus' of common values derived from incompatible assumptions, that Rudd had in mind in his article in *The Monthly* when he defended 'a Christian perspective on contemporary policy debates' and then stressed that, 'once heard, it must be weighed, together with other arguments from different philosophical traditions, in a fully contestable secular polity'.¹⁸ Here, at his most philosophical and theologico-political, Rudd was neither defending the idea of a secular Australia defined by common Christian values nor providing a model of secularism as an independent ethic derived from no tradition. Rather, secularism was conceived as an overlapping and dynamic consensus in which Christianity played but an important part.

Australian secularism is thus founded on shifting sands. At times it seems to be a foil for common Christian values, at other times it asserts the neutrality of ethical principles that are independent of tradition, and for the most part it is probably derived from an overlapping consensus based on incompatible assumptions. If the last is the most dominant, it is also the most fractious, the most fragile and the most subject to compromise and partialness. It is not surprising, then, that during the process of reconciliation, and especially in the Apology, it was the first two that came to the fore, for in both cases, and with justification, a naïve unity was required, supposed and

deployed. Perhaps this is why the spirit of Christianity featured so prominently throughout reconciliation and apology.

It is also worth recalling another, more simple but perhaps more weighty reason for not regarding Australia's public and political culture as essentially secular. It is that Australia does not enshrine the separation between Church and state in legislation. While section 116 of the Constitution requires that the Commonwealth be *impartial* in its relations to religious institutions, this impartiality does not prevent it from financially supporting religious institutions, as it of course does with schools, hospitals, welfare agencies and so forth.¹⁹ Here too we find something close to the Rawlsian notion of the secular as an overlapping consensus which preserves religious interests without officially or legally privileging one over others. As Rudd said in a radio follow-up to his article in *The Monthly*, this allows Australia to be 'both secular and pluralist, but within that secular pluralist polity, you can't deny Christians having their voice, just as you can't deny anyone else having their voice'.²⁰

Accordingly, however we define Australian secularism it ought not to be on the basis of the separation of church and state, much less by distinguishing the private realm of religion from the public realm of politics. Neither Australia's law nor its society establishes the secular in any firm way. The undeniable force of the secular in Australian public life might therefore be merely as deep as a view of modernity as 'disenchantment'. According to this view, citizens came to terms with the enlightened secular basis of life itself and thus religion went to sleep in public life though it was never actually laid to rest. Since religion is once again astir, the secular character of Australian public and political life is liable to be reshaped or even eroded.²¹ However a negative thesis concerning the secularism of Australia is not enough to establish the religious, much less the distinctly Christian character of the Apology. Let us then specify these.

Sovereignty and shame

There were two major obstacles to the Apology. One was the fact that the forced removal of Indigenous children was not a crime but was comprised of acts committed for the most part in ostensibly good conscience in accordance with government policy and sanctioned by law. The second was a narrow liberal and legal view which holds that responsibility for wrong actions can only apply to individuals (or corporations) for acts which they had themselves committed. As is well known, these were among the main reasons for some people, most notably former Prime Minister John Howard, rejecting the idea of a formal Apology by the Parliament of the nation, and indeed of regarding it as an injustice to those millions of Australians who either had no direct involvement with the afflictions suffered by the Stolen Generations or, if they had, did so within the bounds of the laws and values of former generations.²² To overcome this obstacle a shift needed to be made in the very notion of responsibility. Celermajor has insightfully detailed this shift in terms of its two major aspects.

The first consisted of an acknowledgement that it was not only particular acts that bore the burden of responsibility for the wrongs suffered by Indigenous Australians but the political and cultural character of the nation as a whole and of the state in particular. The particular wrongs suffered by individual Aborigines were *made possible* by a pervasive cultural and political denigration of Aboriginality *as such* that served to define and legitimate the political character of the Commonwealth of Australia. Australia was constituted and defined by denying and assimilating

Aboriginal identity. The wrongs which individual Aborigines suffered therefore went beyond the enormous 'inventory of specific losses' to the 'moral grammar of the political community' which encoded 'the conditions of possibility for the specific acts'.²³ In order to right such a wrong it is not enough to modify existing laws internal to the political order, it is necessary to change the order itself. Within a positivistic and perhaps even a strictly liberal theory of state law it makes no sense to apologise for acts that were both legal and not obviously immoral at the time of their commission. The Apology was an act that reached beyond the limits of the entire field of legal and moral justifications of what had formerly defined Australia. This field is determined by the sovereign, which can be defined as that which is in need of no justification beyond itself. In reaching beyond the law the Apology simultaneously touched on the essence of political sovereignty to justify itself *and* on the ethical basis of political sovereignty, thus on something that is not justified by politics but justifies it. The Apology was thus a peculiar and quite remarkable act of the deployment of sovereignty against itself in the name of a good that goes beyond its own political legitimacy. But in whose name and on the basis of what authority could a sovereign power apologise? Only in the name of itself and on the basis of its own authority? But then there would be no need to apologise, for the very notions of what is right and wrong would simply be derived from sovereignty. It would only be within the law and by virtue of the law that one could determine that an act was wrong. The way forward required a moral point of view that was thus outside the law and could therefore call the sovereign to account without compromising on what is essential to sovereignty, which is to justify itself without appeal to external authority. Rudd's reference to 'basic instincts of right and wrong' was not enough, for the sovereignty of the state cannot be contested by objective morality but only by itself. The Apology thus pushed Australia beyond contemporary liberalism by appealing to a sense of moral transcendence that the positivism of law could not accommodate. It touched a moral point of view beyond the sovereign power of the state. On what basis, then, could it be justified? Such moments are generally *contained* by referenda. Or else they belong to the history of revolutions and the essential violence inherent in the establishment of a sovereign legal authority.²⁴ However the genius of the Apology and its status, I believe, as a *novum* in political history (along with similar sovereign acts by other modern states), is to conjure a metaphysics of society, or the transcendence of the people over and above the state, in a way that is *essentially* opposed to violence.

The breakthrough resulted from a shift in the grounds of responsibility from guilt to shame. There was no question of the sovereign having been guilty, for the idea makes no sense. If the sovereign breaks one of its own laws then it can be challenged in court. But this is always done in the name of the law and therefore affirms the absolute right of the sovereign to determine guilt. But can the sovereign be ashamed? Unlike guilt, shame is endured without any personal or intentional wrongdoing. Shame is a mode of moral identification that goes beyond the causal relations of actions to agents (and for this reason it is of course easily exploited). Shame is endured more than it is perpetrated, and even a shameful act only becomes shameful when one goes over what one has done and endures it from a new perspective. Shame emerges from a passive ethical bond between subjects that goes beyond the individualistic and intentional confines of moral and legal guilt. One can feel ashamed without being guilty, so long as one *identifies* with a wrong with which one has no causal or intentional relationship. Moreover, shame is inseparable from the experience of being seen, and especially from the experience of being seen in an

unanticipated light, such as arises when the point of view of someone else, previously unnoticed, obtrudes. Sometimes shame, like pride, stems from what one has not done at all, as when one feels ashamed on behalf of someone. Indeed shame is a moral affectation that is ultimately not caused by anything one has done but by the moral presence of the other. As the moral philosopher Emmanuel Levinas says, 'Shame is founded upon the solidarity of our *being*, which obliges us to claim responsibility for ourselves'.²⁵ Shame is a moral experience of *identification* with a wrong one may not have committed or intentionally committed involving an unforeseen recognition of the other. Unlike guilt, then, shame has less to do with what one intentionally does than *who one is* in relation to others; it results from identification, either with oneself, with someone else or with some group in a way that partakes of a moral burden for which one cannot be blamed. It also involves being seen from a new moral perspective or having a new moral perspective imposed on one by the other. For all these reasons, shame is a moral experience that goes beyond the confines of individual and legal guilt and thus stands beyond the law.

Shifting the terms of responsibility from guilt to shame was the single most important way of overcoming the moral, political and legal obstacles to the Apology.²⁶ We can apply the above analysis to the responsibility experienced by contemporary non-Indigenous Australians in relation to the Stolen Generations, the culmination of which was the Apology.²⁷ First, non-Indigenous Australians took responsibility for the political wrong inhering not only in the *acts* of their forebears, whose legality was never in question, but in identifying the wrong inherent in the political culture as such, thus in whatever it was that made one 'Australian'. The fact that Australians were not 'guilty,' legally speaking, of wronging the Stolen Generations made no difference to the shame of it. Indeed in an important sense it was shame that enabled contemporary Australians not merely to regard those acts as wrong but to identify the 'moral grammar of the political community' of former generations as their own burden and responsibility. Second, the shame arose from the new moral point of view that Indigenous Australians offered their fellow citizens (and, of course, this was only possible after 1967). This is a crucial point. The experience of shame was a new way of negotiating the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, one not without its problems but nevertheless of formidable power. By way of shame, a relationship of recognition, moral respect and the preservation of the otherness or particularity of Indigenous Australians was forged. White shame was a way of recognising or ceding moral authority, a way of affirming the permanent value of the differences marked by Indigenous peoples in relation to settler society. While there is a theological dimension to this development, it is in direct opposition to the theology of ethnic assimilation through spiritual unification that has coloured much Christianity.

The theological provenance

What is the theological dimension of this political process? I am convinced that an enormous amount of relevant commentary could be made about this and related phenomena, as is indeed being done by many scholars working on contemporary political theology in a post-secular world.²⁸ Here I will only offer a sketch along the lines of the two major phenomena leading from the Stolen Generations to the Apology that we have considered. One was the fact that the issue was not this state law or that individual case of the suffering of an Indigenous person but the entirety of the meaning of 'Australian,' including its political and spiritual legitimacy. This caused the problem of sovereignty to obtrude, for only a radical act of sovereignty, of the freedom

to act without interference and to justify one's own laws for oneself, can change the very identity of the state. The other was the collective experience of shame, which involved an identity based on responsibility that went beyond the legal limits of guilt. Collective shame enabled this quite *exceptional* act of assuming a responsibility for a sense of the political *as such* that transcended the law. It will be noticed that both shame and sovereignty are most clearly manifest in their transcendence with respect to the law, as somehow appealing to an ethics, in the case of shame, or a power, in the case of sovereignty, that cannot be based on a liberal notion of state law but claims to lie outside it and to found it.

Christianity reaches for each of these views in its own way, but also in a way that I think both significantly resembles the phenomena we have considered and is in some sense essential to its particular theological heritage. The relation of the Apology and reconciliation to Christianity is not accidental. Let us first consider the ethical point, separating it conceptually from what I have been calling the political. The ethical breakthrough of Christianity, as a religion, pre-eminently comes by understanding Christ as anterior to and outside the law. Especially for St Paul, it is the essence of Christ to have returned humanity to a true relation to God that is outside the law. Christ is likened typologically to Adam, who is marked not only as universal humanity but also as humanity's ethical or spiritual embodiment outside of law. Thus, when Paul moves from Adamic prehistory to the realm of history and particularity he invokes Abraham, the symbol of the particularism of a people determined by law, expressly in order to emphasise that Abraham was given God's word *before and independently* of the law and its particularism.²⁹ It is by conceiving of Abraham – the progenitor of biblical history and particularism – as the bearer of a promise that had nothing to do with the tribal particularism of the law that Paul broke with Judaism.³⁰ This was the great ethical breakthrough of Christianity, which was to proclaim a moral identification that transcends whatever righteousness or unrighteousness there is within the law because it issues from a common spiritual source prior to all law. Christian ethics demands a moral identification going back to the beginning of memory and beyond *the totality* of what is legally right and wrong. There are of course secular versions of radical solidarity. There are humanist intuitions as well as other ways, from other traditions, of arriving at such a position. What is essential to this aspect of Christian ethics, however, is that it involves a moral or spiritual passage beyond the law. Pauline ethics is not just universal, it is also always marked by a break with the law and the assertion of a surplus ethical spirit that the law never contains. In this respect, for example, a purely liberal conception of law might founder. If state law is to be challenged, the liberal will generally move to international law, or basic laws of human rights, or the like. But the Christian move is to break with the law as such in order to announce a new human solidarity.

Furthermore, following Augustine, Latin Christianity even understood this transcendent sense of an ethical humanity outside the law in terms of shame. The idea of original sin identifies the original ethical position of the Christian as a state of shame. Regardless of what the Christian has done or not done, irrespective of legal guilt or righteousness, he or she is *constituted* in a shameful state called sin. We know that there are terrible psychological affects of the application of this idea. However my point is only to highlight that the very phenomenon of shame we considered above has a quintessentially Christian patronage. It too asserted a continuity and therefore a moral burden between the present, which was not a state of guilt, and the past, which was essentially and in its very constitution 'sinful'. I am

therefore not making the obvious but important point that Australia, like other settler states, is founded on an original violence, exclusion or, if you like, sin. That is not what I mean by original sin. Rather, I am making the point that the very substance or identity of the state was identified by contemporary non-Indigenous Australians as shameful, irrespective of what any one of us did, once we acknowledged the moral or spiritual truth of what we had not seen. Here too, I think, the Christian paradigm established the peculiar and provocative, but in this case also redeeming, moral possibility of feeling ashamed for how we were created. Not for what we, as individuals, did to cause the Stolen Generations but what we were, as 'Australia,' which made for sin. I do not mean to associate what happened in Australia with some onerous doctrine of original sin which only faith in a particular sacrament could overcome. Rather, I mean to suggest that modern liberalism and secular individualism are not enough to explain what happened and that it is the horizon of a moral sentiment of religious proportions that enabled the experience of collective shame for who we were to take hold, over and above the legality or unrighteousness of what we did; and that this collective shame for who we were, before we saw what we now see, was at the very least facilitated through or even shaped by a Christian provenance.

The same applies, perhaps more obviously, to the notion of sovereignty that I suggested was deployed in the Apology. As we saw, the Apology involved a reckoning of the sovereign with its own moral grounds beyond the law. Carl Schmitt, following Thomas Hobbes, made the following observation: 'The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology'.³¹ As in a miracle, it is in the exceptional act beyond the law that the truth of the sovereign is revealed. A miracle is the revelation of the transcendence of God over the laws of nature. It is precisely the power of the *exception* to the law that provides proof, for those who need it, of true sovereignty. Now, the political act of the Apology was exceptional in just this sense. Here too it was a matter of the sovereign revealing itself by transcending the very laws that it had created. It proved, for those who need it, and I think we generally do, that there is something to 'Australia' that goes beyond the laws of the state. The symbolic power of the Apology lay precisely in revealing the essence of Australian sovereignty beyond the law by recognising the law itself as insufficient. As Celermajer says, the act of apology points to a radical freedom 'to express and reform a dimension of the nation that cannot be reduced to particular institutions, acts or individuals, but provides them all with the grammatical rules, the categories they assume, and their normative assumptions'.³² The Apology thus displayed the exceptional power of the sovereignty of the nation with respect to its own legal order, just as a miracle displays the exceptional power of the Sovereign with respect to the natural order. This revelation of sovereignty is undoubtedly *secular*, since it reveals the transcendence of *the people* above and beyond the state, but it is theological in the sense that it imagines an identity outside the law, with sufficient unity of substance to designate a moral character and will, that justifies the law. It was Carl Schmitt who brought this theological dimension of political sovereignty back into view. In democrats such as de Tocqueville, for example, 'the people hover above the entire political life of the state, just as God does above the world, as the cause and the end of all things, as the point from which everything emanates and to which everything returns'.³³ The Apology gave voice to the metaphysics of society over and above the institutions of the state. This was not politics ceding to 'civil society,' for the Apology was precisely a *political* act that invoked and, as far as can be said, rallied the nation as a whole. Its spirituality

came from the momentary transcendence of politics through the revelation of the sovereignty of the people. Celermajer calls it a 're-covenanting of the nation' whereby the moral identity of the people takes a new shape that underlies but therefore exceeds the notion of the state as a social contract. Whereas the theological role of the sovereign was, formerly, to stand outside the law in order to relate its own unity and order to a higher purpose or Good embodied in the law, the secular transposition relates this imagined, metaphysical unity of the people to 'their' own idea or sense of the common good. But who are 'they' who hold the sovereign power to exceed the law? It is at least worth noting that recourse to sovereign power is impossible to dissociate from violence and exclusion. When the sovereign is revealed through an *exceptional* act that goes beyond the law it is usually in order to define itself against an enemy, because the revelation of sovereignty is always also an assertion of identity.³⁴ It is not by accident that the Prime Minister compared the bi-partisan approach adopted by parliament to 'a kind of war cabinet', for at issue is both the exercise of the sovereign's ultimate power and the ultimate terms of its identity.

Having sketched what I think are the theological dimensions to the Apology as an event that touched on something 'spiritual' beyond the law – the way it presupposed an ethical excess to the law and a collective form of identifying with the shame of the past, and its character as an act that manifested the essence of sovereignty outside the law – I want to conclude by noting what I think was its most novel quality, namely the way it transcended politics in a manner that was *essentially* non-violent. This is important because the perennial reference of secular law to an often implicit theological dimension also highlights the perennial risk it runs of reproducing the great violence of the theological legacy it has secularised.

The Apology: from 'the ministry for reconciliation' to theology 'from a human point of view'

The Apology was the culmination of the movement for Aboriginal reconciliation. By this I do not mean to suggest that compensation should not be paid (on the contrary), but that the Apology transcended the judicial limits that would have precluded legal action from succeeding in court. If some fund for compensating victims of the Stolen Generations is established it will not be on the basis of legal wrongdoing but by an *ex machina* act, with its evident theological underpinnings, whereby government seeks to satisfy obligations to justice that exceeds the law. Moreover both apology and reconciliation can and in some sense should be understood in relation to Christianity, both sociologically and symbolically. Indeed the phenomena we have considered, namely an experience of shame that goes beyond the law and an assertion of sovereignty that responds to it, is pretty much what the Christian doctrine of reconciliation addresses. To be reconciled through Christ is to have the spiritual and moral excess of the human, which no law can contain, gracefully affirmed by the only power that stands outside the law, the sovereignty of God himself. The sovereign alone can assuage the moral or spiritual excess which the law can merely ignore or contain by judicial punishment. The tension between shame and sovereignty is thus resolved by reconciliation. It is only grace that overcomes original sin.

And yet, as we saw at the outset, in some sense it was precisely the Christian doctrine of reconciliation that got us into this mess. The Christian proclamation of 'one new man in place of two' is precisely what is meant, amongst other things, by 'reconciliation'. For Paul, '*the ministry of reconciliation*' meant that '*we regard no one from a human point of view*' for 'the old has passed away, behold, the new has

come'.³⁵ 'For he is our peace, who has *made us both one*...that he might create in himself *one new man in place of the two*, so making peace, and might *reconcile* us both to God *in one body* through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end... Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together'.³⁶ Is that what reconciliation implied? Is it meant to end hostility by joining together the whole structure of the nation, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, in one new covenant? Is this what the Prime Minister meant when he referred to the 'true spirit of reconciliation' which would 'remove a great stain in the nation's soul' by forging 'a new beginning, a new partnership'?

Many scholars writing about reconciliation movements have worried about the term insofar as it might mask a longing for one unified narrative of the various peoples of a particular historical injustice. The worry is that reconciliation might only be achieved by foregoing justice and the permanence of conflicting narratives.³⁷ In place of justice, compensation, punishment, etc there would be a symbolic assertion of a new identity which whitewashes moral and legal responsibility. I think there is warrant for this concern, but also that the Apology obviates some of the problems with 'reconciliation'. There is, after all, a great difference between an apology and reconciliation. It is by considering this difference, in its theological dimension, that I want to conclude.

The first point to emphasise is that unlike reconciliation, with its emphasis on unity, an apology necessarily implies difference and distance. While the Apology exercised a sovereign transcendence with respect to the former constitution of the state, this radical freedom was precisely not an act of self-affirmation and self-legitimation which united all Australians in one new partnership but a recognition of Indigenous people in their capacity as moral subjects to whom non-Indigenous Australians had to face up. To be sure, the parliamentary motion did not omit to 'request that this apology be received' and the Prime Minister went on to hope that 'the apology we extend today be accepted in the spirit of reconciliation'. But the whole point of an apology, including this Apology, is that it cannot presuppose reconciliation. If it did it would not be an apology but another form of imposition and another denial of the moral agency of the other to whom it is addressed. In a sense, it is only by withholding or deferring reconciliation that the apology could be delivered. This can be seen in two ways. One might say that in this respect the Apology highlights the limits of sovereignty, for the sovereign is precisely not free to determine whether or not the apology will be accepted and thus whether or not reconciliation will be achieved. However this view is based on a type of freedom 'that animates libertarian thinking,' as if true freedom lay merely in the absence of all constraints, as if the inability to ensure that the Apology would be accepted was a limit on freedom.³⁸ Much better, as Celermajer has shown, drawing on Emmanuel Levinas, is to suggest that the apology attests to 'a freedom informed by recognition', a freedom that presupposes the freedom of the other. The Apology, which was sovereign with respect to *its own* past and constitution, remains utterly dependent on the freedom of Indigenous people to receive, reject, ignore or defer. In facing up to the moral claim made by Indigenous peoples on the very constitution of what it meant to be Australian, which took the form of an experience of collective shame, the Apology involved a coming to terms with the arbitrary and violent nature of the assertion of sovereignty that gave rise to the state and with the *moral limits* of sovereignty.³⁹ Thus, whereas the assertion of the power of the sovereign is congenitally violent, the Apology was exceptional since it expressed the sovereign's capacity to go beyond the law *ethically*, by way of recognition and critique

of its own founding authority. Such a limitation of sovereignty is therefore not a weakness but an acknowledgement that the ethical basis and justification of sovereignty is 'essentially other-oriented' for the apology necessarily appeals to the freedom of the other to accept it, reject it, etc.⁴⁰ The Apology thus attested to the *interdependence of non-Indigenous and Indigenous freedom* and thereby to the dependence of the sovereignty of the Parliament of Australia. It thereby also kept reconciliation at bay.

Unlike reconciliation, the Apology sought not to rise above the particularity of Aboriginal experience but to address itself to the particular experiences of people like Nanna Nungala Fejo and others of the Stolen Generations. Unlike 'the ministry for reconciliation' in which the goal is the unity of all people, the Apology was an act of recognition, precisely from 'the human point of view' in which the difference and distance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous experience is preserved. I am not at all suggesting that behind the reconciliation movement there lies some pernicious proselytising which would again seek to assimilate Indigenous experience into a Christian Australian narrative, much less that such was the intention of its leading Christian advocates. Rather, I am suggesting that the idea of reconciliation cannot be entirely divorced from the narrative of ecclesiological or national unity and therefore that the Apology marked a particularly important event within the process which unsettled it and, as it were, kept it honest. It was by deferring and disrupting the notion of reconciliation that the Apology worked. Theologically, it was less a matter of overcoming the gulf between the sovereign and its subjects, or making friends out of enemies, as much as of maintaining their difference in order to effect *atonement* rather than reconciliation. This also explains a conspicuous feature of apology, which is that on the one hand it depends upon recognition of the moral agency and separateness of the other, and on the other hand it does not require the other to speak and does not involve dialogue. While the presence, moral agency and irreconcilable experience of Indigenous people were absolutely indispensable to the Apology, so too was their silence. The silence of the addressee is the condition for an apology and what makes atonement and apology possible. The way the silence of God makes atonement possible as a radical act of freedom and transcendence with respect to oneself and one's past. Only the provisional absence of forgiveness makes atonement possible. This deferral of reconciliation, where the separateness and the distance of the other are preserved in the silence of the freedom of the other is, perhaps, an index of the Judaic dimension of political theology. The Apology expressed atonement in the face of those it recognised as having wronged, not reconciliation. At the same time, for the Apology and the atonement to have been sincere it requires that the freedom and difference that they recognise in Indigenous people be allowed to speak. If there is to be reconciliation it will come after the Apology, which was an atonement, when the voices of Indigenous people are legitimised by the constitution.

The fact that the Apology presumed the freedom and the silence of Indigenous people was not a weakness. It was an act of atonement by non-Indigenous Australians in which reconciliation was still to come. Or if it was a weakness it was of the type that would lead the sovereign to *abase* itself by atoning for its own being. One of the most distinctive and revolutionary ideas of Christianity is to have conceived of the sovereign in terms of abasement, by way of 'kenosis'.⁴¹ I think it is hard to understand the Apology as *an act of sovereignty*, whether this refers to the power of the state or that of the people, without reference to the notion of kenosis. Kenosis is a radical

reconception of the idea of the sovereignty as a mode of radical humility and even abasement, of Christ as 'the form of God' who 'emptied himself... humbled himself and became obedient unto death'. Usually it refers to the free act of assuming the position of the sacrificed on the cross. It is an exercise of sovereignty that *foregoes its own absolute power* by becoming sacrificed. In a sense, the Apology went further, for here the abasement of the sovereign went beyond the point of assuming the position of the victim in order to assume the more debased position of the perpetrator. The point, however, is that the humbling of sovereignty defines Christianity from the very outset. Indeed what makes the Apology of a sovereign nation, whether in Australia or elsewhere, so strikingly new in political history and political theology is that here, finally, sovereignty has deployed its transcendence with respect to the law in order to practice humility rather than violence. The Pope found it much harder to do than did the Prime Minister. Perhaps this is because kenosis, as Gianni Vattimo has argued, belongs not only to Christian theology but is carried beyond Christendom into the very process of secularisation itself.⁴² In his view, the core message of Christianity is to have proclaimed that the sovereignty of God, once manifest through acts that transcend the law and are therefore inseparable from violence, has been *weakened* in the incarnation to the point of dissolving the violence inherent in a sovereign suspension of the law – 'a dissolution of the sacred as violence.'⁴³ In other words, Christianity provides us with the idea that the sovereign is revealed not merely by transcending the law, where its power becomes manifest, but by foregoing the very power that constitutes its sovereignty. At once a secular and profoundly Christian act, the Apology attested to an abasement of the power of the sovereign to transcend the law by an extraordinary act of recognition of the violence of its own sovereignty. By apologising for its own violence, the sovereign accomplished a kenosis of the very idea of sovereignty, which was precisely that which was thought not to be in need of justification because it was the ultimate basis of law. This was perhaps the most original contribution of the Apology to the history of political theology and what made its exceptional status, as an act that reached for a power beyond the law, essentially non-violence. The Apology was a sovereign assertion of power enacted in the mode of humility before Indigenous Australians. It thus revealed a kenotic overcoming of its own essential violence.

Finally, it must be recalled that the status of the Apology as an exceptional act of sovereignty is not only what gave it such a rich 'spiritual' meaning but also what made it so utterly evanescent and immaterial. Beside the repeatedly used term 'reconciliation,' the only other explicit allusion to Christian writings I can find in the *Hansard* came when the Prime Minister said that 'unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong'. The allusion to 1 Corinthians 13 – 'If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal' – is unmistakable. Its deployment, however, is unsettling. It was followed by these words: 'It is not sentiment that makes history, it is only actions that make history'. On the one hand, then, an allusion to Christian love, the sort of love in which friend and enemy are reconciled in faith. On the other hand, a less than oblique repudiation of the doctrine of Two Kingdoms, explicitly stated in the article on 'Faith in Politics,' in which the inner realm of faith and sentiment is prized over the outer realm of law and political action. The gong has rung. It remains to be seen whether the Apology can be

reconciled with the constitution and with claims of justice that exceed the sovereign's own laws but to which it surrendered itself for a moment on 13 February.

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* My thanks to James Cannon for research assistance and to Nathan Wolski, Shelley Marshall and Melanie Landau for reading and commenting on earlier drafts and for disagreeing with me in more ways than I have accommodated.

¹ Rudd, Kevin (2008) cited in 'House of Representatives Official *Hansard*, 1, 2008, Wednesday, 13 February', <http://www.aph.gov.au/Hansard/reps/dailys/dr130208.pdf>. Unless otherwise stated, all citations of Kevin Rudd are from this *Hansard*.

² Respectively, Eph 2:15 and Gal 3:28, to cite but two of the most famous. I do not believe that St Paul himself intended to deny ethnic and juridical differences but that he is the most important source for various western endeavours to do so. Daniel Boyarin offered a sustained polemic against Paul on the basis of such an interpretation in (1994) *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

³ van Krieken, Robert (1999). 'The Barbarism of Civilisation: Cultural Genocide and the 'Stolen Generations'', *British Journal of Sociology* 2, 50: 297-315.

⁴ For an overview, including notable exceptions, see Philpott, Daniel (ed) (2006). *The Politics of Past Evil: Religion, Reconciliation, and the Dilemmas of Transitional Justice*, Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press.

⁵ This motion did not receive the support of the Opposition, under the leadership of John Howard. A useful overview of the historical process is documented in Research Paper 27 submitted to the Parliamentary Library on 29 June 1999 by John Gardiner-Garden, 'From Dispossession to Reconciliation', <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/Pubs/RP/rp98-99.htm>. See also Brennan, Frank (1989). 'Waiting for the Resolution,' *The Australian Quarterly*, Winter, 2, 69: 242-50 and Michael Phillips, cited in note 10 below, p 112.

⁶ The 2001 census statistics, and much more, are usefully analysed by Bouma, Gary (2006). *Australian Soul: Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; this figure is reported on p 31. John Warhurst documents the way the rise of religion in public life favoured the Coalition in (2007) 'Religion and Politics in the Howard Decade,' *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42.1, March: 19-32. According to the highly regarded demographer, John Black, it was a swing amongst Christian voters, especially Pentecostals and evangelicals, that was among the most important reasons for Labor's victory in 2007; see Pearson, Christopher (2008). 'On a swing and a prayer,' *The Australian* 8 March, <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23336628-7583,00.html> and the interview of John Black by Crittenden, Stephen (2008). 'The Christian vote in Federal Politics', 19 March, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/religionreport/stories/2008/2194485.htm>.

- ⁷ Rudd, Kevin (2006). 'Faith in Politics,' *The Monthly*, October; cited from <http://www.themonthly.com.au/tm/?q=node/300>.
- ⁸ 'Tony Jones talks to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd,' Australian Broadcasting Corporation Broadcast: 14/02/2008, <http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2007/s2163296.htm>.
- ⁹ Census figures cited by Bouma (2006) *op cit*: 53. This is down from the 1996 census, when Christians totalled 70.0%. As recently as 1971 the figure was 86.2% and in 1947 it was 88%.
- ¹⁰ Phillips, Michael (2005). 'Aboriginal Reconciliation as Religious Politics: Secularisation in Australia,' *Australian Journal of Political Science* 40.1, March: 111-124; Celermajer, Danielle (2006). 'The Apology in Australia: Re-covenanting the National Imaginary,' in Barkan, Elazar and Karn, Alexander (eds) *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Apologies and Reconciliation*, Stanford: Stanford University Press: 153-183; idem (2007). 'Apology and the Possibility of Ethical Politics,' *Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory*, Winter: 13-34.
- ¹¹ Most of the following paragraph depends on Taylor, Charles (1988). 'Modes of Secularism', in Bhargava, Rajeev (ed) *Secularism and its Critics*, Delhi: Oxford University Press: 39-53.
- ¹² This point is made by Michael Phillips, who also addresses some of the issues in this section, as well as referring to Taylor.
- ¹³ Taylor (1988) *op cit*: 35f.
- ¹⁴ 'Kevin Rudd: Bonhoeffer and 'the political orchestration of organised Christianity', radio interview with Stephen Crittenden, 3 January 2007, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/religionreport/stories/2007/1810679.htm>.
- ¹⁵ My emphasis. Cited by Zwartz, Barney (2008). 'Huge mass launches World Youth Day,' *The Age* 16 July.
- ¹⁶ Prime Minister Rudd, *Hansard*.
- ¹⁷ Taylor (1988) *op cit*: 50.
- ¹⁸ Rudd (2006) *op cit*.
- ¹⁹ A brief but useful discussion is offered by Hogan, Michael (2001). 'Separation of Church and State,' *Australian Review of Public Affairs*, 16 May, <http://www.australianreview.net/digest/2001/05/hogan.html>.
- ²⁰ 'Kevin Rudd: Bonhoeffer and 'the political orchestration of organised Christianity', radio interview with Stephen Crittenden, 3 January 2007, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/religionreport/stories/2007/1810679.htm>.
- ²¹ For the sociology of religion in contemporary Australia, see Bouma (2006) *op cit*.
- ²² As Celermajer (2006) *op cit*: 159 says, 'By binding injustice tightly to the direct commission of particular acts, Howard moved the claim of violation away from Aboriginal people and delivered it to white Australians who, in being blamed for something they did not do, could now justifiably count themselves as victims of injustice'.
- ²³ *Ibid*: 160 and 162 respectively.
- ²⁴ On this, see Derrida, Jacques (2002). 'Force of Law,' in Anidjar, Gil (ed) *Acts of Religion*, New York: Routledge: 228-298, esp 264ff.
- ²⁵ Levinas, Emmanuel (2003). *On Escape*, trans Bettina Bergo, Stanford: Stanford University Press: 63; see also idem (1969). *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press: 84 and Williams, Bernard (1993). *Shame and Necessity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 'Recognising Responsibility': 59-74. Celermajer's analysis of shame and collective guilt is indebted to Karl Jaspers' reflections on the responsibility of all Germans for the crimes of the Nazis. She also cites Robert Manne who, like Sir William Deane, urged the shift from guilt to shame in the Australian context in 1996. My brief remarks differ though they are not incompatible with Celermajer's. Another Australian scholar, Paul Muldoon, uses the moral resources of Greek tragedy to explore the excess of responsibility, over and above the limits of personal and legal agency, to which reconciliation attests. This is a valuable alternative to thinking about reconciliation as a secularised theological act, though it does not address the way in which reconciliation deploys the distinctly theological resources of sovereignty in order to re-imagine or, as Celermajer calls it, 're-covenant' the nation. See Muldoon, Paul (2005).

'Thinking Responsibility Differently: Reconciliation and the Tragedy of Colonisation,' *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 3, 26: 257-54.

- ²⁶ While shifting the moral burden from guilt to blame may have enabled the Apology, it runs the risk of denying *direct responsibility* by way of the *complicity* of non-Indigenous Australians who have benefited from dispossession. In that case, perhaps, as important as the shame of the sovereign is the guilt, by way of complicity, of the collective of citizens. Conspicuous here is the fact that the Apology was issued on behalf of the Prime Minister, the government and the parliament of Australia – but specifically not on behalf of non-Indigenous people as a collective.
- ²⁷ As I specify in the final section, I do not mean to say that compensation should not be provided but that a provision will not take the form of legal compensation but will be more like an *ex machina* act which will have been justified by the symbolism borne by the Apology. It is in that symbolic or theological sense that I mean that the Apology is the culmination of the saga.
- ²⁸ See for example the recent, bulky and excellent collection edited by De Vries, Hent and Sullivan, Lawrence (2006). *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, New York: Fordham University Press.
- ²⁹ Esp Rom 4; 9:6-9 and Gal 3.
- ³⁰ I do not mean to say that Judaism lacks the resources for thinking of the universality of ethics, which it does not, nor even that it does not also conceive humanity outside the law, which it does, but that Judaism is not *founded* on that conception, as Christianity is.
- ³¹ Schmitt, Carl (1985). *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans George Schwab, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 36. The Foreword by Tracy B Strong, 'The Sovereign and the Exception: Carl Schmitt, Politics, Theology, and Leadership,' is also very useful, esp xx and *passim*.
- ³² Celermajer (2006) *op cit*: 175 is referring to comments by Sir William Deane in 1996, who used the distinction between collective shame and personal guilt to make precisely the point – the secularised theological point – that 'our identity as a nation and the basic fact that national shame, as well as national pride, can and should exist in relation to past acts and omissions, at least when done or made in the name of the community or with the authority of government. Where there is no room for national pride or national shame about the past, there can be no national soul'. This comes from Deane, William, *Some Signposts from Dagarugu: The Inaugural Lingari Lecture*, Kingston, ACT: The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. Michael Phillips provides a nice epigraph from a 1999 speech delivered by Sir William Deane: 'the relationship between Australia's Indigenous peoples and the nation as a whole' is 'one of the most important theological issues confronting us as we approach the new millennium'.
- ³³ Schmitt (1985) *op cit*: 49. Schmitt was himself a notorious defender of Nazism. From Schmitt I take the point that the true nature and manifestation of sovereignty lies in its capacity to act beyond the law. For his part, Schmitt thought that a truly sovereign act had to be attributable to *a person*, for it required the capacity to *decide* on the exception without answering to anyone else, and that parliamentary democracy had dissipated the theological ecclesia of the people to an endless conversation that in principle obviated the power of the sovereign to decide on the exception. The Apology strikes me as a rare case of the transcendence of *the people's sovereignty* over and above the state, though I recognise that we are here in a dangerous zone where the basic institutions of politics are suspended in order to assert a new *identity* that is at bottom groundless. Schmitt's insights have long attracted thinkers of both the left and the right.
- ³⁴ Giorgio Agamben has taken up the haunting repetition of Schmitt's insight as it has again become apparent in the Bush administration's attempt to exercise its power beyond the law; see his (2005) *State of Exception*, trans Kevin Attell, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- ³⁵ 2 Cor 5: 16-21.

- ³⁶ Eph 2: 14-21. I have butchered this and the previous 'prooftext' only to highlight a danger inhering in them, though I think the danger of forced assimilation, which was of course actualised in history by Christian powers, was the last thing from Paul's mind.
- ³⁷ The 'aporia' of justice and forgiveness was signalled by Derrida, Jacques (2001). *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, London: Routledge, and has been taken up in interesting ways by Australian scholars such as Michael Phillips, cited above, and Janover, Michael (2006). 'The Limits of Forgiveness and the Ends of Politics,' *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 3, 26: 221-35. See also Moon, Claire (2004). 'Prelapsarian State: Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Transitional Justice,' *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 17: 185-97.
- ³⁸ Celermajer (2007) *op cit.* 25.
- ³⁹ As Levinas (1969) *op cit.* 84 says, 'To discover the unjustified facticity of power and freedom' one must *welcome* the perspective of the other, 'which calls in question my freedom'; 'this is accomplished as shame, where freedom discovers itself murderous in its very exercise'.
- ⁴⁰ Celermajer (2007) *op cit.* 25.
- ⁴¹ The term appears only in Paul, Phil 2: 7, see *passim*.
- ⁴² According to Vattimo, 'secularization is the way in which kenosis, having begun with the incarnation of Christ...continues to realize itself more and more clearly by furthering the education of mankind concerning the overcoming of originary violence essential to the sacred and to social life itself'; Vattimo, Gianni (1999). *Belief*, trans Luca D'Isanto and David Webb, Stanford: Stanford University Press: 48.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*: 38. Here Vattimo is drawing on René Girard.



**'May we each be faithful to the light that we have already gained':
Some Perspectives on Modern Theosophy
Jill Roe**

Enquirer: *Theosophy and its doctrines are often referred to as a new-fangled religion. Is it a religion?*

Theosophist: *It is not. Theosophy is Divine Knowledge or Science.*

Enquirer: *What is the real meaning of the term?*

Theosophist: – *Divine Wisdom, or the Wisdom of the Gods*

HP Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, 1889.¹

As recently as the 1970s, theosophy was reasonably well known in Australia, at least in the main cities. Its presence in Australia dates from 1879, and although its profile subsided in the 1930s, signs of recovery were apparent after World War II, and a new lease of life came in the late 1960s. At that time, rebellious youth found sustenance in theosophical bookshops purveying not only theosophical works but a wide range of 'New Age' titles and various guides and aids to alternative spiritualities, including incense sticks; and as in the 1920s, some of the spiritually oriented made their way into theosophical societies. In 1975 membership of The Theosophical Society in Australia (TS) reached 1 630, a figure not attained since 1927.²

As well, distinctive theosophical buildings still graced some city centres. Nowadays these buildings have mostly gone, and the halls, lodges, and bookshops they once housed have been moved to more distant sites. In Sydney, Blavatsky lodge moved over the Bridge, from Bligh Street to North Sydney (but is now back at Kent Street, a block or so behind St Andrew's Anglican cathedral). In Perth, the lodge which once stood near the State Library precinct is now located to the north of the city, and the single-story Adelaide lodge has left lower King William Street for South Terrace. One building to stay put is the historic Brisbane lodge on Wickham Terrace, though now dwarfed by motels.

Perhaps best known was the building which housed Melbourne lodge in Collins Street (**photo at right**, provided courtesy of the Campbell Theosophical Research Library) next to the Regent Theatre and near some of the city's leading protestant churches, the Baptist, Scots and the Independent (Congregational) churches. The impressive five-story building had been erected on the site in 1937 according to a design by the architectural firm March and Michelson. Built in the Moderne style, its most distinctive feature was the



Egyptian columns on the upper façade, a reference to the temples of Luxor in ancient Egypt. It cost some 40 000 pounds, and was finally paid off in 1961.³ Insert photo here

Unfortunately, Melbourne lodge was not to enjoy its freehold rights for long. In 1970 the city fathers, acting for an English property developer seeking to build a large hotel on the adjacent Regent Theatre site, advised that it faced compulsory acquisition. The TS building, which subsequently enjoyed an 'A' rating from conservationists, was to be demolished to make way for a plaza. The theosophists resisted: 'We'll go for a good cause but not for profit', said lodge chairman and TS stalwart JA Farquharson, sixty years a theosophist.⁴

They did go in the end. But the developer's plans were thwarted by the attendant public controversy and a substantial sum was obtained for the building (1.9 million pounds); and they did not have to go far. The lodge moved around the corner to Russell Street, where it still operates. Moreover the lodge's membership increased. Whereas membership in Melbourne had always been less than in Sydney, where the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Australia has been located since the 1890s, in the third quarter of the twentieth century organised theosophy was strongest in Melbourne.⁵

The actual numbers were never large, and by the 1980s, when Sydney regained its traditional pre-eminence, overall membership was again in decline. The surge in the 1970s represented a second peak in support, but the peak was less than that which attended the great days in Sydney in the early 1920s (see below), and in the 1980s ground was lost in Sydney too, as when broadcasting rights on the TS-founded radio station 2GB ended. The most recent available statistics show that, despite trans-generational loyalties still evident in the lodges and positive initiatives in the 1990s, for example in administration and the establishment of rural retreats in NSW, Western Australia, and Queensland, membership is now much the same as it was in 1914.⁶

Under these circumstances it is little wonder that theosophy is not now well known. Of course the figures are indicative only, as the TS has not been the only theosophical group to function in Australia. It has been estimated that over 20 separate theosophical groupings existed world wide by 1930, each with its own interpretation of 'theosophia', and it is difficult to know how many adherents of such groupings there may have been or still are, even of the main ones, these being the Theosophical Society International (which originated in an early split in American theosophy and is now headquartered in Pasadena) and the United Lodge of Theosophists (also headquartered in California).⁷

Nor have all theosophists been members of theosophical societies. Reflecting on the difficulties of pinning down a small but protean movement which has also had an unstable but colourful history and in times past an influence well beyond its size, it may be helpful to refer to two recent works of reference, the *Theosophical Encyclopedia*, published by the Theosophical Society in the Philippines in 2006 and the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, published by Brill in Leiden and Boston, also published in 2006.

As stated in the entry on 'Theosophy' by John Algeo in the *Theosophical Encyclopedia*, the word now refers to several related but distinct things: firstly, *modern theosophy*, the body of teachings and practices set forth in the first place by HP Blavatsky; *traditional theosophy*, a religio-philosophical approach to life involving both

a tradition of teaching and direct experience of super-sensory reality; and *primordial theosophy*, meaning the Wisdom Religion, the Secret Doctrine, also known as the Perennial Philosophy or the Wisdom Tradition. As Algeo points out, there is often a deliberate ambiguity or elision of these meanings in modern theosophy, and his second category especially explains why statistical exactitude is probably unattainable. That is to say, some theosophists may never have been 'churched'.

The third of Algeo's categories, the *primordial theosophy* alludes to a further difficulty. According to the entry on 'Tradition' in the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, there is a long tradition of thought about the nature and sources of spiritual wisdom dating back to the Greek philosophers, but due to syncretism and the underlying Gnostic principles, it increasingly lies beyond historical exegesis, and indeed some modern expressions reject that approach. Although the idea of a 'perennial philosophy' has a place in western culture, especially since Aldous Huxley's book of that title published in 1943, and later in New Age thinking, backward perspectives may now be eschewed in favour of 'transcendence' and new forms of consciousness, 'the only tradition' to matter. The author, Wouter J Hanegraaf, concludes that at this point 'the perennial philosophy has left the realm of history ... and entered the domain of the mind'.⁸

Even so, the numbers in separatist groups and solitary 'truth-seekers' (as inquirers were once called) have certainly been very few. Mostly, Australian theosophists have been members of the Theosophical Society in Australia, which dates from 1890 and correctly claims to belong to the mainstream. It is one of the numerous national sections of the original Theosophical Society founded in New York in 1875 by the charismatic Russian émigré Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (HPB), sturdy American Civil War officer Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, and a wily Irish attorney, William Quan Judge. The plan was to establish a brotherhood of Fellows to study spiritual laws and the phenomenon currently exploited, according to Madame Blavatsky, by spiritualism.⁹

Apart from the stirrings caused by Madame Blavatsky's first big book, entitled *Isis Unveiled. A Master-key to the Mysteries of Ancient Science and Theology* (1877), a compendium of spiritual phenomena, many of which she claimed to have observed during travels in Central Asia and the Middle East, and the cremation of a member, the Baron de Palm, said to be the first cremation in America, little at first came from the new society. Following internal disputes, Judge left to form an independent American Theosophical Society in 1895, and in 1879 Blavatsky and Olcott moved to Bombay (now Mumbai) in hope of alignment with radical Hindus, to no lasting effect. However, when they established TS headquarters at Adyar, at Chennai (then Madras) in 1882 - where it operates to the present day - it proved to be the making of the small, still secretive, Theosophical Society.¹⁰

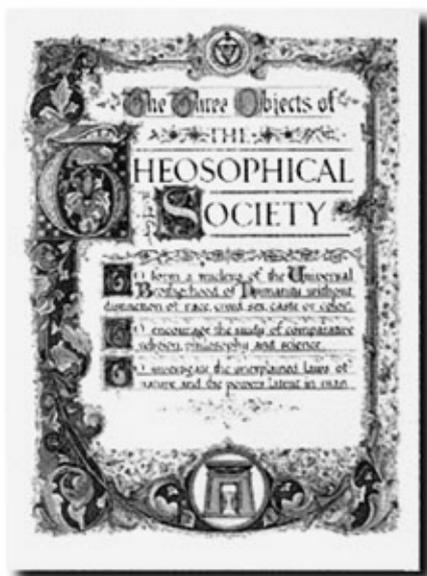
The motto of the Theosophical Society has always been 'There is no religion higher than Truth'. Such a stance is, almost by definition, productive of splits and ambiguities. Paradoxically that can sometimes be a sign of intellectual vitality, and the fact is that the Society has survived for well over a century, with its teachings and property largely intact, while rival claimants to the mantle of Madame Blavatsky have fallen into obscurity, and other Late Victorian religious reform movements such as Christian Science are in precipitate decline. By contrast numerical adherence of the TS seems to be more or less stable. The Society may in some respects be quite marginal, a mere rivulet in the broad sweep of religious history, but in its own eyes it is

a leading institutional guide to, and custodian of, the Divine Wisdom in an ever-changing world.¹¹

It will by now be apparent why theosophy and its principal teachings are now rarely known beyond relevant academic and alternative religious circles, and why the quest for theoretical clarity may ultimately be self-defeating. At this point, it may be helpful consult the website of the Theosophical Society in Australia (www.austheos.org.au), for the Objects of the Society and some straightforward answers to what modern theosophy stands for and who can be a theosophist.

There the three aims of the Theosophical Society (TS) are listed as follows:

- 1 To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour;
- 2 To encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science; and
- 3 To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in the human being.



These objects (**pictured at left**, borrowed from the website indicated above, where they may be seen in full colour) have been in place since 1896, and as will be suggested shortly, they have some appealing features. The only other two rules associated with membership are that freedom of thought is guaranteed and that the society is neutral on all political issues. 'The Theosophical Society', it is affirmed, 'does not claim to have conclusive answers to life's deeper purpose, but does provide an environment for free enquiry and exploration'.

The website designers have been at pains to emphasise what theosophy is not: 'Not a Religion, Not a Dogma, Not a Sect' runs the heading. Rather it is presented as 'the spiritual heritage of all humanity which has been in existence from ancient times'.

Moreover, although there may be a difficulty with the notion of a theosophist, the text advises, perhaps too blandly, that 'Anyone can begin to live a theosophical life at any time by seeking to live in harmony with all life, as the growing ecological awareness today demonstrates'. There is also a stress on altruism as the mark of 'the true theosophist'.

Beyond this modern-day positioning lie the most familiar teachings of modern theosophy, which, it should be stressed, is a non-christian movement dating from the age of empire, shaped by the 19th century conflict between Religion and Science and sustained by an evolutionary optimism. 'We do believe the forces of evolution are exhausted', the second and most famous president of the international TS, erstwhile English radical Annie Besant once said - by which she meant the forces of spiritual evolution. Teachings from other religious traditions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, such as karma, reincarnation, and the existence of adepts or Masters (as

first taught by Madame Blavatsky), and now widespread practices such as yoga and following 'the Path', could be brought to bear. Other alternative spiritualities would be explored under the banner of theosophy, including Christian approaches, and popular theosophy today includes astrology, apparently a mainstay of the Melbourne lodge; but basically, as well as being custodian of the Wisdom Religion, the Theosophical Society is the world's oldest purveyor of 'the Wisdom of the East'.¹²

Anne Besant was the outstanding figure of 20th century theosophy, due to her energy and oratory, her commitment to social service, and her campaign for Home Rule for India; but she died long ago, in 1933, and is not mentioned on the website. There is doubtless another reason for passing over the Besant years as speedily as possible these days. Besant's long association with occultist, clairvoyant, and from 1916, Liberal Catholic bishop, Charles Webster Leadbeater was a troubled one. Not only were Leadbeater's relationships with theosophical boys subject to recurrent scandal, but together Besant and Leadbeater brought the society to an Adventist turn by promoting a young Indian Brahmin discovered at Adyar called Krishnamurti as the Coming World Teacher. This led on the one hand to the formation of a separate preparatory Order of the Star in the East in 1911, and on the other, a split in the German section led by Rudolf Steiner, who established the euro-centric Anthroposophical Society.¹³

The great days for theosophy in Sydney (as elsewhere) in the 1920s were associated with the Coming. Bizarre as this teaching may seem today, after the losses and dislocations of the Great War, all manner of religious prescriptions emerged. Not only did what are sometimes called 'the jazz age religions' such as Christian Science and anthroposophy gain ground, but there was a revival of spiritualism and self help teachings, and a surge in fundamentalism and varieties of adventism. Anne Besant's teachings have been heretical, but as theosophical history amply demonstrates, wherever there was religious tension or spiritual unease, there was room for theosophy, and there was plenty of room in the 1920s. In a still imperial era, theosophy could seem – and in some respects was - quite progressive, as with its commitment to universal brotherhood. It was often pointed out by those who pinned their hopes on the Coming that the Palestinian Jesus was not white of skin.

By the 1920s Sydney was reputedly home to the largest and richest theosophical community in the world. The community had been strengthened by the presence of Leadbeater since 1914, and by a wartime influx of colonial Dutch, mainly from Java. Thus a whole theosophical culture grew up, located mainly on the lower North Shore. It included a garden school at North Sydney, a communal residence at 'the Manor', Mosman, for candidates seeking spiritual instruction and advancement from Leadbeater, the Balmoral Beach amphitheatre for the revival of religious drama under British-born actress Enid Lorimer and to serve as a platform for the World Teacher (it was finally demolished in 1951), radio 2GB established by entrepreneur (and Liberal Catholic priest) AE Bennett at the Manor, the hosting of cultural events at the Savoy theatre in Bligh Street, and from 1926 to 1929, a well-produced journal of comment *Advance! Australia*. Meanwhile support for allied causes, such as environmentalism, town planning, feminism, child and animal welfare, and vegetarianism, continued.¹⁴

Of course not all theosophists joined the Order of the Star in the East. In December 1925, at Adyar, Anne Besant announced that the Coming had begun. Sydney would have been a lovely site from which to spread the word. However it was not to be. This

extraordinary project collapsed in the late 1920s when Krishnamurti disavowed the role he had been prepared for, and set up as an independent and quite successful spiritual teacher in the Besantine mould. He died in the USA in 1986.¹⁵

To many people, and especially educated women seeking spiritual certitude, 'Brother Besant' personified this strand. One recently researched example of a woman whose idealism was mobilised during the Besant years is Melbourne's Amelia Lambrick (1864-1965), public servant, pacifist, temperance advocate, feminist, socialist, and critic of the White Australia Policy. Lambrick joined Melbourne lodge in 1902, and lectured there for fifty years. Looking back, she wrote:

I realise after a long life that my keynote for this incarnation has been the quest of the universals. Puritan training had its limitations, and mental restlessness led me to the study of literature. Carlyle, Emerson and other great writers brought illumination. I saw that all races and religions were manifestations of Oneness. Swedenborg the great seer revealed a world beyond the physical. A study of these works led me eventually to theosophy – the principles of which have spread to all corners of the earth. Dr Besant was my spiritual ideal for many years. I owe her a debt of gratitude. It may be that the new ages will reveal fresh phases of Truth. Reconstruction externally may be inevitable for no man in any age has said the last word on any subject. May we each be faithful to the light that we have already gained.¹⁶

Another instance of idealism born of theosophy is surely Molly Bondan, who died as recently as 1990, aged 78. As recounted by Jamie Mackie, Bondan became involved in the Indonesian independence struggle through contact with political prisoners relocated from the Dutch West Indies during World War II, later married an Indonesian nationalist, and moved to Indonesia shortly after, where she supported the nationalist struggle and rose to become President Sukarno's English language speech-writer at conferences in the 1960s - hoping all the while to bring the best of Indonesian and Australian nationalism closer together. Arguably, although she and her family subsequently left theosophy, she represents the best of Sydney theosophical culture in the 1920s. She attended the Garden School, and joined the Theosophical Society as soon as she was old enough to do so (at age 15), where the young Dutch people who came to Sydney to study theosophy were the first people she encountered from Indonesia.¹⁷

To date some 37 past lives influenced by theosophy have been documented in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, encompassing a wide variety of interests and achievement. Thus politician Alfred Deakin took an interest in theosophy in the 1880s and 1890s, and in Perth leading feminists joined, notably Bessie Rischbieth. Others less prominent have been documented by TS researchers, for instance Melbourne lodge has included numerous voluntary workers for the Red Cross, the aged and child welfare. This is not to overlook the fact that a commitment to social harmony led some theosophists in a reactionary direction especially in the 1930s.¹⁸

Theosophists have often been word people. Hence many sources are available for the writing of theosophical history and biography. Dipping into what is now a vast literature is likely to result in a mixed reaction. But it must be remembered that perspectives and priorities change, and that a prerequisite for assessment must be to take tradition seriously. Any organisation which has lasted for as long as the Theosophical Society must have something going for it. Current evidence suggests it

has usually been able to find a niche in which to work, and that its principal teachings still resonate in the wider society.



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- ¹ Cited the simplified edn (1953), Theosophical Publishing House (TPH), Adyar, Madras, repr. 1977: 1.
 - ² Data provided by the Campbell Theosophical Research Library, Sydney.
 - ³ (1988). Research paper, National Trust of Australia (Victoria), ts, copy in my possession.
 - ⁴ (1970). Unattributed press cutting, inscribed Melbourne, 3/6/1970, Melbourne file, Campbell Theosophical Research Library, Sydney; re acquisition of the theatre, see Dunstan, David (1980). 'Collins Street and Eastern Hill', in Davison, Graeme (ed). *Melbourne of Foot, Rigby*, Adelaide: 40-41.
 - ⁵ In August 1981, Melbourne lodge reported 405 members, cf 246, Blavatsky lodge, Sydney (Annual report, *Theosophy in Australia*).
 - ⁶ In 1993, Melbourne lodge reported 307 members, cf 352 reported by Blavatsky lodge, Sydney ; data provided by the Campbell Theosophical Research Library, Sydney, and Annual report 2007 (1914: 1391, 2007: 1287).
 - ⁷ Estimate cited in Santucci, James (2006). 'Theosophical Society', Hanegraaf, Wouter J (2006). *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, Brill, Leiden and Boston: 1120.
 - ⁸ Quinn, William W (1999). *The Only Tradition*, SUNY Press, Albany, cited in Hanegraaf (2006) *ibid*: 1125.
 - ⁹ Helen Petrovna Blavatsky ('HPB') was born in southern Russia in 1831 and died in London in 1891; the best biography is probably Meade, Marion (1980). *Madame Blavatsky. The woman behind the myth*, GP Putnam's & Sons, New York. Henry Steel Olcott, first world of the Theosophical Society, was born in the USA in 1832 and died at Adyar in 1907, see eg Mumphett, Howard (1972). *Hammer on the Mountain. Life of Henry Steel Olcott*, Wheaton, Illinois. William Quan Judge was born in Dublin in 1851 and died in the USA in 1896; see Ransom, Josephine (comp) (1938). *A Short History of The Theosophical Society*, TPH, Madras: 112.

- ¹⁰ HPB's other big book was (1888). *The Secret Doctrine. The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*; Campbell, Bruce F (1980). *Ancient Wisdom Revived. A History of the Theosophical Movement*, University of California Press, Berkeley and London, is an accessible account.
- ¹¹ TS data 2001-2006, Annual report 2007. Re Christian Science, see eg, Roe, Jill (1998). 'Testimonies from the Field': The coming of Christian Science to Australia, c.1890-1910', *Journal of Religious History*, 22, 3, October: 304-319.
- ¹² Typical teachings in theosophical lodges today are listed on the website. Annie Besant was born in London in 1847 and died at Adyar in 1933; Taylor, Anne (1992). *Annie Besant. A biography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, deals primarily with her British years.
- ¹³ As established by Tillett, Gregory (1983). *The Elder Brother. A biography of Charles Webster Leadbeater*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, Leadbeater was born in Stockport, UK, in 1854 (he died in Perth en route to Sydney in 1934). Jiddu Krishnamurti was born in 1895 north of Madras and died in California in 1986; Lutyens, Mary (1975). *Krishnamurti. The Years of Awakening*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, is a moving account of his early years.
- ¹⁴ Roe, Jill (1986). *Beyond Belief. Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939*, UNSW Press, Sydney, chs 7-8, outlines 'the great days'. My entry on Enid Lorimer OAM will appear in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 18 (forthcoming).
- ¹⁵ Lutyens, Mary (1985). *Krishnamurti. The Years of Fulfilment*, John Murray, takes the story to its end.
- ¹⁶ Roe (1986) *op cit.* ch 6, and Dixon, Joy (2001). *Divine Feminine. Theosophy and Feminism in England*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London. Amelia Lambrick: Personal Detail, hand written attachment, Melbourne file, TS Archive; Amanda Rasmussen, Amanda (2005). 'Lambrick, Amelia (1864 - 1956)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Supplementary Volume, Melbourne University Press.
- ¹⁷ Hardino, Joan and Warner, Charles (1995). *In Love with a Nation. Molly Bondan and Indonesia*, Charles Warner, Picton: 8 ff, and Mackie, Jamie (1990). 'Molly Bondan' (obit), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 January: 7.
- ¹⁸ (1988). 'Bicentennial research work', *Theosophy in Australia*, vol 52 assembles biodata on contributors to social and creative work, State by State; Roe (1986) *op cit.* ch 6; see also my entries in (2001) *The Wakefield Companion to South Australian History* and the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Western Australia* (2009). This article has highlighted Melbourne theosophy as a contribution to research on theosophy in Victoria.



Religion and Social Cohesion

Gary D Bouma and Rod Ling

From the early 1960s sociologists saw religion as a fading social phenomenon of decreasing relevance to social analysis or policy. In the 21st century this view was rudely confronted by Muslim terrorism and aggressive Christian Pentecostalism, both socio-religious forces with supporters all over the world. People of other religious backgrounds have reacted to the conflicts associated with the resurgence of religion with the feeling that social cohesion is now under stress in nations around the globe. In analysing this state of affairs, contemporary sociologists have (re-)acknowledged – although they are yet to articulate – the relationship between religion and social cohesion.

Despite this acknowledgement, Australia's recent Coalition government (1996-2007) assumed challenges to social cohesion centred more on issues associated with ethnic diversity, which became the focus in policy for multiculturalism, counter terrorism and interfaith relations. This vision of social cohesion was based on the assumption that the social cohesion of a society depended on congruent values being held across ethnic groups, preferably with religious uniformity or, at least, 'religious harmony'. Having wrestled with this view for some years, we see it as problematic because in most dialogue and analysis, social cohesion remains undefined with a 'null set' of properties. While inputs and outcomes are discussed, a satisfactory definition eludes policy makers and theorists alike.¹ Moreover, most social scientists and policy makers are woefully ignorant about religion in any of its forms or activities, and fall prey to disinformation, prejudice and the negative discourses of secularists.

This paper delineates the nature of religion and spirituality in the 21st Century and the consequences for social policy; explores theories of social cohesion through classical sociology to the present; and finally, considers how in the contemporary world religion and social cohesion may be related. We argue that religion remains an ambivalent force in social cohesion. There are blatant circumstances, such as in social tensions between Muslims and other Australians, where the significance of religion in straining the cohesion between groups is primary. Second, even where social cohesion is negotiated on other factors like ethnicity, race and gender, religion continues to be a significant variable in social identity within both interpersonal and intergroup relations. In contemporary societies, where there is a moving kaleidoscope of social identities, religion, or more properly religious difference, continues to stand out as a factor in the negotiation of identity and demands more careful consideration than it has been accorded.

Social cohesion

Up to the mid 1970s – the period of 'modern' sociology – sociologists often used 'social cohesion' in a Durkheimian sense to imply a state of interdependence between broad social structures and groups that produced only insignificant levels of social atrophy in the form of individual alienation, or to use Durkheim's term, 'anomie'.² More recent uses of social cohesion, influenced by political usage and the need to 'move on' from classical sociology, tend to look at social cohesion from a standpoint of the values pertaining to an egalitarian society, free of discriminations and hence free of tensions.³ Khoo lists five dimensions of a state of social cohesion which include the interests of all sub groups or individuals: 'belonging (shared values, identity,

commitment); inclusion (equal opportunity for access); participation (engagement in structures and systems); recognition (respect and tolerance); legitimacy (pluralism)'.⁴ Dialogue on social cohesion usually stipulates a social context with respect to a nation such as Australia, or a sub level of national government. The areas of concern around which discussions of social cohesion are focused are those which potentially disrupt the maintenance of society or its survival, potentially generate conflict and exclusion rather than co-operation and inclusion.⁵

Despite the current wide and liberal usage of the term, some writers find it discomforting. As Jakubowicz⁶ points out, 'social cohesion' may lead to only a simplified appreciation of the social, suggesting that individuals and groups 'need' to share 'orientations', emphasising 'commonality' and improperly delimiting the significance of social conflict. Definitions of social cohesion can also express major social projects of their authors who emphasise their personal social priorities such as an acceptance of multiculturalism, racial harmony or another social ideal most important to them.⁷

In formulating a definition that precludes personal priorities and incorporates conflict and power relations, we start with Marvin E Olsen's work on social cohesion in the 1960s and 70s – the later period of 'modern sociology'. Olsen, who aimed to develop a social theory that gave prominence to change by way of a process orientation, gave the following definition with reference to organisations, but it applies to any type of social entity including a nation state:

Social cohesion is the process through which the component parts of an organisation become united so as to give solidarities to the total organisation.⁸

Olsen distinguished between 'social integration' and 'social cohesion' so as not to negate conflict. He astutely saw 'social integration' as implying a state where the 'parts' would give way to the 'whole', surrendering their autonomy and sense of self. The reality of continuing internal autonomies, conflicts and power imbalances is acknowledged by Olsen's concept of social cohesion, which 'suggests solidarity without denying the pervasiveness of internal dynamics among semi-autonomous constituent parts', allowing the parts to continue to 'act on their own as partially distinct entities'.⁹

Olsen holds that the capacity to manage conflict and social cohesion are related positively. This allows a social entity to use internal conflict advantageously in adjusting to changes in the external environment. Social entities could use internal conflict to be more flexible and adaptable, and have longer expectations of maintenance and survival.¹⁰ Olsen recognised two types of explanations of social cohesion. The first included 'functional explanations' that explained social cohesion with respect to interdependence between sections of society. For example social cohesion may occur between groups with great cultural differences as both recognise each other's essential roles in the social division of labour. The second type was 'normative' theory, which explained social cohesion with respect to common values across groups.¹¹

We accept Olsen's definition but apply it to a post-modern version of the social. This view accommodates the now continual and overwhelming flows of information, financial capital, communications, cultural images, consumer products and people across the globe. Social things and social life are infinitely 'fluid' in form and movement¹² – across both nations and cultures; and social situations are infinitely

dynamic and uncertain for actors. The post-modern standpoint discards the concept of permanent 'structures' and the overarching meta-narratives required for value congruence across the diversities found in large societies. It also acknowledges that post-modern societies are necessarily and irrevocably¹³ characterised by fragmented and fragmenting atomistic social entities - like racial, ethnic and religious groups.¹⁴ This approach negates propositions that insist that the interests of atomistic entities must be subordinate to those of higher level social structures, for instance, economic exploitation of new migrants is justified because the national economy requires cheap labour. In fact, the approach empowers atomistic entities, recognising them as having power relations, in the Foucaultian sense of continuing and complex strategies of domination and resistance, pertinent across any number of social factors and being fundamental catalysts to social change.¹⁵

Hence, in post-modern society, 'social cohesion' is a state of relations, where social groups, through their engagements in power relations, support the survival, reproduction and evolution of the social context. For example, a state of social cohesion exists between Greek Australians and European Australians in 'Australian society'. A state of cohesion exists because relations between the groups – although not always smooth, often tense, and not necessarily guided by commitment to some set of overarching values – contribute to the survival, reproduction and evolution of the Australian society which includes power relations between groups.

We present this definition with qualifications. First, the concept of social cohesion is applicable to all 'types' of society. Pertinently, social cohesion can and is achieved in societies that are judged as morally 'deficient'. Second, as social cohesion recognises the maintenance of societies containing imbalances in power relations, we recognise that social cohesion can exist in societies containing significant marginalisation, such as when migrants support a national economy with cheap labour and are therefore tolerated by other groups, with whom they could be said to have achieved social cohesion. Last, given our fluid dynamic concept of the social, social cohesion can exist in circumstances when a society is adapting to changing exogenous circumstances. A state of relations between two groups may germinate adaptation required to support the survival of the greater society in its changing environment.

21st century religion, spirituality and social policy

Academics in Australia have been unprepared for a world in which religion plays an active role, unless its significance can be reduced to the effects of class, economics or politics. Many still resist the fact of religion's power as a force in many societies of the world. Following Marx's maxim, 'religion as opiate', or Freud's, 'religion as illusion', and the general drift of the Enlightenment, social scientists outside the United States have tended to ignore religion, decrying it as a waste of social resources to be consigned to the sphere of 'private life' where its status as a social force will be insignificant. School curricula have been 'freed' of religious content and rationalism has become a credo of universities. Consequently, religion has been written out of social policy, social theory and commentaries and understandings of current events.

In the Ecumenical movement, the then dominant liberal Protestant Christian churches argued that 'religious difference made no difference', thus contributing to their own marginalisation which has been indicated by declining attendances and affiliations. In this setting it is not surprising that Australian social policy has largely ignored religion.¹⁶ Immigration policies for example, have focused on classifying and administering new Australian settlers on the basis of ethnicity and language. Only

when Muslim settlers – who have arrived in Australia from over 60 different countries – asked to be treated as a single ‘religious group’ was the importance of religion raised in a way that required administrative response from the government.¹⁷ Similarly, in the initial development of Australian counter-terrorism policies and legislation, terrorism was only understood in terms of economic factors, responses to repression, frustration, and psychological imbalance, while religious factors were entirely discounted. But the complex relationship of religion and social cohesion came more sharply into focus once the significant roles of religious belief, religious identity, and religious organisations were appreciated in the propagation of terrorist ideology and technology and terrorist recruitment. The relationship between religion and social cohesion was further appreciated when religions were observed contributing to social forces that counter terrorism like promotion of communities, social integration and the spread of values of peace, respect and forgiveness.

As Appleby magnificently demonstrates, religion as belief, as identity, and as organisation is ‘ambivalent’ in its relationship to social cohesion, having the capacity both to build or dismantle.¹⁸ There is no religion that has not produced violence, and there is no religion that does not promote reconciliation, forgiveness, and protection of the vulnerable. The ‘West’ may demonise Islam in an unhelpful discourse grounded in ignorance and bigotry that further serves those who look for social division.¹⁹ However, the evidence is clear that all religions - including Islam - promote socially sustaining values, and on the other hand include negative individuals and groups who find in their faith, scriptures and beliefs, the capacity and legitimations for dehumanising and attacking ‘the other’. Religious actions have significant influence on the state of social cohesion, both promoting social order on the one hand, and undermining it on the other.

The complex relationship between religion and social cohesion can be explored further. While religions tend to support the status quo and legitimate existing leadership – the thorn in Marx’s flesh – and promote patriarchal and familist sexual moralities along with communal as opposed to individual values – one of Freud’s irritants – religions have also been the motive force for revolution, rebellion, struggles for liberation and social justice. For example, the civil rights movement in the United States was led by clergy, legitimated by reference to the Bible and fuelled by black spirituals, many of which were more or less veiled freedom songs in biblical imagery. Those opposing civil rights were often also clergy, drawing support for their views from the same Bible, if not the same passages. Similarly the protests in Australia against the Vietnam War were joined by members of the clergy, although after the war the same clergy often argued that a secular voice was needed to achieve such goals as the end to child poverty.

Despite the significance of religion with respect to social cohesion, sociologists understand the contemporary social nature of religion inadequately. From one perspective, we need more specific analysis of declines in religion, particularly in the larger Christian churches in countries with European based cultures. In Australia and New Zealand the percentage of people choosing to nominate ‘No Religion’ in national censuses has been increasing over the last few decades.²⁰ In Britain, religious affiliations have been declining since World War II.²¹ These changes may be attributed to ‘secularism’, ‘generational effects’, a succession of ‘period effects’; or general forms of estrangement between the churches and the public. But such explanations are so general they tell us almost nothing. Further empirical research is

needed so sociologists can explain these declines with more specificity, with reference to both theory and evidence.

From a reverse perspective, an explanation is required of the persistence of religion. As pointed out above, since the 1960s, sociologists²² predicted that religion would fade from public life and sociological significance. 'Modern societies' would negate the importance of religion by furnishing material wealth, technical progress and increasing proof of the superiority of rationalism and reason over supernatural belief. 'Modern' social life would also give 'the secular' priority over 'the spiritual' as people would be most focused on, if not anxious about, personal wealth, business, employment, social status and political issues of a secular nature. Religion would move out of observable and significant public social life and into the so called 'private' sphere with its marginal importance. As referenced above, this prediction has strong support in national statistics of nations based in Christian European cultures.

But despite its decline, formal religion retains significant social relevance. The major religions of the late 19th century and many of their most important denominations have survived and retain significant social capital in many countries. Religious persons like the Pope and the Dalai Lama; and rituals including the Muslim Hajj are still essential aspects of life meaning for billions. Protestant Christianity remains a significant political force in much of the United States and Christian renewalists are gaining increasing congregations in Australia. We still see large numbers of Christians attend churches in response to terrible events like the death of Princess Diana.²³ Theravada Buddhism is still critically important in the society and politics of Thailand; and Islam continues to be a major aspect of everyday life, government and law in the Middle East, parts of Africa, and Asia. If anything, Islam has taken firmer root in so called western countries. Judaism remains an undeniable force, both politically and spiritually, through the world.

Further, many smaller religions persist, some of which are very ancient like Zoroasterism and Wicca, and some of relatively recent origin like Brahma Kumaris, Rastafarianism and Soka Gakkai. New religions continue to be born, as is perhaps most easily observable in Japan. In Australia, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Sikhism are growing, not only through migration and biological multiplication but also through conversions of people from Christian backgrounds. Folk or indigenous religions survive, probably everywhere.

Religion retains significance and meaning in the contemporary world in both 'developing nations' and 'developed nations'. It has not faded at the rate expected by sociologists of the 1960s and recent patterns of religious affiliation and activity have been unexpected and complex. But the survival of religion and its patterns of development are yet to be analysed and explained with useful specificity. It might be generally mooted that religion retains 'use value' as a social space of caring, given the uncertainty of many forms of social bonding like family and 'community'. It might also be argued that religion can supply 'meaning' to the value of life given increasing demands in public life, such as long working hours, which for many people devalue the quality of life. Taylor holds that religion satisfies a surviving need for 'the festive', or 'moments of fusion which wrench us out of the everyday and put us in contact with something beyond ourselves'.²⁴ However, it must be repeated, these are only general explanations and religion's persistence requires deeper research.

In fact, in the post-9/11 era, there is urgency for substantial explanations on the continuation of religion as a significant social force. For decades, 'Western'

sociologists negated religion, while religious based narratives of conflict were building social pressures that later exploded in New York, Bali, Madrid and London. Why has religion remained a social fact with influence on social cohesion? What is the reason for its decline in some areas? Given its resilience and changes, what is the social nature of religion in the contemporary period? By answering these questions, we begin to understand the religious pressures of social cohesion that have led to the present states of conflict.

We note that given global social changes of the last quarter century, religion should be considered in a post-modern, rather than a modern context. Durkheim's 'modern' concept of religion, which could be expected to comprise a very small number of religions, was a functional social 'structure', integrated with others like the economy and the law, in an organic meta-entity. The values and moral beliefs of religion underlined all norms of societies, across all the structures providing an essential support to their integration. Religions still contain narratives of cosmological existence that include references to the supernatural and extol morals and social values. However, we no longer see religion as a solid, largely undifferentiated structural part of the social. Rather it is like a diffuse liquid component of the social, dynamically fragmenting to form new religions or adding religious content to social fragments of other social entities like political parties and sporting teams.

Religion and social cohesion

At this point we consider the relationship between religion and social cohesion in the context of the contemporary social. Durkheim's structural functional view of religion presupposed societies with a single or dominant religion, a view consistent with social and political thinking of the time. A religiously divided society was considered a weaker society, subject to internal dispute, conflict and disruptions to work and productivity. The *Peace of Westphalia* imposed religious homogeneity within nations while giving way to religious diversity between them. If disputes relating to religious diversity occurred, they would be contained within countries and not spread across borders.

However, across contemporary societies, fast communications technologies, free commerce, post-colonial foreign policies and ongoing movements of people have created global flows of culture and religion.²⁵ Recent 'western' awareness of the Dalia Lama and Tibetan Buddhism is an example of how global marketing has disseminated religions across nations and cultures and in this case, extended a religion beyond its formative cultural context. The global flow of religion has undermined the dominating power of national and ethnic based religions, bringing a broader and more fecund religious differentiation across countries.

Therefore, religion – considered either globally or nationally - is no longer 'a social structure' producing moral norms that support social cohesion. As a 'social thing' religion is now a range of social discourses that are referenced in complexes of power relations between identities or groups with a given identity. In contemporary society, religion can play different roles in social cohesion, as we describe in two ideal type power relationships which can exist between two or more groups:

1) *Religion as a primary issue in power relations.* In a two group encounter, this occurs when both or only one group references religion as a primary aspect of their identity distinction, making religion a primary focus in power relations between themselves and 'the other'. In any encounter, only one actor has to take their religion

seriously, for religion to then be a primary aspect of power relations. This type of power relationship occurs for example, in interfaith meetings between religions. It also occurs in the conciliation process between Australia's government and its Muslim communities. In both cases, at least one group claims a religious aspect to their identity. Religion is a focus of power relations, either with respect to the acknowledgement of the religious identities of the groups, or religious issues significant to the groups. Religion is the focus of social interaction through which social cohesion develops.

2) *Religion as a secondary issue in power relations.* Here, groups espouse their primary distinction with respect to a non-religious attribute, but also hold as significant religious distinctions, which are a latent or surreptitious focus of power relations. A simple example is intermarriage between families who identify with primary reference to ethnicity, but are of different religious traditions; .eg, a Greek Australian and Jewish Australian family. They recognise their major differences as ethnic, but may also have underlying and unstated religious differences on life philosophy, politics and style of wedding celebration. Another example is the 2005 Sydney youth riots between groups of 'Lebanese' and 'Australians'. The general identity distinction between the gangs was broadly ethnic – 'Lebs' or 'Middle Eastern'; and 'Aussie'. However the Lebanese carried an association with Islam, to which the media, being sensitive to issues of Islamic terrorism, bought attention. Muslim community figures also gave public comment on the riots and co-operated with police investigations.²⁶

Religious values may also inspire ethnic, racial and class groups to assertively change their material and political situations. In southern Thailand, Malays have been inspired by radical Muslim ideologies to take militant actions against Thai authorities. At the same time, Buddhist ideals of peace and charity may – along with political considerations – inspire the Thai government to attempt to resolve their conflict by extending material and moral support to the Malays. Religion provides a 'quiet backdrop' of themes and potentials for interaction against which the power relations can affect positive or negative states of social cohesion.

Secular societies: prevalence of religion in power relations

In contemporary 'secular' societies, religion is a more common aspect of power relations than generally perceived. First, it should be noted that claims of secularity do not provide an objective or neutral base for a 'religion free production' of power relations with other groups. Secularity simply includes alternative belief systems, which compete with religious standpoints. By claiming for example, to be atheist or agnostic, a group describes themselves from a religious standpoint and they become open to participation in power relationships on a religious basis. The fact that secularists take their philosophical identity seriously is demonstrated in their responsiveness to religious revitalisation.

Second, as societies become increasingly multi-religious and religiously revitalised, religion more commonly becomes an essential aspect of the self and 'the other'. Power relations in which religion is a primary focus have become more common. In Australia, the national Census shows decreasing levels of religious identification, but public expressions of religious belief have arguably expanded, due to increases in Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and the visibility of evangelistic Christians. Religion is now an essential and public aspect of identity for many in Australia, New Zealand, continental European countries and the United Kingdom. This increases the probability that

groups will enter into situations of power relationships with at least a primary focus on religion.

For example, although in general religion is seen as an issue removed from workplaces and industrial relations in Australia, workplace negotiations in Australia have recently included provisions for religious practices where Muslims were allocated time and space to pray.²⁷ Religion has also made an appearance in relations between groups in sport. In 2004, religious difference became an issue between a player and officials in Australian soccer, when a female Muslim player was ordered to remove her head scarf by the referee.²⁸

Governments' multicultural policies also draw religious differences into primary focus in power relations. Public discussions and events promoting multicultural policy encourage groups to be assertive about their religious identities and encourage 'others' to be tolerant. In this socio-political field, some groups may claim to negate religion from all their relationships by 'accepting all religions'. On the contrary though, these groups enter power relations identifying themselves in a religious context, immediately recognising the religious position of all 'others'. Such groups may also find themselves forced to take standpoints on religious issues, if such issues confront their own values. Can a 'universally tolerant' sports club support the prohibitive attitudes of some religious groups toward women's participation in sport? Are such clubs able to 'sit on the fence' claiming respect for all religious standpoints, particularly when these views contradict the policies of the club and laws on equal opportunity? In societies that are consciously multicultural, religious identities and issues commonly enter power relations and can be very difficult, if not impossible to evade.

Conclusion

The social importance of religion continues everywhere - despite predictions of its demise. Further, religion is associated with social cohesion – possibly more than ever, with the great differentiation of religion, and the increased possibilities for religions to encounter each other. In countries around the world, including Australia, a glance at street pedestrians can reveal a social world of great religious difference where religious groups identify themselves with respect to each other. But different religions do not just walk past each other, they interact directly and regularly in social spaces like workplaces, schools, community life and politics where they negotiate joint identities, coalitions and or tolerant separation. The fact that religiously identifying groups cannot avoid each other means that religion remains 'a given' aspect of social cohesion in post-modern societies. The issues of social inclusion or exclusion with their impact on social cohesion are raised by the existence of differing religious groups – and in fact there are many differing groups for whom religion is a primary aspect of identity. If exclusion occurs, social cohesion is eroded because there is no positive process of integration.

Having argued that a strong if not essential relationship exists between religion and cohesion, we have not predicted anything about future states of affairs. In Australia, Europe and North America religions encounter each other in changing narratives, making the process of cohesion fluid. The Australian media shows Muslims in both positive²⁹ and negative³⁰ contexts, the latter making both non-Muslims and Muslims highly uncomfortable about their social relations. As well, the social meanings of interactions between the groups are continually open to further negotiation.

The social meaning of Islamic schools for non-Muslims may change among non-Muslims if they develop greater comfort with Muslims in other situations such as work places, schools and universities, politics or sport. Some Muslim groups are very active in promoting encounters which reduce the 'fear of difference', again demonstrating the ambivalence of religion in the social cohesion process. The dynamic and fluid state of the contemporary global society facilitates cohesion on these bases, since when interacting in these spaces people can find that their 'religious others' are more like themselves than they anticipated, with the same life issues, interests and everyday problems. This does not mean that religious difference will disappear as groups integrate on secular grounds. Rather, religious difference is likely to persist and remain at least a secondary factor in social cohesion. Hence it is not in the interests of nations, including Australia, to either ignore religion or attempt to coerce groups toward religious uniformity. Rather, social cohesion is better served by the recognition both of the inevitability of religious difference and the possibility of strength through policies that recognise and are inclusive of diversity; where different groups are encouraged to express their unique positive potential in the national social context.



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Metaphysics: A Once and Future Discourse

Freya Mathews

Metaphysics is the study of the ultimate nature and structure of reality. Metaphysical questions are foundational to civilisation, indeed to all culture: why is there something rather than nothing, how did the world originate, what are the ultimate elements of reality, is there a distinction between how things appear to us and how they really are, what is our own relation to the world, how did we originate and does our existence have a purpose, indeed does the universe at large have a purpose? In the context of Western civilisation, such questions have been the province of philosophy: for more than two thousand years, up until the eighteenth century, Western philosophers were preoccupied with metaphysical questions. Metaphysics was a branch of philosophy; indeed it was the very trunk thereof, the inquiry out of which further questions, about truth, beauty and goodness, arose. Religion was also, of course, preoccupied with metaphysical questions. But while religion sought answers to these questions through faith or the authority of scripture and tradition, metaphysics as philosophical discourse conducted its investigation strictly via the tools of reason.

In the eighteenth century however, metaphysics as philosophical discourse came into deepest contention. The mechanical science that had emerged in the seventeenth century had, by the eighteenth century, come of age. Like its philosophical precursor, it was adamantly rational, but unlike that precursor, it was also adamantly empiricist: close observation of natural phenomena was its key to understanding nature. Such observations had moreover to be repeatable – of a kind that could be reliably reproduced by other inquirers. In practice this meant that the evidential base for scientific theories had to be established under controlled – experimental – conditions. Only relative to such conditions could a particular theory predict specific observations, and thereby be verified or falsified. Science was thus characterised not only by empiricism but by a highly controlled form of empiricism dictated by the requirement of testability.

The scientific approach delivered dramatic results: the structure of matter, energy, space and time proved amenable, in due course, to detailed and demonstrable empirical analysis. The empirical demonstrability of science offered a marked contrast to traditional metaphysics, which had sought to explain reality-as-a-whole in terms of supposedly self-evident and universal truths of reason not amenable to experimental test. This contrast between science and traditional metaphysics cast metaphysics, at least initially, in an unfavourable light. In the late eighteenth century, Kant drove the case against metaphysics home with almost terminal force: the ostensible 'truths of reason' on which traditional metaphysical theories were built were nothing but the organising principles of the mind itself, principles which the mind imposed on its own sensory data in order to render that raw data intelligible to itself. Such 'truths of reason' could, Kant showed, be used to underpin contradictory metaphysical hypotheses. For example, the metaphysical hypotheses that the universe had a beginning and that it had existed from eternity could both be 'proved' by appeal to the same 'truths of reason'. What this showed was that metaphysics in its traditional, purely rationalist forms was really empty of content. Such metaphysical reasoning relied on conceptual schemas which it regarded as reflecting the necessary structure of reality when really they merely reflected organising assumptions of cognition itself.

Metaphysics thus ended up 'proving' only what it had already presupposed: in this sense it was 'dogmatic'.

Metaphysics has not yet recovered from the blow Kant dealt and has been repudiated by most subsequent intellectual movements. In the early twentieth century metaphysics was disallowed by logical positivists and verificationists on radically empiricist grounds. It was by-passed by phenomenologists, who followed Kant in seeing as the proper object of philosophy the study of the structure of experience rather than the study of the structure of reality. Right up until the 1980s metaphysics was regarded as pretty much out of court by prevailing schools of analytical philosophy, whose approach was to prune metaphysical superfluities from discourse by subjecting every statement to techniques of logical analysis specially designed to weed out spurious instances of reference. The most recent example of the anathematisation of metaphysics has been postmodernism. Postmodernists, following post-structuralists, argued that all theoretical categories, not only those of metaphysics, are discursive devices deployed by historically situated knowers to organise their experience in accordance with their own basic, if sometimes unconscious, political interests. What is true for theoretical categories in general is even more emphatically true for the categories of metaphysics, these being the most abstract and universal of all categories.

So metaphysics has been out of favour for two hundred years. There have been local resurgences here and there, as in Germany in the Romantic period immediately subsequent to Kant, and in England in the late nineteenth century amongst absolute idealists. Notwithstanding these resurgences, the main current of Western thought has been running hard against metaphysics up to the present time. Meanwhile, the place abdicated by metaphysicians has been taken over by scientists, particularly cosmologists and particle physicists. While professing their aversion to metaphysics, scientists have tacitly converted their method - empiricism - into metaphysics, insisting, implicitly if not always explicitly, that only that which can be observed under experimental conditions is real. In other words, to the extent that scientists have insisted that empiricism is the only method for investigating the nature of reality, they have underwritten a metaphysics of their own, a narrow materialism that allows that only the kind of phenomena that can be scientifically observed - which is to say, the kind of phenomena posited by physics - are real.

This unavowed monopoly that science currently has on questions about the ultimate nature of reality surely needs to be challenged, and metaphysics as a critical philosophical project that subsumes but exceeds science reinstated. A consequence of the demise of metaphysics as a philosophical project has been the polarisation, currently acute, between religion and science. Both profess to provide an account of the ultimate nature of reality, but fundamentalist and new age religions base their accounts on faith or intuition while science bases its account on reason. The adamant irrationalism of contemporary fundamentalisms and new age movements may be seen as a response to the co-option of reason by science. Science claims to occupy the territory of reason, but the account of reality offered by science is, as I have indicated, reductive and in its own way dogmatic, denying the existence of anything not accessible to scientific observation. This ideological take-over of reason by science in modern societies, and the consequent contraction of worldview to a narrow materialism that admits the reality only of entities that can be inferred from physics,

has left many both in the West and outside it angrily reviling reason and championing faith, feeling, and the authority of scripture and tradition instead.

But reason is far too important to be compromised in this way. The discovery of reason in classical Greece and more latterly in the crucible of the Enlightenment is the West's great gift to the world. For not only has reason opened the way for the legitimate achievements of science; it is also reason which has conferred autonomy on individuals by furnishing them with the cognitive tools to judge truth-claims for themselves and thereby earn the moral authority to legislate for themselves. Without reason, individuals revert to the mercy of arbitrary authorities and whatever prejudice and superstition those authorities care to instil in them via social conditioning. The whole emancipatory project of modernity, and the democratic values of freedom, equality and human rights it entrains, rests on the foundation of reason.

If reason is not to be sacrificed then, it must not be compromised by being wholly co-opted by science, a science which, while an immensely progressive and successful tool as far as it goes, is reductive and debilitating when it presumes to cover the entire field of investigation. What is needed in this impasse are methodologies which are open to aspects of reality not accessible to scientific observation while still being rigorously rational. And this is what metaphysics as philosophical discourse has always been: rational inquiry which is at least in principle open to, and prepared to try to make sense of, any unobservable or unseen aspects of existence as well as those which are observable or seen. In this sense metaphysics can furnish a third way between the reductivism of scientific reason and the dogmatism and authoritarianism of religious unreason.

But if a return to metaphysics is to be feasible, metaphysics must first meet the challenge of Kant. It must itself become post-dogmatic. This means, in the first place, revising its tendency towards *a priorism* and avoiding the mere recycling of presuppositions built into its foundational categories. In other words, a metaphysical theory must have substantive content – it must explain things in ways that do more than draw out implications of the definitions of its terms of analysis. More importantly, its substantive content must be in some sense testable. This is not to say it should be testable in a scientific sense. It may be testable in the way that the teachings of Buddhism, for example, are. The Buddha asked followers to try out his hypotheses for themselves, in the 'laboratory' of their own subjectivity, via certain experiential – for example, meditational - experiments. He never asked followers, as the prophets of the Abrahamic religions did, to accept his teachings on authority or faith. So while it might be argued that metaphysics is necessary because it provides the theoretical means for renegotiating our relationship with reality, it will also be necessary to insist, post-Kant, that metaphysical theories include suggestions for practice – ways in which readers might try out the proposed metaphysical possibilities for themselves.¹ In this respect, metaphysics post-Kant would in fact revert to a more ancient mode: amongst the Stoics and Epicureans of the Hellenistic world, for example, philosophy was not merely a discourse but a way of life, complete with a whole array of exercises and practices by way of which philosophers tested whether their theories were conducive to cognitive, psychological and ultimately spiritual development.² (It was only after the fall of Rome and the advent of Christendom in the Dark Ages that philosophy became terminally divided into secular discourse on the one hand, the province of universities, and spiritual practices on the other, the province of the monasteries.³) Metaphysics reconstrued as inclusive of practices, and hence as in a certain sense testable, might

no longer announce itself in the *assertive* mode but rather as *invitation*. Re-construed as invitation, metaphysics can hardly rate as a vehicle of dogmatism.

But if metaphysics is to make a come-back today, subsuming but exceeding science, it must be re-worked not only to accommodate Kant but to accommodate the legitimate political scruples of postmodernism. In postmodern circles people have given up 'believing in believing in things' - most particularly believing in believing in the existence of the 'Unseen'. Postmodernity has brought to light, conclusively, the cultural contingency of different conceptions of the Unseen, leaving many of us doubtful of anything but the Seen, the mere unprepossessing ground beneath our feet. It is only the Seen, the realm of matter, of ordinary everyday things, that can be affirmed with any confidence in the context of postmodernity. If we are to avow Unseen aspects of reality at all, subsequent to the experience of modernity, they had better somehow be implicated, indissolubly, in that mere ground, on which we cannot disagree. They ought best not be described, at least at the outset, in conventional religious terms, the theisms and deisms and divinities that have gone before. Better that we start from the ground, the common ground, beneath our feet, and, embarking on our explorations and experimentations *de novo*, work back from there. Let us remove the wrappings, layer by layer, from plain old matter, the unremarkable and incontrovertible, and, assuming nothing, see what we can see.

In saying this I am drawing close to what I regard as the most compelling reason for advocating a return to metaphysics: the materialism which science has covertly bequeathed to us as the *de facto* but unexamined metaphysical premise for all our thought is proving an unreliable, not to say disastrous, basis for our civilisation. This is evidenced by the present upheavals in planetary ecosystems. This environmental crisis is the crisis we get when we think of matter as brute and blind, as nothing but clay for us to stamp with our own insignia and mould to our own convenience. This environmental crisis is the crisis we get when we have ceased to ask the metaphysical questions, when we have abandoned these to scientists whose answers are necessarily relativised to the capacities of the machines that constitute their experimental equipment. These machines circumscribe the answers that scientists can give to questions about space and time, mind and meaning and purpose, agency and freewill: the universe revealed by machines will be a machine universe. And a machine universe will be one devoid of mind and meaning, purpose and agency of its own. It will be one which we can accordingly treat as of no intrinsic significance – one we can use as we see fit.

Having discovered however that the world, treated as a mere assemblage of nuts and bolts, is falling apart, it is beginning to dawn on us that there was all along an integrity to its structure, a holding together of things, that the fundamental sciences had missed. Overlooking this, we have wrought havoc. New sciences have recently been whistled up to rectify this oversight: ecology, for instance, has come to the fore as a template of relational interconnectedness, suggestive of a new paradigm that will enable us to adapt our instrumentalism to the requirements of the world's integrity. But ecology as a science is still relativised to the technologies of observation by which its hypotheses are tested: the ecosystem, viewed through the lens of science, is still an artefact of observation, a sheer externality, a machine in fact, even if it can boast additional levels of organisational integrity. Science cannot take us beyond this machine image of the world. It is internally bound to it by the methodological requirement of experimental empiricism. To get beyond it calls for a reinstatement of a

larger form of inquiry which can take into account not only the data of scientific observation but the findings of all our forms of experience, including those of introspection. It is only within such a larger frame of reasoning that the true significance of the mysterious 'holding together' of things can be explored. For such holding together points precisely in the direction of mind, meaning, purpose, agency. Mind is inherently indivisible, its different aspects cross-referential and interpermeating; meanings are likewise differentiated only within a larger field of meanings which overlay and inform one another; purpose gives direction and coherence to all it touches, binding functions together into indissoluble unities; agency, being referenced to purpose, has the same effect. This 'hanging together' that we have discovered as an integral aspect of our world points, in other words, to the possibility that world itself is imbued with the kind of mentalistic attributes necessarily absent from scientific accounts of reality - absent because they cannot be detected in the empirical manner required by science.

In other words, the current falling apart of things under the impact of our human assault on the 'environment' is suggesting that the instrumental culture of modernity, premised on the materialist outlook of science, has failed to notice something crucial about the nature of reality. It has failed to notice a certain holistic quality in things, a certain priority and integrity of wholes that cannot be accounted for in terms of parts. What this holistic quality points to is in fact something that science by its very nature can't detect, an interior dimension to reality analogous to mind or meaning in us. To consider the possibility of such a dimension requires a shift to a frame of inquiry larger than science, the kind of framework that might be provided by metaphysics, suitably adjusted to a post-Kantian, postmodern setting.

The importance of making this shift is incalculable. The current relation of modern civilisation to reality is radically out of joint. Science has, to a degree, recognised its past inadequacies and is ushering us towards an ecological worldview. To graduate to ecology would indeed be to take a massive step in the right direction, the direction of sustainability. But it may be that ecology is not enough. To view the world through the lens of ecology is still, as I have explained, to experience it only in terms of what can be revealed by the machines - the technologies of observation and measurement - of ecological science. It is not to experience it as we could if we recognised it as meaningful and mindful presence. To recognise it as meaningful and mindful presence would be to initiate an entirely new chapter in our relationship with reality. It would be to open up possibilities of meaningful engagement with our world that are entirely beyond the modern imagination. These possibilities would include new modalities of practice that would integrate techno-environmentalism with mythopoetics, science with spirituality, utility with communion. To come to the world with all the insight that science has bequeathed us and yet also to relate to it as a mindful, never-fully-knowable presence, capable of engaging communicatively with us and thereby 'pulling us into love', as Deborah Rose puts it,⁴ would be to enter a new phase of culture. Yet this would be a truer phase of culture, if we remember that the root of 'culture' is the Latin *cultura*, meaning tending; *cultura* is in turn derived from *colere*, meaning to till or cherish. Culture is essentially to do with cherishing, and what is this cherishing but devotion to the ground that we till, the plain old matter from which we nevertheless draw forth endlessly the sustenance, the magical coloured thread of meaning and beauty, that becomes the fabric of all culture.⁵

This is the kind of leap – from an attitude of instrumentalism to one of cherishing the ground beneath our feet - to which the environmental crisis seems currently to be summoning us. But it is a leap we cannot take so long as we allow science to co-opt the place of metaphysical inquiry and shackle us to an unreflective materialism, even an ecological one. We need to find ways – responsible and rigorous ways - of re-engaging with the metaphysical questions that are the oldest and deepest wellsprings of our civilisation. Only by re-engaging with these questions can we begin to make our experience commensurate with the vast *mysterium* we call nature. And only by enlarging our experience of reality in this way can we begin to renegotiate our relationship with it.

Associate Professor Freya Mathews is in the Philosophy Program, School of Communication Arts and Critical Inquiry at La Trobe University. Her books include *The Ecological Self* (1991, Routledge, London); *For Love of Matter: towards a Contemporary Panpsychism* (2003, State University of New York Press, Albany New York); *Reinhabiting Reality: towards a Recovery of Culture* (2005, UNSW Press, Sydney).

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- ¹ As I understand it, this is part of what Ken Wilber means by the term *post-metaphysics*. Thanks to Caresse Cranwell for alerting me to this connection.
 - ² Hadot, Pierre (1995). *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (trans Michael Chase), Blackwell, Oxford.
 - ³ Tarnas, Richard (1991). *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Ballantyne Books, NY.
 - ⁴ Bird Rose, Deborah (2004). *Notes from a Wild Country*, University of NSW Press, Sydney.
 - ⁵ See Freya Mathews (2005). *Reinhabiting Reality: towards a Recovery of Culture*, State University of New York Press, Albany NY.



Academy News

ASSA Annual General Meeting 17 – 19 November

Annual Symposium 2008

Fostering Creativity and Innovation, convened by *Leon Mann* and *Janet Chan*, will be the theme of this year's Annual Symposium.

At both national and global levels, we are confronted with new challenges in social, economic and environmental problems which require creative and innovative solutions. The 2008 Symposium will focus on what the Social Sciences can contribute to the broader debate about how Australia can become more creative and innovative. Contributions from the sciences, technology and the humanities will also be examined. A panel of policy makers and leaders involved in the 2008 Government review of the national innovation system will discuss the issues and recommendations of the review. Another panel will discuss innovation in higher education, a core component of the creativity-innovation system.

Other questions to be addressed at the Symposium include:

- What new knowledge has social science research and research from other disciplines produced about creativity and innovation in key areas?
- What lessons can be learned from Australian efforts to foster innovation?
- What more can public policy do to foster creativity and innovation?

Participants at the Symposium include Glenn Withers, Bob Williamson, Margaret Sheil, Simon Marginson, Jane Marceau, Leon Mann, Ron Johnston, Roy Green, Peter C Doherty, Mark Dodgson, Glyn Davis, Ian Chubb, Janet Chan, Stuart Cunningham, Peter Jonson, Paul Kelly, Barry Jones, Gael Jennings, Terry Cutler, and Minister, Senator Kim Carr.

The Annual Symposium is open to the public, but bookings are essential. Contact Sarah Tynan at Tynan.assa@anu.edu.au.

Cunningham Lecture

On 18 November, the Cunningham Lecture will be delivered by *Barry McGaw* AO, Director, Melbourne Education Research Institute, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, the University of Melbourne. His theme will be 'Building a world-class curriculum for Australia's schools'.

Academy Colloquium

The Colloquium on 17 November (for Fellows and invited guests only) will be chaired by Glyn Davis, with Joshua Gans and Jenny McGregor, and will discuss 'The Social Sciences, the policy process and the wash-up from the Australia 2020 Summit'.

Research Program

ARC Learned Academies Special Project 2008

A grant has been received from the ARC for the project 'Integration and Multiculturalism: A harmonious combination.' The project, which will be led by *James Jupp* and *Michael Clyne*, has received funding of \$89,000.

Using social science research from linguistics, sociology, demography, political science, history and psychology, the project will focus on issues raised by the transformation of Australia into a multicultural society as a result of post-1945 immigration. Among these issues are the maintenance and consolidation of social cohesion, the development of a common national identity and core values and the role of public agencies in securing these objectives. As these are contested issues, the project aims to explore the variety of analyses which have been applied to ethnic and cultural variety and the concrete outcomes of public policy. Language use and maintenance will be an important focus, as will participation in social and public life.

Human interactions, including marriage patterns, choice of location and political participation are all within the professional interests of the proposed research team. Participants in the project are well known for their expertise in language policy and ethnic community issues, as well as for their active involvement in national and international studies of relevant policy developments and issues.

A workshop with the project leaders and contributors will be held in Canberra in November. The major outcome of the project will be a carefully analysed account of social cohesion and community relations within a globalised migration system.

ARC Learned Academies Special Project 2007

The Academy's 2007 ARC Special Project, 'New Social Policy Approaches for Sharing Risk', will hold a two-day workshop in early August, at which the preliminary findings of the project will be discussed. The project, led by *Bruce Chapman*, aims to develop principles for the broad application of income contingent loans (ICLs) as part of public policy. The workshop will discuss proposals relating to ICLs and childcare, maternity leave, research and development funding, elite athlete development, and Aboriginal community investment funding.

As part of the workshop, the Academy is pleased to announce a public lecture by *Professor David Moss*, of Harvard University, who is recognised as a world expert in the area of government as risk manager, and the use of income contingent loans as a policy tool. Professor Moss will be speaking in Canberra on Monday 4 August.

Publication of the ASSA/ABS 2006 Census Research Project.

The first three papers in the Academy's *Occasional Papers (2006 Census Series)* will be published in November of this year. The publication of the three at the 'NatStats' conference in Melbourne, will launch this Academy special series of papers. The papers are the result of an Academy research project which has been conducted with the assistance of the Australian Bureau of Statistics. As has been reported previously in *Dialogue*, the aim of the project has been to write engaging stories in essay form about the current circumstances of people's lives and significant changes in key areas

of contemporary Australian society. These stories are based on access to customised data from the 2006 Census, which has been generously provided by the ABS.

The three papers to be launched in November are: *Creative Australia: The arts and culture in Australian work and leisure*, by David Throsby; *Evolution in Australian Housing: Trends in affordability, need, household structure and dwelling type*, by Andrew Beer; and *Lives of Diversity: Indigenous Australia*, by Maggie Walter. They, along with the series, will be launched by the President, Stuart Macintyre, and the series editor, Jeff Borland.

The remaining papers, which will have staggered release into 2009, are: *Living Alone*, by Sue Richardson and David de Vaus; *Different Lives, Different Places: Changes in Australian population distribution*, by Graeme Hugo; *The New Social Productivity: Work and leisure in Australia*, by Bettina Cass; *Beyond Life Expectancy: The lives of older Australians*, by Diane Gibson; and *Immigration*, by Jeff Borland and Andrew Clarke.

Policy and Advocacy Program

'University Policy Futures' Roundtable

On 1 August the Policy and Advocacy Committee will convene a policy roundtable on 'University Policy Futures'. This roundtable on Australian universities and policy directions for the higher education sector is being held in light of, and in response to the Commonwealth Government's Review of Australian Higher Education, being headed by Emeritus Professor Denise Bradley AC. The object will be to coordinate, without obligation, the input from participants to help inform the Academy's preparation of a statement on University Policy Futures. The scope of the Review of Higher Education is necessarily broad, and this roundtable will not seek to address every component of policy relating to the wider higher education sector. Rather, the University Policy Futures roundtable will focus on the role of universities, and the issues which arise from, and pertain to, government policy for universities.

Policy and Advocacy Program Initiative

The Policy and Advocacy Committee is pleased to announce that it will shortly be sponsoring a pilot event as part of its initiative for a new State-based program. Under the program, a modest amount of funding would be made available to defray the costs of a discussion forum or event, such as a workshop, which dealt with State-based issues.

The pilot event will be held in conjunction with the Western Australia Division of the Institute of Public Administration Australia. The IPAA is a non-profit organisation whose membership constitutes 'public servants, academics, students, provider and community members' at all levels of government, and which has as its broad aim 'to contribute to the development of public policy and management practices that will enhance the performance of the public sector' (see www.ipaa.org.au). ASSA has convened two successful policy roundtables with the national level of the IPAA.

The pilot event should provide an opportunity for WA Fellows of the Academy and representatives from the WA Division of the IPAA to discuss a local issue of interest to both social science researchers and policy practitioners. The event would also offer

an opportunity to participating Academy Fellows and social science researchers to establish inter-sectoral networks.

Upon successful completion of the pilot event, the goal of the Policy and Advocacy Committee is to open this program to all Branches of the Academy. Suitable proposals would receive modest funding to contribute to the cost of the forum/event. Under the program guidelines, funding from the Academy would need to be met with in-kind support from an organisation such as a (State) Division of the IPAA, which would undertake the some of the planning and administration of any such event. As with Academy Workshops, events would require a Fellow as co-/convenor.

Input and feedback are sought from the Fellowship regarding this program initiative. Fellows should direct any queries/comments they may have to William Douglas at the Academy Secretariat on assa.admin@anu.edu.au, or 02 6249 1788.

International Program

Australia-Japan Foundation

As reported in the previous edition of *Dialogue*, the Academy has submitted an application to the Australia-Japan Foundation under its AJF Grant Program. The International Committee is pleased to report that the application was successful, and the Academy has been awarded a grant of \$24,000. Under the application, two component projects involving collaboration between Australian and Japanese researchers and policy practitioners will be carried out respectively by *Professor Sue Richardson* and the National Institute for Labour Studies, and *Professor Ann Harding* and the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling.

Australia–Netherlands Exchange Program

As part of the Exchange program between the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, ASSA and the Australian Academy of Humanities, *Dr Peter Mascini* of the Erasmus University of Rotterdam will visit Australia in August-September 2008. Dr Mascini is a sociologist in the area of public policy whose work examines the legitimation and execution of policy, particularly in the areas of health and safety, asylum policy, and crime and terrorism. His work is based in part on an assessment of the assumptions which underlie specific policy measures, as well as questioning the manner in which such assumptions are connected to the motives and interests of the policy subjects. He will visit the Regulatory Institutions Network at the Australian National University, to engage in collaborative research in the area of food regulation and associated regulatory bodies.

Further relations with India...

In other international news, ASSA has responded to invitations from the Australian High Commission (AHC) in New Delhi, and the Australian Embassy in Dublin to consider how ASSA might engage similar bodies in those countries in order to collaborate on issues of common interest. The relationship with India was inspired by AHC Education Counsellor, Professor John Webb, who suggested an ASSA-India project to ASSA Executive Director, John Beaton, in 2007. The project was followed up by his replacement at the Indian High Commission, C Linda Laker. The activity

involves our bilateral partner, the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR), the Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS), and the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC). Following Beaton's solo trip and staging meetings in New Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai (17-22 February 2008), a workshop was convened at the Tata Institute in Mumbai 14-16 May. The workshop, termed the 'India-Australia Futures Workshop: Perspectives from the Social Sciences', was an intensive three day 'lockdown' workshop where the participants began by considering a broad list of possible topics provided by ASSA, topics that were intended to help find the far-horizons of what will command interest among social scientists in both countries for the next two decades. Participants then engaged in two days of intensive discussion followed by a third day of drafting outlines and text on topics selected by break-out groups. The results, now being edited, are to be prepared as a discussion paper and a steering committee made up of the participants will select some combination of these as suitable subjects for an India-Australia symposium in early 2009 in Delhi.

Professor Jeff Bennett, Director, Environmental Economics Research Hub, Crawford School, ANU and Associate Professor Bill Pritchard, Economic Geographer, School of Geoscience, University of Sydney, along with ASSA ED John Beaton and Administrative Assistant Hayley Da Quinta represented ASSA at the workshop, joining with Indian scholars Professor and Dean, Sharit Bowmik, School of Management and Labour Studies (TISS), Professor and Director S Parasuraman (TISS), Professor and Chair, A Ramaiah, Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy (TISS), Professor and Dean of Social Sciences RN Sharma (TISS), Associate Professor Madhushree Sekher, Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy (TISS), Professor and Head, School of School of Agricultural Development and Rural Transformation Centre, ISEC, Professor and Head, Population Research Centre KS James, Associate Professor KG Devi, Centre for Decentralisation and Development (ICSSR), and Professor and Director B Venkatesh Kumar, ICSSR. The Australian High Commission in India provided funding for the event, and the Tata Institute provided a very comfortable venue. Indian colleagues provided generous enthusiasm, welcome hospitality and excellent collegiality over what were long, rather warm but very productive days.

...And the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS)

In a second and very recent Government initiative - this time with ASSA working jointly with the Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH) - the Australian Embassy in Dublin, with assistance from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has asked the two Academies to consider how they might collaborate with the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) on issues of mutual interest. Following consultation with DEEWR representatives and AAH ED John Byron, John Beaton attended a meeting (11 June) in Dublin. Also attending the meeting were Dr Maurice Bric, Chair and Ms Dipti Pandya, Director, IRCHSS, and Anne Plunkett, Australian Ambassador. A program that provides for two workshops, one in Australia in early 2009, and one in Ireland mid-2009 will bring together Irish and Australian scholars on topics currently under review. A further aspiration is to create and support an annual joint-action research collaboration along the lines of those which ASSA now enjoys with France, the UK, the Netherlands, China and India.

The Australian Government's interest in enhancing the inclusion of the social sciences and humanities in its international collaborative networks is a most welcome development, and one that was sought by our sector at the time of our last five-year review. A recent statement by Minister Carr announcing increased support for such international collaborations indicates significant support for developing a stronger presence for the social sciences and the humanities in the international profile of Australia.

The **application dates** for programs to be funded in 2009 are as follows:

India exchange	19 September, 2008
United Kingdom exchange	26 September, 2008

Workshops Program

Completed Workshops:

'Climate Change Responses Across Regional Australia'
John Martin, Maureen Rogers, Caroline Winter (all at LaTrobe), and Jim Walmsley FASSA (UNE)
Held at La Trobe University (Bendigo), 10-11 April, 2007.

'War, Commerce and Ethics in British International Political Thought'
Ian Hall, Lisa Hill and Wilfrid Prest FASSA (all at Adelaide)
Held at the University of Adelaide, 22-23 July 2008.

Forthcoming Workshops:

'Religion and Politics: Australian Cases and Responses'
Marion Maddox (Macquarie) James Jupp FASSA (ANU)
To be held at the Macquarie University, September, 2008.

'The Great Risk Shift? Institutionalisation of Individualism'
Greg Marston and John Quiggan FASSA (UQ)
To be held at the University of Queensland, December 2008.

Reports from workshops conducted under the Workshop Program, including policy recommendations, are published in *Dialogue*, usually in the first issue following the workshop.

National Academies Forum (NAF)

The four Learned Academies of Australia have been supported by Government to conduct a NAF workshop in order to respond to the Green Paper resulting from the Cutler review of the National Innovation System review.

A one-day workshop at University House, Canberra will be held on 26 August. It will be opened by Minister Kim Carr, and Dr Terry Cutler, Chair of the review panel, will be attending. The workshop will be moderated by Steve Leeder, former Dean of Medicine at the University of Sydney and a frequent commentator on public health policy. A

preliminary session will set the stage for the workshop and discussion surrounding the substance of the green paper will identify specific topics for the day's agenda.

More than thirty workshop participants are expected, most of them representing the National Learned Academies. The likely strategy for the day is to form break-out groups for each of the topics with specialists from various disciplines contributing to a draft statement. A subsequent summary plenary session will outline a framework and the collected responses will then be passed to a scribe to prepare a draft. Once reviewed by contributors, and revisions made, the final response will be printed and submitted to Government.

A reception dinner for the contributors will be held on 25 August in the Shine Dome at the Australian Academy of Science. Professor Mary O'Kane, a member of the panel of Experts of the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR), will speak at the dinner (which may also be attended by Minister Carr).

A Public Lecture in conjunction with this workshop is planned for 15 August and will be held in the lecture theatre, John Curtin School of Medical Research, at the Australian National University. Professor Alan Hughes of the Centre for Business Research and Margaret Thatcher Professor of Enterprise Studies, University of Cambridge, will give the lecture, promoted jointly with ANU as part of the ANU Public Lecture Series 2008.

More information is available at <http://www.naf.org.au>.



Reports from Workshops

Australia and Climate Change Diplomacy: Towards a Post-2012 Regime Policy proposals on Australia's climate change diplomacy

Rosemary Rayfuse and Shirley Scott

Introduction

A workshop on 'Australia and Climate Change Diplomacy: Towards a Post-Kyoto Regime' was held at the Faculty of Law, University of New South Wales on 22-23 November 2007. The purpose of the Workshop was to evaluate Australia's past and current climate change diplomacy and to make policy recommendations for the future.

The interdisciplinary Workshop brought together 19 leading experts in economics, science, international relations, law, and business. The majority were academics, but the group also included private consultants and NGO representatives from Australia with one visitor from China.

The Workshop was organised and hosted by Rosemary Rayfuse (Law) and Shirley Scott (Politics and International Studies, both at the University of New South Wales) and financial support was provided by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, and the Faculties of Law and Arts and Social Sciences, UNSW.

The Workshop was held, under circumstances of uncertainty, two weeks prior to the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and Meeting of Parties to the Kyoto Protocol held in Bali, Indonesia, from 3-14 December. This summit was to set the stage for a comprehensive agreement that tackles climate change on all fronts following the expiry of the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol in 2012.

The Workshop was also held immediately preceding the Australian federal election. Climate change was a significant issue during the election campaign and the incoming Rudd Government has committed itself to ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

Recommendations and supporting papers

The policy recommendations are presented below. This report, together with the full text of papers prepared for the Workshop, will be published online in the UNSW Law Research Series available on Bepress:

<http://law.bepress.com/unswwps/>,

on SSRN:

http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/JELJOUR_Results.cfm?form_name=Pip_Pub&pip_id=107909,

and on AustLII: <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNSWLRS/>.

Associated previously published papers by Workshop participants will also be included where permission can be obtained from the publishers.

Key themes from the workshop

The science

Recognising the conservative nature of the IPCC's predictions, according to the science, dangerous climate change is almost, or may already be, upon us. This is a planetary crisis. There is an urgent need to shift both our thinking and the global and domestic economy away from a 'business as usual' approach into what is essentially crisis mode.

Greenhouse gas reduction targets and mitigation and adaptation strategies must be precautionary in nature and must be based on current scientific advice, not economic or political expediency.

The current objective of limiting global warming to 2°C to avert dangerous climate change is already too high to protect many vulnerable ecosystems including the Great Barrier Reef.

Climate change is essentially a risk management issue and we need to act quickly to stave off intensifying threats. There is little downside to taking action to save the planet but a considerable downside if we delay. Reliance on as yet unproven or non-existent technological mitigation 'solutions' fails to address the underlying causes of climate change and unsustainable development and oversells our ability to 'master' the problem.

Australian climate change diplomacy

Over the past decade, Australia has missed a large number of diplomatic and economic opportunities to influence international climate change policy and responses as a result of official Australian attitudes towards the issue of climate change.

Australia's image as a regional and global leader in environmental matters has been tarnished by its insistence on a 'voluntarist' approach which, rather than complementing UN processes, is seen as having undermined them.

Australia has experienced a significant loss of influence in the South Pacific where its engagement in climate change related issues has been inconsistent and at times counter-productive due to application of narrowly defined strategic policies which were too short-term, too self-interested, and poorly implemented.

Australia's Domestic Policy

Failures on the international level reflect failures in domestic policy where concerted action is needed as a precondition to effective participation in the international arena.

For Australian diplomacy to be credible and garner support it needs to be logically consistent with a strong and coherent domestic climate change policy. Australia needs a new view of its economic self-interest and prosperity in a carbon-constrained future.

In formulating that view it is imperative to integrate adaptation and mitigation strategies. We must also devise adaptation and mitigation options that fill other sustainable development goals.

No one approach is adequate to tackling this issue. Market mechanisms are not the only, or even the best, policy options available to the Australian Government. Emissions trading, even with strong caps, is inadequate on its own.

There is a need for a suite of strong regulatory responses of which carbon trading and renewable energy targets are just two.

Australian climate change policy-making has, to date, been heavily influenced by the interests of narrow but powerful constituencies, such as the fossil fuel industry. Lack of transparency in policy making and governmental support for entrenched commercial interests have inhibited development of alternative energy sources and other economic opportunities.

Because serious action on climate change has been long delayed, mitigation is now an urgent priority. Australia must take a long-term view and ensure continuity and consistency in its policy responses and increase transparency through engagement with a broader cross-section of public, private and civil society interests to unite the country in meeting the challenge of climate change.

Key policy recommendations arising from the workshop

The key overarching recommendation to emerge from the Workshop was that Australia needs to make significant changes to its performance at the international, regional and domestic level to be seen as a credible player in the international arena. In each of these areas a number of more specific recommendations emerged.

International leadership

Australia should take an international leadership role in international negotiations under the UN framework consistent with UNFCCC principles. To that end it should, along with ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, now:

- Work with other industrialised countries to adopt significant binding GHG emission reduction targets for the second Kyoto commitment period;
- Take a leadership role in developing other global mechanisms for adaptation and mitigation;
- Consistent with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, propose a global fund to assist major emerging emitters (MEEs) to modify their economies to meet the needs of a carbon constrained world;
- Seek international solutions to the carbon leakage/competitiveness problem for trade-exposed emissions-intensive industries that maintain incentives for more sustainable production and consumption in developed countries; and
- Take a leadership role in development of an international regulatory framework for geo-engineering and other mitigation techniques involving environmental modification and or perturbation which provides for adequate risk assessment based on peer-reviewed science and ensures the benefits from deployment outweigh the risks, and that real, measurable, long-term and independently verifiable results are achieved.

Regional leadership

Australia should take a regional leadership role in a process complementary to, but not replacing or conflicting with, existing UN processes. To that end it should:

- Establish a coherent and consistent regional policy framework for long-term sustainable development in the region;
- Propose a regional climate pact to improve regional capacity and efficiency in meeting individual (and possibly collective) mitigation targets, assist in climate

adaptation, facilitate technology transfer, and help meet monitoring and compliance needs; and

- In this context, provide substantial resources to assist regional and more specific national adaptation and mitigation measures.

Domestic leadership

Australia's role in international climate change diplomacy must be consistent with and based on a strong domestic climate change policy which complements rather than competes with the international regime. This will greatly enhance the credibility for Australian policies within the region and globally. To that end the Australian Government should:

- Move beyond currently inadequate proposals and set substantial and binding interim and longer term national GHG emissions reduction targets for all greenhouse gases, consistent with reducing national emission by 80 – 95% by 2050. Immediate action to reduce GHG emissions should not be delayed until there is agreement on targets;
- Urgently rethink the basis for Australia's long-term prosperity. The new basis needs to meet simultaneously the challenges of not only climate change but other related sustainability issues including peak oil and water insecurity;
- Introduce a broad portfolio of legally binding measures as a framework for economic, social and environmental opportunity. Measures should include:
 - national legislation articulating the interim and longer term GHG emissions reductions targets;
 - a comprehensive, target-based strategy for energy efficiency, including reform of energy markets and institutions, that overcomes the underlying preference for fossil fuels and gives full support to alternative energy/ renewables;
 - binding and effective standards and targets for renewable energy;
 - land management and land use planning measures;
 - standards and targets for development of improved public transport infrastructure;
 - a target-based clean vehicle strategy;
 - a rigorously designed cap and trade emissions trading scheme with stringent targets; and
 - no exemption of domestic consumption of emissions-intensive products from the carbon prices signal provided by the cap and trade scheme;
- Galvanise the Australian populace into action by correlating targets with ecological indicators. These could usefully be couched in terms of the likely impact of climate change on significant Australian icons. Rather than refer to numerical concentrations of greenhouse gases or even temperature, targets could be translated into likely impacts on the health of **Rivers**, **Rural Australia** and the **Reef** (the Three Rs);
- Develop climate change policy in a more transparent manner, based on the United Nations Development Program's five principles of good governance – legitimacy and voice, direction, performance, accountability, and fairness;
- Immediately deploy existing mitigation technologies;

- Substantially increase funding for research and development in low emissions technologies; and
- Increase funding for research on transformative legal and policy responses to climate change and institutional arrangements which meet the needs of all Australians affected by climate change, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.



Climate Change Responses across Regional Australia: Social Learning and Adaptation

John Martin

This workshop was held at LaTrobe University in Bendigo on 10-11 April. ASSA Fellow Professor David de Vaus opened the workshop and spoke on behalf of the Academy. The workshop brought together academics from different disciplines and places from across Australia who provided examples of how people, communities, organisations and institutions are responding to address climate change impacts.

The convenors provided an overview of the social learning literature as it had been applied to addressing environmental issues.* We asked contributors to focus on the social learning processes that facilitated effective climate change adaptation responses. Their papers covered cases as diverse as rural governance, water delivery, community education to reduce emissions, tourism choices, business decisions and farmer decision making. We also included papers which addressed theoretical and policy issues relating to climate change adaptation via social learning strategies. Each paper was discussed and the presenter was provided with a one page review sheet completed by other participants immediately after each presentation and discussion of the paper (the convenors kept a copy of each review sheet so that when the next draft of the paper is received we can also consider how authors have dealt with comments from their colleagues).

Our overarching response to the cases presented is that Australian society is responsive to the climate change message and is, in fact, responding in unique and important ways to this changing climate. Of course the public policy concern is whether their responses are the most appropriate and effective to adapt - and of course mitigate - climate change impacts. While the social response is self evident: if there is less rain, we conserve; if it is hotter and dryer, we act to reduce bush fire impacts; the organisational and institutional response is far more constrained. As with so much social change it is the context which limits an effective response when the content of the message is clear – human induced climate change is occurring and what can we do to reduce GHG emissions?

Brian Head addressed this very issue; 'The Evolution of Adaptation to Climate Change Policy and Program Ideas in Australia'. There is a long historical line of development of 'environmental' policy, and climate change is the contemporary driver of public policy. Head's paper will be presented in the first part of the proposed book publication, setting the scene for the evolution of climate change public policy. Tim Smith from the University of the Sunshine Coast provided a post-normal science approach to enhance climate change adaptation based on the extensive work he has been doing with Sydney coastal councils and the impact of sea level rise on their communities.

Several themes relating to climate change adaptation came out in the paper presentations. Approximately half related to farmers and rural communities. Clearly it is in these places that impacts are most evident. Ian Gray and Geoff Lawrence (delivered by Margaret Alston) presented a paper entitled 'Considering Farmer Capacity for Change' as a result of drought and decline in the availability of water. Their research shows that while the impact is variable, it is a major issue for policy makers. Margaret Alston's own paper 'Gender and Climate Change' highlighted once again that when times are tough in Australian agriculture, a particularly heavy burden falls on women. This is true with climate change impacts. While some women cope well, primarily together, many others become more isolated and do not obtain any support through the different social networks. Aysha Hope's doctoral work on understanding resistance to climate change in rural communities identified the nature of the climate change discourse in these places. The challenge is to create a dialogue that enables people to respond, and then to adapt, to a changing climate.

Susan Brumby and John Martin discussed cases of what is possible within farming communities to assist them in adapting to climate change. Brumby's paper 'Cardio, Climate, Coping and Crops' showed how effective community connections can assist farmers to learn together, in this case around health and wellbeing during extended dry periods. Martin reported on the challenges of engaging rural communities in a discussion about what it means to go carbon neutral, in this case with the Elmore Farm Machinery Fields Days, the largest event of its kind in the southern hemisphere. Quentin Farmar-Bowers reported on his research into farmer decision systems, which revealed how farmers deal with a multitude of issues, including climate. He suggested they see their choices through a series of 'lenses' that reflect current and future preoccupations. Jerry Courvisanos from the University of Ballarat outlined an innovation policy framework for sustainable development in regional Australia. Kevin O'Toole and Anne Wallis from Deakin University reported on two projects (Local Agenda 21 and Cities for Climate Protection) to anchor environmental concerns to political and administrative routines in south western Victoria. These presentations show that in rural Australia, whether working specifically with farmers or the wider rural community, change occurs through collective learning and commitment – an important message for centralised policy makers,

Regional communities are both urban and rural and people in communities and organisations in urban Australia are also active addressing climate change issues. John Fien, Ralph Horne and Susie Moloney from RMIT reported on a research project which identifies and trials a mix of technological and social 'transition mechanisms' for advancing carbon neutrality at the community, predominantly local government, scale. Also from RMIT, Martin Mulligan, Yaso Nadarajah, Jodi-Anne Smith and Yael Zalchender reported on an innovative scenario planning and climate change program currently underway in Hamilton Victoria. Their work showed that communities will

engage in a constructive dialogue about climate change adaptations if provided with a credible process to do so.

Scott Baum from Griffith University reported on social learning and integrated assessment in climate change adaptation at the Gold Coast. Caroline Winter and Elspeth Frew from Latrobe explore the role of regional recreation in a carbon neutral society. A common theme across these three presentations is the need for shared understanding around concepts and the need for comprehensive measurement and abatement programs. The social learning process provides an important path towards this shared understanding for action.

Managing water in times of drought was covered by Francine Rochford, Bradley Jorgensen and Steve McEachern and colleagues. Who pays for irrigation infrastructure, what is the role of the irrigation providers and individual farmers? and, how does this reconcile with the long term viability of farming communities? Was discussed by Rochford. Jorgensen's paper complemented Rochford's case as he highlighted the importance of trust in public institutions if we are asking the community to change their water consumption patterns. McEachern, Lowe and Lynch from the University of Ballarat showed how communities have actually changed their water consumption patterns as a function of both regulatory and social pressure to do so. Philippa England from Griffith University provided a legal analysis of the planning implications of planning for urban water and its management in south-east Queensland.

While each paper acknowledged the theoretical and policy literature relating to their case we are encouraging chapter contributors to reflect, more specifically, on the social learning factors contributing to or detracting from effective climate change responses. To this end Keen, Brown and Dyball's 'five braids' of social learning provide an excellent framework; namely, how apparent is reflection, a systems orientation, integration, negotiation and participation reflected in their case.

We thank the Academy for their support with this workshop. As a result of this support we are looking to provide a relevant and timely volume which will be of service to policy makers and program managers in government, as well as individuals and organisations playing an active role in assisting Australian society to respond and adapt to the challenges of climate change.

* Leeuwiss, Cees and Pyburn, Rhiannon (eds) (2002). *Wheel-barrows Full of Frogs: Social Learning in Rural Resource Management*, Koninklijke van Gorcum: Assen. Keen, Meg, Brown, Valerie A and Dyball, Rob (eds) (2005). *Social Learning in Environmental Management: Towards a Sustainable Future*, Earthscan: London. Wals, Arjen EJ (ed) (2007). *Social learning: Towards a Sustainable World*, Wageningen Academic Publishers: Wageningen.



Policy Roundtable

Public Service Independence and Responsiveness

Suzy Killmister

This report provides a general overview of the Policy Roundtable on Public Service Independence and Responsiveness, held at the University of Melbourne on 14 March and co-sponsored by the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia and The Institute of Public Administration Australia. The roundtable brought together senior public servants, politicians, academics and stakeholders with the aim of discussing the issue of public service independence in the light of current drivers in the public sector. Following a background paper on the limits of responsiveness and two illuminating keynote speakers, four sessions were held. These focused on: Drivers and Impacts; Communications Management and Stakeholder Engagement; Ministerial Advisors; and Public Sector Arrangements. At the conclusion of the sessions, break-away groups were set the task of determining best practice solutions.

Drivers and impacts

The session on drivers and impacts focused on the background conditions affecting the public service, and discussed ways in which both institutional design and people management could be utilised to balance independence and responsiveness in response to these changes. The changes in question were seen to be the advent of the 24 hour news cycle, the increasing role of ministerial advisors, and the changing structure of public sector employment arrangements, all of which formed the basis for subsequent sessions.

It was suggested that ministers and public servants would have a different view of the appropriate balance of responsiveness to independence. In terms of institutional design, the usefulness of the conceptual schema developed by Chris Hood was pointed out. This schema distinguishes between two models of the public service: the trustee model and the agent model. According to the trustee model, the bureaucracy has an intrinsic value, and is seen as a relatively autonomous check on politics. On this model, the bureaucratic role of telling truth to power is both expected and respected. It was pointed out, though, that this model runs the risk of compromising responsiveness. According to the agency model, by contrast, the bureaucracy is seen as an instrument that should perform according to the wishes of its political masters. Emphasis is placed on performance, and therefore the bureaucratic voice is largely muted. This model runs the opposite risk of encouraging subservience and anticipatory compliance. It was noted that most OECD countries are moving towards the agent end of the continuum, as reward structures and other drivers serve to inhibit the independence of the public service. An understanding of this model helped to frame the debate for the ensuing discussion on the situation in Australia.

Another important factor animating discussion on the institutional design of the public sector was the observation that ministers increasingly look beyond the public service for the next 'big ideas'. There was lively debate as to potential reasons for this shift, and also whether it was cause for concern. Some suggested that the depth of capability in the public sector had diminished, causing ministers to look elsewhere; others directed responsibility at ministers demanding undue responsiveness, and thus turning to more partisan affiliations for future policy. There was also disagreement over whether the role of the public sector should include policy direction, or if their appropriate role was limited to implementation. It is perhaps fair to say that

participants who were themselves from the public sector were more inclined to support a policy role for the public service.

Communications management and stakeholder engagement

The session on communication management centered on the changing nature of the media – the communications revolution – and the impact this has had on the roles and responsibilities of the public sector. The discussion can be divided into that which focused on the changing pressures on ministers, that which focused on the perception of stakeholders, and that which concerned the changing role of the public service.

The impact of the communications revolution on ministers was amply demonstrated by a speaker sharing a day in the life of politician. It was pointed out that ministers now expect to be briefed by the public service before the day starts. Ministers also expect public servants to be able to participate in strategies for handling the media stories of the day, which relies on the public service having a solid understanding of how the media works.

While one speaker observed that ministers are not all victims of the 24 hour news cycle (Howard was given as an example of a politician who was never afraid to use it to his advantage), the general consensus was that the 24 hour news cycle creates new pressures on ministers, as they are now expected to make instant decisions with little if any opportunity for public service input and advice. Some participants observed that this is compounded by the rise of campaign journalism, which aims to force a response from government when mistakes are made. This in turn, it was suggested, creates a culture in which the easiest option for a politician is to find a scapegoat, for if the minister does not respond by castigating a public servant, they are then required to publicly take the blame for mistakes made within their departments.

This problem was illustrated by an example from the health sector, whereby a minister was pursued by the media to take responsibility for the death of a child in a hospital. For over a week, the media led with a story of negligence, blaming the minister for failings in the health system – this was not retracted when a post-mortem ultimately vindicated the hospital. The lesson drawn from this story by some participants was that there is a need to find ways for ministers to express concern about a given situation without giving the impression that they can be responsible for everything that happens in the public domain.

A final problem that was raised in terms of ministers was the rise of party discipline, which is duly enforced by the media. It was observed that ministers are now often in a position where they cannot publicly question decisions made by their party, which plays into the idea (damaging in the eyes of some) that there can only be one message from the government.

The advent of the 24 hour news cycle was also discussed from the perspective of stakeholders. One participant discussed a recent situation in which a minister publicly turned against a welfare organisation when he was door-stopped about a controversial policy they had implemented. She explained that this response undid the relationship of trust that had been building between the government and the welfare sector. The organisation involved was left exposed to public pressure, and the sector once more felt marginalised by the government. More distressingly, the public scrutiny initiated by the media and supported by the minister had serious negative consequences for the vulnerable young people at the institution in question.

The final aspect of the communications revolution under discussion was the impact on the public service itself. Both the changing pressures on ministers and the changing role of stakeholders have affected the way in which the public service operates in the 21st Century. It was suggested that the biggest change in the public service has been the realisation that managing communication is vital. But this raises the problem of role definition: should public servants be helping ministers prepare for briefings? Should they be speaking directly with the media? There was general agreement that the rules of the game are changing when it comes to public service interaction with the media, and yet there is a distinct lack of guidelines to mediate this shift. It was observed that staff and ministers don't have a clear understanding of what can be handled by the department, and what is political and therefore needs to be handled by the minister's office. Some participants also held the view that the public service was lagging behind in comprehending and responding to the current media environment. Finally, the spotlight of the media has the potential to strain the relationship between ministers and their departments, with one participant noting that public servants are increasingly put in the position of damage controllers, attempting to protect ministers from negative publicity. This role sits uncomfortably with public service independence.

Ministerial advisors

The third session focused on the relationship between ministerial advisors and the public service. The recent exponential rise in the number of ministerial advisors employed in Australia presents two key challenges to the public service: firstly, advisors provide ministers with alternative sources of advice, thus potentially undermining the policy role of the public service; and secondly, the nature of the relationship between ministers, their advisors and the public service is relatively undefined, meaning that constitutional boundaries are becoming blurred.

The growth of ministerial advisors in recent decades has seen policy increasingly circumventing the public service. One participant suggested that this has been due to the lack of ministerial confidence in getting the policies they want from the public service. Some concurred that ministers need to be intelligent consumers, and there is no need for them to rely purely on one source. The policy revolutions of both the Kennett and Keating years were pointed to as evidence of the benefits of increased reliance on ministerial staff, combined with isolation from the public service. It was also suggested, however, that the reduction in advisors under Rudd may mean that the public service will once more increase their policy role.

From the public service perspective, some doubts were expressed as to whether ministerial advisors had the experience, training and maturity to play the serious role that they have been given. This was posited as a management issue: the tension between the public service and ministerial advisors was described as 'a group of people without a clear sense of their role butting up against a group of people who think they aren't qualified'. The competence of the minister as a staff manager was raised as a solution to this problem.

Perhaps more important than the personal tensions between ministerial staff and the public service was the question of defining advisors' roles. It was remarked that while the federal system has a sophisticated understanding of the role of advisors, the states are lagging behind. While at the commonwealth level there is a staff act that sets up a framework distinguishing partisan employees from non-partisan, in the states advisors are employed as temporary public servants. This impacts upon staff accountability, conduct and behaviour.

Concern was expressed that the lack of accountability in the advisors' role tests the balance of responsiveness and independence. Given that the advisor's job is to deliver for the minister, this can easily be interpreted as 'getting the public service to deliver', which is then pursued without due concern for the limits of responsiveness. More training for advisors was offered as one way of dealing with this problem, as was developing a culture of resistance to the demands of ministerial advisors within the public service.

The final aspect of ministerial advisors under discussion was the issue of a staff code of conduct. Debate focused around managing the potential executive responsibilities of ministerial advisors. Opinion was divided between those who felt that ministerial advisors held no executive authority, and were therefore only internally accountable to the ministerial office, and those who felt that as in practice these staff did exercise executive authority through giving consultancy advice, this needed to be reflected in having ministerial advisors accountable to parliament. It was noted that this latter was in line with Rudd's policy, which requires staff to appear before parliamentary committees.

Public sector arrangements

The session on public sector arrangements focused on the roles and expectations of ministers and the public service, and in particular the issue of trust within this relationship. Attention then turned to the employment arrangements of public servants, and how that could be structurally altered to benefit the relationship between the ministry and the public sector.

There was some disagreement over the extent to which ministers actively endorsed the notion of 'frank and fearless advice' from the public service. Some with a ministerial perspective maintained that ministers saw such advice as a necessary component of the relationship. They expressed frustration that often public service opposition is unspoken, meaning that unpopular policies are met with passive non-responsiveness rather than vocal disagreement that would enable resolution. This was countered, however, with the point that the desire for frank and fearless advice appears to dissipate the longer a minister is in power. Others suggested a similar resistance to frank and fearless advice from ministers who are less confident in their role. There was some concurrence around the position that not all ministers have the strength to accept critical advice.

There was also agreement over the need for the relationship between the public sector and the minister to remain a professional partnership with a degree of distance. The issue of the relationship between the minister and departmental staff was seen to be crucial, with trust, managerial competence, and employment security all playing a significant role. A number of factors were identified that could place strain on this relationship.

Firstly, there was a perception that department secretaries may see themselves as ultimately accountable to the Prime Minister or Premier, and not to their department minister. This was seen to have the potential to cause friction and distrust, with ministers resenting the possibility that public sector advice is circumventing their office.

Secondly, there was much discussion around the notion of self-censorship and disclosure. Particularly with the rise of Freedom Of Information legislation, public servants observed that they felt hesitant to express dissent in writing for fear of

disclosure. This lack of confidence leads to an avoidance of giving advice for which they might be held accountable, thus undermining their role of providing frank and fearless advice. Here, public scrutiny was seen to undermine the relationship between ministers and the public service, and threaten public sector independence. It was noted that appropriate forums in which to privately debate the merits of policy are necessary for the effective functioning of the public service.

The final aspect of the relationship under discussion was the issue of partisanship. Particularly for secretaries who have had a close and productive working relationship with a previous administration, suspicions of partisanship are hard to allay. One participant mooted the idea of banning party membership in the public service, claiming that it was corrosive to have party members visible within departments.

The question of partisanship also raised the issue of public service contracts and employment arrangements. Concern was expressed that public servants could be vulnerable to the whims of ministers. This was particularly concerning for participants in light of the courts ruling that ministerial lack of faith is sufficient grounds for dismissal, even if there is no evidence of misconduct or incompetence. This vulnerability was seen to compromise public service independence, as opposing the views of the minister could lead to 'lack of faith', and thus termination of employment.

The way forward

At the conclusion of the four sessions, participants were involved in a break-away session to identify potential best-practice solutions to the issues raised for the latter three topics. These are outlined below.

Communications

- Encourage effective stakeholder engagement, to ensure that third parties can assist in the management of issues.
- Establish the preconditions for open dialogue on policy, including more forums with Chatham house rules, and seminars that steer clear of current controversies.
- Develop end to end guidelines on transparency, articulating that the whole department is responsible for communications.
- Develop specific guidelines for the public service in relation to dealing with the media.

Ministerial advisors

- Provide a separate employment framework and legislation for ministerial advisors.
- Aim for increased clarity for the role, defining who the employer is and the extent of the responsibilities of ministerial advisors.
- Provide increased training for ministerial staff.
- Move away from the presumption of executive authority, leaving the minister directly accountable for the actions of her staff.

Public sector arrangements

- Provide fixed four-five year terms, with the presumption of continuity of employment and regular performance appraisals, as well as a termination clause.

- Give a stronger role to the public service commissioner, particularly in mediating relationship breakdowns between secretaries and CEOs.
- Develop clear guidelines on public accountability, including for contracts, non-government agencies and Public Private Partnerships, with the minister recognised as spokesperson for the department.
- Provide space for discussion of alternative policy options, without the threat of public disclosure.

Overall, given the disparate voices and perspectives gathered together for the roundtable, it was a remarkably collegial and productive day. Participants worked together to identify common problems, and develop solutions for the issues that were raised. While the pressures on the public service continue to grow and change, the ability of the sector to respond and adapt to these pressures was amply demonstrated.

I would like to thank the Academy for Social Sciences in Australia for the opportunity to participate in and report on the day's events.

[An extended report on this Roundtable, by Jenny Stewart, has been published as Occasional Paper 2/2008 in the Policy Paper Series. Enquiries to William Douglas at assa.admin@anu.edu.au.]



CSIRO-ASSA Symposium

Integrating Social Sciences into the CSIRO National Research Flagships

On 12-13 May about 40 representatives from CSIRO, ASSA and other social scientists gathered at the joint CSIRO-ASSA Symposium to discuss social science integration in CSIRO's National Research Flagships. The Symposium, convened by ASSA Past-President Leon Mann and Daniel Walker of CSIRO was held at CSIRO's Discovery Centre, Black Mountain, ACT.

ASSA was represented at the Symposium by Fellows from a range of disciplines: Leon Mann, Steve Dowrick, Meredith Edwards, Jane Marceau, Janet McCalman, Phillipa Pattison, and Michael Smithson. The ASSA Fellows were active in keynote presentations, panels, and general discussions. Phillipa Pattison, Ann Harding, Anne Edwards and John Beaton together with Leon Mann were members of the joint CSIRO-ASSA organising committee.

While CSIRO has a strong social science capacity, with approximately 110 social scientists throughout the organisation, some parts of the organisation are still to realise the potential of the social sciences and their significance and value to CSIRO's

natural science research. In particular the social sciences are seen as crucial in delivering impact for the nation from the Flagships, which direct their research to areas of the greatest national priority.

There are nine Flagships in the CSIRO National Research Flagships Program:

- Climate Adaptation Flagship
- Energy Transformed Flagship
- Food Futures Flagship
- Light Metals Flagship
- Minerals Down Under Flagship
- Niche Manufacturing Flagship
- Preventative Health Flagship
- Water for a Healthy Country Flagship
- Wealth from Oceans Flagship

In 2006, the Batterham Review of the CSIRO National Research Flagships concluded that the Flagships should expand their engagement with social science and their visibility in the social science community. Several strategies were identified by CSIRO to encourage greater engagement, including an annual symposium, possibly badged with ASSA, and Flagship Visiting Fellowships for social scientists.

The CSIRO-ASSA Symposium in May 2008 was an opportunity to examine the role of social science capabilities within the Flagships; to look at how social science integration has already enhanced the impact of CSIRO's science, and to explore the opportunity for further integration and collaborative work.

Dr Geoff Garrett, Chief Executive of CSIRO, in his welcome address, discussed the need for integration and collaboration in order for the Flagships to deliver their primary goal, that is, impact for the benefit of Australian society. He spoke of a new breed of researchers – 'collaboranauts' - people from different disciplines combining their knowledge to stimulate and enhance their research to find solutions to complex problems.

In the ensuing Panel discussion each of the nine Flagship representatives indicated a wish for increased social science participation and input within their Flagship. As each encompasses different areas and goals, their needs and contributions required from the social sciences also vary. For example, the Preventative Health Flagship has discovered that in attempting to combat the obesity problem in Australia, it is simply not sufficient to concentrate on education regarding health and nutrition, but a much broader and deeper understanding of the social issues contributing to obesity must also be developed.

A series of case studies illustrating the diverse social science integration across Flagships projects were presented. These studies told the story of social science integration in Flagship projects and how the social science perspective proved invaluable to a successful outcome. Projects where more input of a social science nature could have improved the impact of the science were also discussed.

Gabriele Bammer from the Australian National University gave a presentation on Integration and Implementation Science (I2S). She discussed how this field should

develop into a discipline in its own right and of its potential to contribute to enhanced integration and collaboration between CSIRO and the social sciences.

The Symposium Dinner, held at Old Parliament House at the end of Day 1 of the Symposium, included a speech from Phillip Glyde, the Executive Director of the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics, who gave a unique perspective on the policy making process and the issues involved in getting messages across to policy makers.

Day 2 included an examination of different models of social science integration, with presentations covering social and economic analysis, social learning, and complex systems science.

Interest groups were formed to develop new opportunities and strategies for building greater social science integration in the Flagships. Eight interest groups were formed and reported their ideas and plans to the Symposium. A joint CSIRO-ASSA panel of Janet McCalman, Phillipa Pattison, Steve Dowrick and Tom Hatton, Director of the Water for a Healthy Country Flagship, discussed 'Enhanced social science integration: strategies for moving forward' and recommended several future directions for building CSIRO's social science capacity.

The most prominent issues emerging from the Symposium include:

- acknowledgment of the CSIRO Flagships' existing social science capacity and how social science has enhanced the impact of many Flagship projects;
- the need for capturing and disseminating social science knowledge within CSIRO, and establishment of a basis for corporate knowledge and organisational learning;
- the need for social science integration to take place from the outset of a research project, and the benefits of a problem-driven (a predominantly social science method) approach;
- the need for greater attention to some social science disciplines, such as history, that are frequently overlooked;
- acknowledgement that social science is different from integration science and the need for different strategies for implementing social science and integration;
- identification of the barriers that prevent more deeply integrated social science:
 - researchers' attitudes to the social sciences;
 - difficulty in accessing relevant expertise;
 - time and budget constraints on researchers; and
 - difficulty in communicating across disciplines.
- identification of strategies to overcome these barriers:
 - institutionalisation of integration - a contentious issue, as many feel that 'forced' integration will impede, rather than enhance, successful collaborations and integration;
 - reward-based incentives to improve integration; and
 - encouragement of joint CSIRO-social science research, through joint ARC grants, shared PhD students, internship placements.

The Symposium was very successful, with many ideas and concepts brought to the table, and development of valuable networks, associations, and dialogues. Certainly

the benefits which deeper social science integration can offer the CSIRO Flagships have been identified and acknowledged.

ASSA also stands to benefit from further engagement as 'we [ASSA] need to understand and respond to the larger national scientific research agenda as we build our interdisciplinary knowledge, educate early career social scientists, and become available for collaboration and partnership' (Leon Mann).

At the conclusion of the Symposium, all participants were asked to submit their number one conclusion, idea or proposed strategy that they would like to see taken forward in regard to social science integration.

A report to CSIRO on the Symposium, covering the ideas discussed, new initiatives developed, and recommendations to build social science integration will appear later in the year. The Report will also be available to ASSA.



Vale Fellow of the Academy

Professor Fay Gale AO, Geographer, formerly of the University of Adelaide and a past President of the Academy, died on 3 May 2008.

An Obituary will appear in the *Annual Report*.

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Branch Convenors: Professor Susan Spence (Qld); tba (NSW); Professor Ann Pauwels (WA); Professor Jeff Borland (Vic); and Professor Alison Mackinnon (SA)

Panels:

A *Anthropology, demography, geography, linguistics, sociology.*

Chair: Professor Michael Bittman

B *Accounting, economics, economic history, statistics.*

Chair: Professor Amarjit Kaur

C *History, law, philosophy, political science.*

Chair: Professor Murray Goot

D *Education, psychology, social medicine.*

Chair: Professor Helen Christensen

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