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PO Box 553
Richmond
VIC 3121
Australia

Tel +61 3 9427 7311
Fax +61 3 9428 4450
Eureka@eurekastreet.com.au



Politicians need capacity to imagine heaven

COLUMNS

Summa Theologiae

Andrew Hamilton

A feature of the current pre-election campaign is how small-scale it is. It is a case of, 'anything you can do, I can do smaller'. No vision of prosperity to be brought, but only the security of a surer technician's hands on the economy. No image of a more generous or coherent society, only adjustments to the immigration quota and an assurance that you will be better off. No dreams of a home paradise, but the promise of a slower rise in interest rates. No national health policy, only fixes to 'save' hospitals in marginal electorates.

This modesty may seem a blessing when we compare it with times when visions of the great, self-confident and harmonious society reigned unchecked. Elections bring out the hucksters who promise instant happiness and magic get-well pills. And when the visions of an equitable or triumphant society become utopian, blood can flow in the streets. A knowledgeable electorate which can count surely produces a more honest politics.

And yet we hesitate. The experience of the Christian churches in thinking about the future and the shape of the promised future might be illuminating. It seems that when people have a lively imagination of heaven, the bonds that link them in churches are much more healthy than when the understanding of heaven is atrophied.

In earlier ages of the Church, the hope of good things was imagined in quite tangible ways. It was communal — those saved and taken into heaven were *sodales*, drinking companions. The understanding of the communion of saints meant that those who had died and those still alive were linked in one body. So heaven meant bringing together all the generations into a happy society.

Heaven was also seen in bodily ways. It was about the resurrection of the body, and not simply the survival of the immaterial soul. This always caused difficulties in understanding, but it lent richness in imagining. The crowded canvasses of saints, angels and the blessed gathering above the earthly events meant that heaven could be seen as a like, but different, place to our own. In more theological language, it meant that nothing that was precious in our bodily life and in our bodily relationships would be lost, but that it would be transformed.

These aspects of heaven were rooted in the Jewish tradition of promise.

The promises made by the prophets of what God would do to Israel had to do with an actual society, and were couched in terms of tangible flourishing. They involved a happy and wealthy society, a harmonious ecology, and just and harmonious relationships between people. Images of lions lying down with lambs, of green fields overflowing with milk and honey, and of kings bearing gold and silver as taxes enriched the imagination and gave heaven a tangible feel.



This did have problems, of course. The vision of heaven was balanced by an even clearer and more imaginative vision of hell. Where hell dominated, it could easily lead to a polarised view of society between the elect and the damnable, and to conflict between the two. Crusades and massacres of heretics could be the other side of a utopia.

But this was not integral to the imaginative vision of heaven in large terms as the transformation of a society. But the capacity to imagine heaven has diminished in modern western culture, and its effects are felt in the erosion of imagination about the future in politics too. When people think of judgment, they think more in individual terms. They see heaven as the reward for good deeds — we speak of people going to their reward. And they go alone. The idea of people linked together in a common destiny is not current.

They also think more in terms of the mind. Souls go to heaven, and to imagine it in bodily terms is an embarrassment. As a result, the links that bring people together in heaven are more distant and ethereal. As the imagination of heaven fails, the focus of life becomes more unremittingly on the present reality, which is seen in increasingly intractable terms.

When that happens in churches, the church paradoxically has a more solid importance as the place in which to live in this life. It becomes seen as increasingly important for the church to control those who live in it, because the present reality has nothing to counterpoint it. So, we have a flat understanding of the future and a pressured understanding of the present.

Which brings us back to Australia and the election. A flat understanding of the future, in which the hope is minimal and limited to economic theory, also brings with it a controlling government with an emphasis on security and predictability. The promise that you will be better off is delusional unless it means differently off.

Rudd strip club story a promotion of women as sex objects

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Earlier this week, many Australians had smiles on their faces at Kevin Rudd's expense. This followed the reporting in the Murdoch Sunday papers of Rudd's visit to a Manhattan strip club four years ago.



To some extent, it was refreshing that most were able to brush it aside as an amusing but pointless smear that might do Federal Labor's election chances slightly more good than harm.

Vox pops broadcast on ABC Radio on Monday reflected the most common reaction: "He's human ... Most red blooded Australians would do something like that ... I reckon good on him ... I don't have a problem with it at all ... Fantastic ... I really don't mind ... Good form."

For most Australians, endearing naughtiness was the beginning and end of it. For his part, Kevin Rudd presented himself as properly contrite, doing the Christian thing that others such as Bob Hawke would not have been concerned about.

What was overlooked was the *de facto* promotion of the sex industry, and implicit tolerance of the damage it does to human dignity and the long struggle to ensure that women are not looked upon as sex objects.

Is taking part in the exploitation of women really something most red blooded Australians would want to do? Surely not if they were aware of the degradation caused to the lives of many women through being lured to work in the sex industry.



the Jammed
A film by the Jammed

Many people are only aware of what is presented to them by the media or friends, family and work colleagues. For all the time given to superficial analysis of the Rudd Manhattan strip club story, media outlets have barely alluded to the consequences for the dignity of women. Coverage has amounted to fulsome promotion of the sex industry.

Sadly it is unlikely that many Australians will see the new local film [The Jammed](#), which is reviewed in this issue of *Eureka Street*. It is not primarily about strip clubs, but it does offer a disturbing insight into the closely related sex trade, and the trafficking of women for prostitution. The film's

researcher says 1,000 women are annually trafficked into Australia, in a growing industry estimated to be worth up to \$150 million.

Reviewer Tim Kroenert suggests that human trafficking is integral to the whole sex industry. He describes the film as a “reminder that this issue is not just on Australia’s doorstep — tragically, it’s part of the furniture”.

Lest all in the sex industry be tarred with the same brush, it has to be said that its activities can be a source of great — albeit temporary — solace, and therefore a contributor to human dignity.

But by and large, we have to be disturbed by the frightening, if exaggerated, *vox pop* observation that “most red blooded Australians would do something like” go to a strip club.

Haneef case shaping future of Australian migration law

AUSTRALIA

Kerry Murphy

"It is right to acknowledge the political character of the Minister's office, and his accountability to the Parliament, and of the government ultimately to the electorate. The Minister is nonetheless susceptible to the requirements of the law that he act within the jurisdiction conferred by the parliament on him."

Jeffrey Spender, *Haneef v Minister for Immigration and Citizenship* [2007] FCA 1273 at paragraph 68.

On 21 August, Justice Spender of the Federal Court held that Immigration Minister Andrews had made a legal error, known as a 'jurisdictional error', when he made his decision to cancel Dr Haneef's temporary visa on 16 July. The 74-page judgment considered cases not only from the High Court of Australia but also from the US Supreme Court.



The key issue in the case was not a major legal point — "It is an embedded constitutional guarantee that persons will be dealt with according to law (19)". Even a Minister of the Crown is subject to the Rule of Law. This is well-trodden ground and not a radical proposition. The judgment does however dispose of the view that a decision of the Minister can be justified simply on security grounds, or the flawed proposition that the end justifies the means — as found in comments such as 'better to be safe than sorry'. Such logic sees the innocent hanged.

Argument in the case had focused on the interpretation of the 'association test' in s501(6)(b). It provides that a person does not pass the character test if: "The person has or has had an association with someone else, or with a group or organisation, whom the Minister reasonably suspects has been or is involved in criminal conduct."

The argument of the Minister was that the 'association' could be an innocent one, such as being related. It does not matter whether the person themselves was involved in any criminal conduct, or even was aware that the person they were associated with was involved in criminal conduct. The 'association' was enough.

Counsel for Dr Haneef argued that this was too wide a test and would catch innocent people. They argued that a victim of domestic violence would fail the character test, because they had an association (a

relationship in this example) with the perpetrator of the violence against them.

Justice Spender considered the history of the relevant constitutional provisions, as well as case law, and concluded that this interpretation of the 'association test' was based on a case that had been wrongly decided. Therefore, the wrong test had been applied by the Minister when he considered whether to cancel Dr Haneef's visa.

The legal consequence of applying the incorrect legal test is what is called 'jurisdictional error'. The result is that the decision of the Minister is flawed, and so cannot stand. The Court held that the cancellation of the visa was incorrect in law. "Having regard to the context, it seems to me impossible to conclude that Parliament would have intended that a person fail the character test where relationship of a visa holder with a person, group or organisation was utterly remote from the criminality of that person, group or organisation."(188)

Justice Spender noted that the Minister could have come to the same conclusion to cancel the visa in another way, and that would have been legally acceptable. But he did not do so.

Counsel for Dr Haneef also argued that there was illogical reasoning in the Minister's decision. But Justice Spender held: "Faulty or illogical reasoning does not amount to jurisdictional error."(277)

Minister Andrews has stated that he has instructed the government lawyers to appeal. A further attempt to appeal to the High Court from any decision of the Full Court will need to convince the High Court that the case raises important legal issues which require the attention of the final appellate court in our democracy. It is too early in the process to predict what may happen in such an application.

On one level, the case can be simply described as the refusal of one Federal Court judge to follow the legal reasoning of another Federal Court judge. But the politicisation of this case in an election year means that the outcome of the appeal will have political as well as legal consequences. Previously the Government has changed the Migration Act when courts have held that the law was not to the liking of the Government. This could be a very significant case in Australian jurisprudence.

'Lazarus with a triple bypass' could well become Harry Houdini

AUSTRALIA

Politics

John Warhurst

Labor remains almost ten points ahead in opinion polls. According to the Reuters Poll Trend, having been ahead by at least ten points ever since Kevin Rudd became its leader last December, Labor has just slipped to a 9.5 per cent lead. How can Rudd lose?

There are a number of factors that should not cause Labor to lose, despite party mythology to the contrary. First, there are some superficial ones that should be disposed of: dirty tricks, rabbits out of a hat and just being habitually unlucky.

Then there are some more significant myths that should be discounted. Labor will not lose because it will self-destruct on policy. Rudd is too careful and cautious about both foreign and domestic policy to allow that.



Labor will not lose because of Rudd's personal limitations. There have already been allegations made against his character. He has been tested on his personal beliefs and background. Minor scandals aside, Rudd is a very different person to Mark Latham. This is a key difference between 2004 and 2007. Elections are increasingly a referendum on leadership and Rudd leads Howard as preferred Prime Minister in the polls.

There are, however, four reasons why Labor might still lose.

Howard's lead in economic management remains one of the government's strengths. While interest rates and housing affordability might favour Labor, the strong economy is one factor that could still return Howard to office if most voters are content enough with this central aspect of their lives.

Business will eventually back the Coalition to the hilt on industrial relations if they believe that they alone stand between Labor and victory. Despite some advocacy, business remains relatively passive, satisfied that Rudd is quite conservative. He is now being pictured by cartoonists as a younger version of Howard. While this horrifies some Labor supporters it is a reassuring image for swinging voters. But business will still back Howard when the chips are down.

The power of incumbency, especially the government advertising blitz, remains very important. We live in a PR state and governments have the power of the PR purse. The government will spend big (with a capital B). The government's new Work Choices advertisements have the potential to really bite with swinging voters. The government PR campaign will increase in intensity prior to the campaign proper.



Finally, Labor might just fall short because of the government's campaigning for marginal seats. Labor might win 51 per cent, just as Kim Beazley did in 1998 and Andrew Peacock did in 1990, but lose in the marginal seats. When you look at the election from the bottom up rather than the top down, by examining individual seats within Labor's range, there are several, such as Malcolm Turnbull's Sydney seat of Wentworth and a couple of the seats in Western Australia, that look difficult for Labor to win. If Labor manages to lose three or four seats it is not likely to win overall.

Labor, importantly, is ahead with the bookmakers, suggesting that the public at large is becoming used to the possibility of a Labor victory. This will help Rudd's prospects. I certainly didn't expect Labor to be this far ahead in mid-August. But unlike some of my academic colleagues I remain on the fence. Changes of government are rare in Australian politics. We have only experienced five since World War II (1949, 1972, 1975, 1983, and 1996). I will be astounded if there is not a swing to Labor, but I don't yet know whether it will be large enough for it to win office.

While this election is still there to be won or lost, Labor is rightfully the hot favourite. But John Howard was correct to point recently to the 1993 election as an example of what is always possible. On that occasion Paul Keating won the unwinnable election in similar circumstances. Keating once called John Howard "Lazarus with a triple bypass" for rising from the dead to reclaim the Liberal leadership. If he manages to escape defeat on this occasion his new nickname might well become Harry Houdini.

I believe that this conclusion holds even in the light of this week's story about Rudd's visit four years ago to the strip club in Manhattan. If Rudd is open and contrite, as he has been, then there will be no lasting damage to his reputation. The revelation may even serve to further humanise him in the eyes of many voters.

How to measure governments' economic performance

BUSINESS

Les Coleman

The proliferation of forensic soaps on TV has not only given us some great characters, but promoted a quest for proof. Politicians are alert to voters' instinctive search for evidence, but are adept at confusing simple questions. Consider the economy. The most sensitive human organ is the hip pocket nerve, and every voter puts economic management close to their top ballot test. Not surprisingly, Government and Opposition are now arguing over their economic credentials. Each cites data from different decades, which given the epochal changes between terms in office, makes forming a sensible judgement on this basis unrealistic.

Voters with a serious interest in the track record of governments as economic managers may prefer a different test: how did Australia's economy perform under the current and previous governments relative to the performances then of comparable economies? This recognises the reality of globalisation, and that domestic economies must be managed in light of offshore developments. It also recognises the cyclical nature of the global economy and eliminates good or bad forces that were unique to the times and beyond the control of the Australian government.



I propose to use five standard measures of economic performance to answer this question: growth in gross domestic product; inflation; money market interest rates; unemployment; and the exchange rate. These, respectively, cover performance of the economy as a whole in terms of its growth, and success in containing price pressures which are usually accepted as detrimental to sustained growth; voter's 'misery index' of interest rates plus unemployment; and a measure of financial performance relative to other nations. The yardstick nations are our close neighbour New Zealand, major trading partner the United States, and Canada and the Netherlands, which are similar in size and culture to Australia and seem (to me at least) well governed.

The critical test for each government is: during its term in office, how did Australia's economy perform relative to international yardsticks? This will be measured simply by the change in each of the five indicators between the calendar years that bookended the terms in office. The intuition is that this reflects relative economic improvements achieved by the government whilst in office. Two periods will be covered: the Hawke-Keating government from March 1983 to March 1996 (that is, changes between calendar years 1983 and 1996) and the Howard

government from March 1996 to June 2007. The table shows the results which — to ensure consistency — use data sourced from the International Monetary Fund publication International Financial Statistics.

In brief, comparison of the economic performance of the Hawke-Keating and Howard governments relative to other economies at the same time shows that the Howard Government delivered: lower inflation, interest rates, and unemployment, and stronger exchange rates; but weaker economic growth. The current government has outperformed its predecessor on three criteria and underperformed on one. It also delivered a stronger currency, which is outperformance for importers and Australian tourists, but underperformance for exporters and foreign visitors.

Not surprisingly, changing the comparison criteria affects the results, but leaves the broad conclusion unchanged. For instance, removing the Netherlands makes the comparison move favourable for the Hawke-Keating Government; and removing New Zealand improves the relative performance of the Howard Government; but the changes are only slight. Fiddling with the start and end dates also shifts the relative advantages, but not substantially. Qualitatively each of the comparison bases leads to the same conclusion: the current Government has the better relative economic record, but not unequivocally.

Intuitively the mixed record of the current and previous governments should not be a surprise. If the Government or Opposition had a demonstrably superior track record they would have long since placed it proudly on display with a knockout blow. The most significant point of distinction is on interest rates, which is why the Howard Government is using this legacy as one of its strongest weapons against the Opposition.

This leads to a much more complex question. Given the probable early departure of key Howard ministers and scant continuity in Rudd's team from the Hawke-Keating ministry, voters seeking the better economic manager need to decide on which of the candidate governments is more likely to prove at least the equal of its predecessor.

Numbers are of little help here. The fact that the Howard Government's fiscal policy is currently being steered by a drunken sailor should alarm all of us who detest pork barrelling, waste and uncosted commitments. Kevin Rudd's lack of experience and seeming inability to come up with his own economic policies makes it impractical to judge his expertise and likely stance if in government. On the other hand, both Government and Opposition seem committed to economic reform, which — of course — is the best way to outperform competitor economies.

In summary, voters keen to choose the better economic manager will need to scrutinise the policy fine print and evaluate the economic expertise

of the leader (including possible Howard successors). An important judgement is the ability and determination of the party to deliver on its policy and not suddenly find some reason to backtrack. Unfortunately choosing an economic manager based on track record seems no easier than using track record to choose the better party for foreign affairs, social security and other key policy areas.

Hip-pocket implications of real jobs in remote communities

AUSTRALIA

Frank Brennan

The Commonwealth Parliament has now passed five bills described as the national emergency response to child sexual abuse on Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. It was law making at Canberra's worst. The 600 page bills were introduced and passed through the House of Representatives in less than a day.

They were subject to just a one-day committee review process in the Senate. When government does not have recourse to an elected Aboriginal consultative body, when the government controls the Senate, and when there is an election in the air with an Opposition that refuses to be wedged on non-economic policy issues, there is little prospect of close parliamentary scrutiny of bold new policy proposals for Aboriginal well-being emanating from Canberra.

A central plank of the original proposal was to ensure ...œcompulsory health checks for all Aboriginal children to identify and treat health problems and any effects of abuse.... The initial announcement of the government initiative was so rushed that it took only the most rudimentary consultation with the medical profession to highlight how unethical, unworkable and harmful compulsory health checks would be.

The government claimed to be acting urgently, without consultation with the NT government and NT Aboriginal leaders, in response to the NT report 'Little Children are Sacred'. And yet the authors of that report had said, ...œIn the first recommendation, we have specifically referred to the critical importance of governments committing to genuine consultation with Aboriginal people in designing initiatives for Aboriginal communities. ... The authors of the report were not invited to give evidence to the Senate committee even though they travelled to Canberra and were in Parliament House.

Those concerned for the well-being of abused children, but not prepared to take the Commonwealth government's intervention on trust, asked for credible explanations why it was necessary for the Commonwealth to acquire land leases over Aboriginal community lands for five years. Everyone knew that compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal land without reason and without consultation would engender mistrust in those local Aboriginal leaders whose cooperation would be essential if any Canberra initiative were to succeed.



Minister Mal Brough told Parliament, ...œWe cannot allow the improvements that have to occur to the physical state of these places to be delayed through red tape and vested interests in this emergency period. Under normal circumstances in remote communities, just providing for the clean-up and repair of houses on the scale that we are confronted with could well take years if not decades. The children cannot wait that long....

We are now entering a new phase in Aboriginal policy. It is not just about protecting the children. Canberra has decided to try a new way of involving Aborigines in remote communities in the real economy, and a new way of delivering health, education and law and order services. The real policy work for this new era will commence in earnest in 2008, no matter which party is in power in Canberra.

Before the 1960s, Aborigines participated in the north Australian economy without land rights, without self-determination, and without equal wages. The second phase of participation was built upon equal wages with welfare taking up the shortfall, and land rights, with remote communities and outstations being established without a real economy or access to the usual government services.



With the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), 8,000 Aborigines on these NT communities have been paid the equivalent of the dole for working a few days a week. In this new third phase, 2,000 of these people will be paid real wages for real work. And the rest? They will have to seek employment and job training like other Australians. Where? How? There will be two classes of Aborigines in remote Australia — those with jobs and those with no prospect of employment or training in their home communities.

In the last 20 years, the Aboriginal population in NT remote communities has grown by approximately 40 per cent. 72 per cent of the Territory's Aboriginal population lives on Aboriginal land outside major towns. 54 per cent of these communities do not have a local health clinic and 94 per cent are without preschools.

Here now is the problem which has been escalating since land rights were first granted and recognised. No matter what the politicians say at a time of emergency, it is not cost effective to deliver the full panoply of human services to small remote communities. The acute problem now is that the children in such communities cannot be guaranteed protection from sexual predators by either the state or by their own community members.

Once the dust settles on the present political flurry, there will have to be

a negotiated process for determining the viability of outstations and small remote communities. Taxpayers will not stand for delivering the full panoply of services to every community, no matter how small. There will be a need for detailed government cooperation with groups like the Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations.

Public servants can be sent to remote communities to deliver services; police can be sent to enforce the law; but there will be no long-term satisfaction for anyone in commissioning outsiders to live in communities simply to monitor family obligations before quarantining welfare payments. This third phase will cost big money and will entail significant relocation of the Aboriginal population in northern Australia. Real jobs and real services don't come cheap in remote Australia, regardless of the community's racial identity.

More than enough ministerial discretion

AUSTRALIA

Frank Quinlan

The rushed progress of the Northern Territory 'emergency response' legislation through Parliament during the past fortnight raises major concerns about whether Australia's parliamentary processes ensure adequate scrutiny of proposed legislation.

Flawed process produces flawed outcomes. Everyone would like to see good results emerge from the new Commonwealth commitment to addressing major problems affecting child welfare in indigenous communities. It is unfortunate, however, that the input of all relevant parties was not channelled towards this end, and that Parliamentary processes were not allowed full play.

From the broad announcement of radical measures on 21 June to the passage of the legislation through the Senate on 17 August, flaws in the process have been evident. Stakeholders struggled to understand the detail of the measures in this significant announcement policy shift. They have had to rely on information gleaned from media sources.

The announcement and subsequent developments could only be described as 'policy on the trot'. The legislation — over 500 pages spread across five bills — was available to most politicians less than 24 hours before being tabled and passed in the House of Representatives on 7 August.

After significant public pressure the legislation was referred to the Senate's Legal and Constitutional Committee with a hearing date of 10 August and a reporting deadline of 13 August. Despite the short notice and absence of any call for submissions, over 150 submissions were made to this inquiry.

Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) called on the Senate to defer consideration of the Bills for two months, in order to allow Senators enough time to read, consult on, and fully consider the implications of the legislation.

During the one-day Senate Committee hearing it was apparent that Senators and witnesses alike had been unable to work through the extensive legislation. But even so, the Committee recommended passage of the Bills unamended. The majority Committee's view is expressed in only four pages, including recommendations.



In the debate which followed the tabling of the Committee's Report, other important issues emerged as community groups raised concerns and Greens and Democrats Senators delved more deeply into the implications of the legislation.

Of the many concerns, four were outlined in a [submission by CSSA](#) to the Senate Inquiry.

First, CSSA identified the need for more extensive consultation, and for genuine Parliamentary scrutiny, if the outcomes were to be workable and beneficial.

Secondly, CSSA objected to the introduction of racial discrimination into the welfare payment system. Some parties criticised other racially discriminatory aspects of the Bills as well. But in its subsequent report, the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee did not provide a compelling response to the significant criticism of the Bills' racially discriminatory aspects, and of designation of such aspects as 'special measures' under the [Racial Discrimination Act \(Cth\)](#) and the [International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) . Merely asserting something is insufficient when qualifying a law with serious discriminatory aspects as a 'special measure'. Australia's hard-earned reputation as a supporter of human rights worldwide will count for little if domestic legislation discriminating against indigenous Australians allows that they are 'excluded' from domestic anti-discrimination legislation. And at international law, such purported 'exclusion' will not excuse violations of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.



Thirdly, CSSA raised concerns regarding the 'quarantining' of welfare payments. But the majority Committee report expressed no view as to the merits of the scheme, except to recommend that the Commonwealth Government make clear what was meant by 'unsatisfactory school attendance' (something not done in the relevant Bill). This surely cannot pass as adequate Parliamentary scrutiny of this radical change to our welfare payments system, particularly as no evidence has been provided to justify such a measure.

Fourthly, CSSA raised previously-expressed concerns (echoed in 2006 by the same Senate Committee which inquired into the current legislative package) that the proposed sentencing provisions were likely to discriminate against indigenous people and other cultural minorities, while not helping to redress child abuse.

Of particular concern are the extraordinary discretionary powers afforded the responsible Minister. Two examples concern 'community service entities' and the 'quarantining' system.

The legislation authorises the Minister to direct a 'community services entity' to give up its assets to the Commonwealth or a third party, or to admit to its meetings a Ministerially-appointed 'observer' —provided that the entity has been funded by the Commonwealth or Northern Territory Government to provide services in a 'business management area'. The definition of 'community services entity' is expected to cover most Indigenous organisations delivering services to remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. The definition will also extend to 'any other person or entity' in the area that is so specified by the Minister by legislative instrument (in a form neither disallowable nor subject to any sunset provision).

It was apparent from last week's Senate debate that there are very few limits to these extremely broad powers regarding 'community service entities' — apart from those conveyed by any reassurances which may be received from time to time from incumbent Ministers.

Exactly which people will be affected by quarantining, and how the system will work, is not spelled out in sufficient detail in the legislation. Further details are to be set out in legislative instruments to be made by the Minister, including the vital definition of 'unsatisfactory school attendance' which will trigger quarantining of welfare payments of the parents of relevant school children. Such instruments are subject to little Parliamentary scrutiny.

The extent of Ministerial discretion regarding quarantining rules is particularly disturbing in relation to quarantining in Northern Territory areas because affected people on welfare payments will be unable to appeal to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal.

South Africa buys Mugabe's 'them and us' ruse

INTERNATIONAL

Peter Roebuck

Next week South Africa flies across the Limpopo to play three 50-over matches against its neighbour and sometime rival. As far as can be told, the tour serves little purpose other than to fulfil a fixture list and to maintain contact between dispensations.

No one in their right mind expects Zimbabwean cricket to recover until the mass murderers and looters running amok in that country have been tried and executed or incarcerated in the rat infested hellholes into which opponents are dispatched. Now that the ANC is taking an interest in the State-sanctioned murders of the 1980s, it might care to cast an eye over the State-sanctioned massacre that took place in Matabeleland in the same period.



Argument is raging about the rights and wrongs of touring such an infernal, betrayed, lovely land. Familiar with tales of torture, Australia cancelled the visit scheduled for next month. The West Indies 'A' side has also refused to tour on the spurious grounds that players might be in danger. Many bad things can be said about Zimbabwe, but not that it is a security risk. Every fifth person works for state security.

Should South Africa refuse to tour Zimbabwe? Is it right to play sport as normal in an abnormal society? Notwithstanding the rules applied by the game's governing body, every country has a right to make up its own mind, and the same applies to every player. Few of the Australians had the stomach to appear amidst such torment, and the boycott came as a blessed relief. No-one understands the symbolic value of a sporting boycott better than this government. As many of us argued in the 1980s, sometimes it is just not right to keep playing ball.

As continentals committed to playing various sports in places of death and decay, South African officials may see things differently. Moreover, cricketing links with Zimbabwe have been strong for several decades and will not lightly be cast aside. If anything they are becoming closer. Last month SA cricket welcomed a group of emerging Zimbabwean players to its high performance centre in Pretoria. Reciprocal 'A' team tours have become commonplace.

In any case a boycott is not going to happen. To a fault, political sentiment hereabouts influences sporting policy. The politicians stubbornly refuse to stand side by side with the forces of economic and political liberation showing courage across the Limpopo. Instead the government

defends the tyrant. Apparently unaware that they have been at war for seven years, Thabo Mbeki and his ludicrous Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs have voiced support for both the Zimbabwe government and its people. Mugabe's ruse in turning the slaughter and starvation over which he has so blithely presided into a 'them and us' confrontation has paid dividends. Lost in cleverness, Mbeki and his party have forgotten that they exist to protect the common African.

Since the tour is bound to take place, South Africa might as well take the chance to have a look under the carpet. To do that they will need to ignore their charming and untrustworthy hosts. Far and away the best thing about Zimbabwean cricket is its young black players, an intelligent bunch, proud and committed, exactly the sort of talent this country urgently needs to unearth. South Africa must discover how it has been done. And it must talk privately to the players to hear the truth about their lives.



Far and away the worst part of Zimbabwean cricket is the way it remains in the hands of ever more dishonest and desperate thugs — a small coterie with friends in high places and families living overseas in a luxury surprising in light of their breadwinner's modest stipend. The Peter Chingoka XI, as next week's opponent is called by every reasonable observer, is little more than a collection of underpaid and bullied youths amongst whom the mildest has been chosen as captain. Chingoka himself has become a nasty, corrupt, pitiful figure incapable of serving any cause save his own.

Chingoka's main ally, Ozias Bvute, is almost as bad and even more offensive. He is an ignorant loudmouth who knows nothing about the game, cares nothing about its players and understands nothing about the demands of international sport. Moreover he has a past best described as shady. Using the power of his notoriously nepotistic office to deny them money, transport and succour, Bvute takes upon himself the role of intimidating the cricketers. Like Chingoka, he is Mugabe is another skin, and likewise has put his own survival and prosperity at the top of his agenda.

Such is the country and cricket community the South Africans will be visiting. But will they detect the truth behind the facade, or remain as pampered and pristine as the ANC election scrutineers in 2002? No one expects these late winter matches be meaningful. Both teams have been pulled apart by tiresome administrators eager to placate politicians. Neither represents the power of the nation, but rather the desires of its post-colonial leadership.

Sport is an inexpensive way to appear radical, and much less troublesome than sorting out ailing hospitals or kleptomaniacs in office.

Taking charge of selections is an easier way of appearing successful than actually producing players. Meanwhile truth tellers are sidelined and the show goes on.

Governments duped over GM food crops

FEATURES

Health

Charles Rue

Most Australian states have started reviews of their 2004 GM Acts which carry a de facto moratorium on growing genetically modified (GM) crops. The pro-GM lobby has responded with an orchestrated campaign.

Liberal insider Guy Pearce's website, [High and Dry](#), tells how the Howard government's climate change policies became captive to the "greenhouse mafia" because of an ideology of neo-liberal economics. A 'GM mafia' has captured the Federal political scene and is pressuring State GM Reviews.

"In the absence of consumer take-up of its products, selling stocks has become a biotech industry lifeline", stated *The Wall Street Journal* in 2004. In 'Biotech's dismal bottom line: More than \$40 billion in losses', it spelt out the immediate GM agenda.

Australian State governments been caught up in a religious type rapture over biotech promises of silver bullets. They have become naïve investors seemingly unaware of biotech economic strategies. Industry lobbyists such the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) and its PR arm the Australian Environment Foundation have egged them on.

More importantly, big long-term profits for biotech companies will come through monopoly control of the food industry.

To achieve this, government mechanisms have been white-anted. In Australia, it means implementing the biotech led Trade Related Intellectual Properties (TRIPs) Agreement of the WTO and manipulating both the Office of Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) and Food and Safety Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ).

Australia has implemented patenting laws that benefit GM seed companies. These are reinforced by the US-Aus Free Trade Agreement. (Pharmaceuticals are under the same threat). Farmers will be forced to buy GM patented seed and consumers will have no choice but to buy GM food in a monopoly system. The TRIPs office within DFAT has proved reluctant to reveal who forms Australian policy on patenting at WTO meetings.

The next step is to have federal bureaucracies help implement biotech monopoly of the food chain. The OGTR was set up to guarantee health and environmental standards but is headed by Dr Sue Meek who formerly promoted biotech based industries. The OGTR has approved GM crops without regard for the 'precautionary principle'. This lack of caution is evidenced by the GM contamination of Australian canola seed.



GM contamination of the crops of conventional breeders and organic growers suits the long-term economic goals of the biotech companies; to undermine economic rivals. The OGTR is only restrained by State GM Acts of 2004 which have shown at least some concern for the economics of farmers about issues such as seed separation. That is why the State Reviews are under attack.

An aspect deserving attention is the negative effects of GM plants on the genetics of the natural environment. In economic terms it is a mere externality. However, for wheat and other food crops, cross pollination means GM contamination of genetic riches. It will grow worse as Roundup-Ready (gluphosate) crops become ineffective and replaced by Agent Orange related Dicamba-Ready GM crops.

The OGTR does no independent testing about health or environmental impacts. It relies on what the biotech companies tell them. Independent testing by the iconic CSIRO has all but stopped as it has been forced to form profit-oriented commercial partnership with biotech companies. These are bound by confidentiality clauses.

FSANZ, like OGTR, does no independent testing yet controls the approval of foods for consumption and food labelling. Food ingredients under one per cent GM go unlabelled. Even the report of Minister McGauran prepared by ACIL Tasman says that 'consumers in some countries are not aware they are purchasing and consuming products containing GM foods. It is of note that co-founder of ACIL Tasman, David Trebeck, is on the board of Graincorp.

Information presented in the media has been deliberately limited or given as spin. The reports of Jason Koutsoukis are examples of creating the impression that lifting GM moratoriums is a done deal and consumers are for it. When reporting on a survey on customer attitudes to GM by Biotechnology Australia his article did not explain that key survey questions were prefaced with 'What if?' caveats supposing evidence about health safety and benefits.

The Catholic Church in India is responding to the alarming number of suicides among farmers, many because of failed GM cotton crops. It would be good to see Catholic moralists and ethical institutes in Australia venture out of the bedroom and into the kitchen. Morality is about care for God's

gift of life in every form. It means addressing what the alliance of the 'GM-mafia' and neo-liberal economics is doing.

Recommended Websites:

[Concerned Farmers](#)
[Science in Society](#)

Family bond obsession a form of racism

FEATURES

Essay

Peter Fleming

What did I most fear in becoming a father?

Well, you start out with a lot of suppressed fears, long before the prospect of imminent fatherhood arises. When single, its: 'Will anyone love me? Will anyone want to marry me?' And then, when you've found that someone and you're planning the wedding, it's: 'Will we even be able



to have children?’ This last one, especially, taunts as you get older and older and all the newspapers and scientific studies frown on your hopes.

All these things I feared, but then Tereza (pictured) came into my life, and life stopped being so panic-stricken and started feeling sensible again.

We had accepted that at our ages, forty-six and thirty-nine respectively, parenthood may be beyond our reach.

Then, one day, I came home and my wife broke the news to me, in September 2006, about nine months after we’d been married.

Such are the absurdities of life that, at the very moment she told me she was pregnant, the thing I most wanted to do was go to the bathroom — not out of any reaction to what she had said, but simply because I had just arrived from a long trip in the car and, well, nature called. Of course, one can’t be told by one’s wife that she is expecting a child, and instantly ask to be excused; I held on for a full twenty minutes, embracing her, while all the while thinking, ‘When can I go?’



New fears emerged. Of course, the most common one is about money. Would we be able to support a child, on one salary? Tereza had come to Australia as an immigrant and was still to find a job, and let’s face it, who was going to employ a pregnant immigrant?

I was worried about the world, its politics, its wars and its environment, and what life might be like for the little one, forty, fifty, sixty years down the track. Every parent must have worried about the future since, well, time immemorial.

But, no, the principal worry for me, strange as it may seem, was not these things. It was this: ‘would I become just another jealous parent, defending my family at the expense of the needs of others?’

Let me explain.

For some years I have believed that it is not primarily racism which is the cause of trouble between different nations, but a more fundamental force I called ‘genism’. I believed that family and tribal loyalties — genetic loyalties — are the major cause of tensions, fights and wars.

Genism: favouring your own child over everyone else.

What made me think this was seeing in-fighting over children between parents of students in a school I taught at in North Carolina. Even at the school’s beauty pageant — about which the students themselves had some sense of humour — several of the parents were adamant about the rules and conditions their children would be appearing under. ‘Fairness’ was the

word used, but 'advantage' was the goal being pursued. You see it all the time on school football fields on a Saturday morning: the raw desire to stand out above everybody else. When babies are new-born, the number one concern is that he or she be 'normal'; but later, parents want their kids to be seen to be 'exceptional'.

In nature, it has been observed that a gorilla which leaves its original tribe and joins another is beaten even more savagely than enemies if it should foolishly return to the old tribe's territory. It has committed the ultimate betrayal, that of turning against its family.

Similarly, political parties punish traitors even more than they lambaste their opposition, because political parties are networks of friends and supporters, people who will look after the shared interests of families of the same class or background, 'Labour', 'Conservative' and so on. A political traitor, like the mis-allied gorilla, has been a waste of precious time, nurture and resources. He has disadvantaged the family.

Family is the glue that binds society, and a love of parents for children is one of the great delights of the world. However, when resources grow scarce, that same bond can turn monstrous. On television, I've seen poor African neighbours fighting each other for food parcels hurled from the back of a truck — a deeply disturbing phenomenon, born of the desperate need to feed one's own children.

The lines are always drawn first around one's own family.

That is what I believed, and in part still do. And I believe racism is just a crude form of 'genism' — differences of racial features are just more obvious; a potential rival is more easily identified.

But in the first days after her birth, when I looked down at my little daughter, I was surprised.

I found myself, yes, wanting her to have every blessing and as little suffering in her life as possible (although we all know that it's suffering which builds character, sad to say).

But I also found myself yearning for all children to have lots of blessings and little suffering. I found myself praying that all children be fed and sheltered, in peace, with a future to look forward to. When my daughter cried, I thought of every child who cries — the pain of the world — and prayed for them as much as for her.

It seems that a child brings into the world as much compassion as jealousy. We just have to keep reminding ourselves of those early feelings, and keep using the empathy we feel for our own to help us to understand the needs and feelings — and fears — of the other.

Ozlit's gentle ambassador in Italy

COLUMNS

By the Way

Tim Kroenert

He was standing at boat stop 14 in the shadow of Santa Maria della Salute, a rotund, slightly gnome-like figure with a shock of just-greying hair and a huge smile that managed to appear both joyous and mischievous. The year was 1974, the place Venice, and I was about to meet Bernard Hickey for the first time. This encounter would change my life.

My job was to teach for a term in the Australian literature course he had founded and, to begin with, personally funded at Ca' Foscari, the University of Venice. He presented me with a timetable that would have kept a whole department flat out for months and we got down to work — though I was disconcerted to find him on edge, tense — a condition which I would soon discover was wholly uncharacteristic of him.

Slowly, over several pleasant dinners at the end of some rigorous classroom days, the truth emerged. The Sirocco — one of the more notorious of Mediterranean winds — had made an unseasonable appearance and was causing him agonising sinusitis. And the Australia Council, which had been providing critical financial support, seemed to be threatening to pull the plug. Since the Council was funding my visit, he told me, I would be required to write a report on the work going on at Ca' Foscari, and on that report would probably depend the future of the whole enterprise! Such was my first, but not remotely my last experience of a Hickey bombshell.

But all was well. Within a few days I realised that the Prof, as I ever after called him, was a brilliant teacher whose students adored him; that the courses were exceptional, especially given the difficulties of language, acquiring texts and finding reference material; that my impossible schedule transformed itself into a demanding but comfortable rhythm by virtue of subtle metamorphoses known only to Italians; and that Hickey himself was a cornucopia of ideas, allusions, amazing erudition, innovation, cheek, daring and sheer old-fashioned pizzazz.

In Venice he was an institution. When we walked through the Venetian campi or along a canal or a rio terra he would be greeted constantly by passers-by and shopkeepers standing at their doorways. Waiters and chefs would call out from their restaurants and pizzerias, "Buongiorno



In Memory of Bernard Hickey



On Sunday 29 July, at the age of 76 years, Bernard Hickey, a very highly regarded Australian professor and clear friend and collaborator of the Australian Embassy, who has lived in Italy for many years, passed away.

Professore". Bar keepers would wave him in for a drink — a grappa or un'ombre di bianco — and since Hickey almost never refused any of these invitations, the long walk after work from Ca' Foscari to his apartment in Dorsoduro might begin in sober, end-of-the-day gravity but would often end riotously with friends tagging along and a dinner in some favourite trattoria.

Once, when my friend and colleague Syd Harrex and I were travelling with Hickey by train to a conference in Frankfurt, an Irishman who was heading for a conference of ophthalmologists in Basel came into our compartment by mistake. Within minutes Hickey had captivated him with his blarney, his apparent familiarity with the world of ophthalmology and his massive if uncontrollably quixotic range of reference. The Irishman, joined us in a few drinks, swapped anecdotes and ideas with Hickey, declared him "a scholar and a gentlemen" and then, discovering he had missed his stop and was on his way to Mannheim, settled down happily for more talk and laughter.

If any test were needed to establish Hickey's uncanny ability to lead, to motivate and inspire, it came when his attainment of a Professorship took him to Lecce — about as far away from Venice as he could be and still stay on the peninsula. He conquered Lecce and became as dazzling an institution and cultural hero in that city as ever he had been in Venice. He died there, at the end of July, aged 76, within months of having realised another of his dreams — the establishment of a Centre for Australian Studies in the Mediterranean, to which he donated his library of 7000 books.

Bernard Hickey devoted his life to the cause of Australian literature and Australian culture in Europe, often at the cost of great personal sacrifice. He was known, loved and profoundly respected wherever Australian writing and literary culture were studied and wherever Australian writers and academics gathered. His nurturing influence on the whole field was prodigious. His astonishing energy, his capacity to encourage in ways that excited students and colleagues; his sharp wit; his totally infectious joy and ebullience; his philosophical attitude to, though never meek acceptance of, the vagaries of fate, circumstance and bureaucracy; and perhaps above all his determination to celebrate his Australian heritage, all marked him out as exceptional — a force for good and for excellence.

As Mark Antony said of Brutus: "His life was gentle; and the elements/So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up/And say to all the world: 'This was a man'".



A voice for victims of the sex trade

FILM REVIEW

Tim Kroenert

The Jammed: 89 minutes. Rated: MA. Director: Dee McLachlan.
Starring: Emma Lung, Veronica Sywak, Saskia Burmeister, Sun Park,
Amanda Ma, [website](#)

In the wake of Michael Apted's political biopic [Amazing Grace](#)— which, in examining the life of abolitionist William Wilberforce, indirectly addressed the issue of modern-day human trafficking — comes a film that tackles that subject head-on.



What's more, drawing heavily upon real-life court transcripts, and based and filmed on and around the streets of Melbourne, *The Jammed* is a frank and gritty reminder that this issue is not just on Australia's doorstep — tragically, it's part of the furniture.

Melbourne woman Ashley (Sywak) learns about her city's seedy side quite by accident. A chance encounter with Chinese woman Sunee (Ma) finds her drawn into the search for Sunee's estranged daughter, Li Rong (Park).

While Ashley is busy playing the gumshoe, the film parallels her journey with the experience of three young women, Li, Crystal (Lung) and Vanya (Burmeister); illegal migrants who've been coerced through violence and fear into lives of prostitution.

Strong performances and writing amount to many scenes of extraordinary power. Lung, in particular, evokes both inner strength and social vulnerability, as her character is subjected to some shocking physical and psychological abuse.

The most unsettling degradation, however, is that suffered by Vanya following an attempted escape from her captors; credit goes to both Burmeister and the film-makers for their bravery in detailing the humiliating act she is subjected to.

Perhaps more importantly, the actors who portray the three prostitutes ably display moments of joy and camaraderie — during, for example, a rare (and supervised) trip to the beach — that emerge amid the horrors they endure every day. These fleeting moments provide glimpses of hope and warmth that make the girls' ultimate tragedy all the more powerful.



If there's a criticism to be made (apart from the uninspired and

uninformative title), it's that *The Jammed* is too stylised. Really, the subject matter is sufficiently potent for the film to have stood — even benefited from — a little more exposition, and a more linear structure. Sometimes straightforwardness is key to a powerful story; the film's artsy flourishes tend to distract from, if not totally confuse, the issue.



According to Patricia Church, who worked on the film as a researcher, Australia Federal Police estimate that “at least 1,000 women were annually trafficked into Australia in a growing industry estimated to be worth up to \$150 million.

I found that few charges were being brought against suspected traffickers ...| and that most prosecutions failed due to ‘lack of evidence’”

Like many crimes of a sexual nature, the industry in human trafficking for the sex trade is largely protected by walls of silence and secrecy. In *The Jammed*, McLachlan has provided a voice on behalf of the many voiceless victims. That alone makes it a worthwhile, albeit confronting, film.

Urgent matters written about in haste

BOOK REVIEW

Non-Fiction

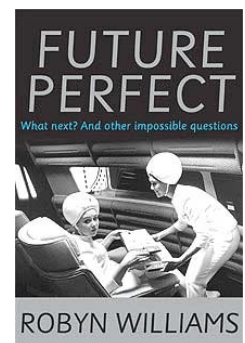
Peter Pierce

Future Perfect: What next? And Other Impossible Questions, by Robyn Williams; Allen & Unwin, \$17.95, pp 171. ISBN 978-1-74175-318-9

Robyn Williams wrote [*2007: A True Story, Waiting to Happen*](#) in 2000, "In a burst of rage" at the extinction of species, and the ruination of reef and rain forest. In this fantasy of a near-future (where John Howard is still Prime Minister) animals take over the world, exacting a long-overdue revenge. A science journalist with the ABC for 35 years, Williams has received various honours — a visiting professorship at Balliol, a star named after him in the constellation Carina — none of which has diminished his self-confidence. His latest work, *Future Perfect*, is concerned — as the subtitle indicates — with "What next? And other impossible questions". The book begins with the assertion that "Thinking about the future is not a normal human activity". Nevertheless it is one that Williams is prepared to undertake, considering in sequence the futures of communication, science, God, transport, cities, sex, innovation, work and last of all 'The Future of Us - Our Last Century?'

The introduction is unpromising, evincing signs of haste that are evident throughout. Then again, urgent matters are being addressed. Some 35-40,000 years ago, Williams proposes, "We invented culture". Evidence: cave paintings in France and Australia, Usually he condescends to the past, better to concentrate on what has not yet come to be. Thus only at harvest time could "peasants [gather] for a grim romp". Galileo enters next: "his cosmology affronted the Church, but that didn't worry him". In fact, the threat of torture, death, an end to scientific experimentation, worried him constantly. No matter, Galileo is soon shuffled offstage so Williams can recollect an appearance of his before an audience of Year Ten students: "I was as familiar as Tycho Brache to the eye-rolling, lounging youth". But he tunes in to their bleak pessimism, their helpless fate as "shuttlecocks of circumstance". Direly, it seems to him, we "have abolished the future yet again".

Time, then, for the book proper to begin. Much of what follows is sage judgement from a mind that is formidably well-stocked. In 'The Future of Communications', Williams persuasively asserts that "We move too much and are beginning to think about the benefits of staying still". Just so, but how can we insert a slow movement into the hectically-paced symphony of



modern times? This chapter ends, as do the others, with Williams at play, outlining 'The Hunches of Nostradamus'. Speaking personally and professionally, and perhaps not much in jest, he predicts that by 2010 the ABC will have closed Radio National, merged with SBS and "[restructured] to add five extra layers of senior management".

Future Perfect is punctuated with episodes of autobiography: how Williams's father forced him — against the son's inclinations — to study science; how some of his schooling took place in Vienna; his bureaucratic battles with "accountants *sans frontieres*"; his admiration for the kind of person, such as himself, "who is refreshed by a romantic interlude". Jealousy, he reckons, is "very nineteenth century". The 'Future of God' chapter refers to recent works propounding the virtues of atheism and elaborating the evils that flow from religion. Williams's friend Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, is introduced by a long, hostile quotation from Terry Eagleton, rather than in his own words. Williams 'small volume', *Unintelligent Design* is mentioned here. It reappears in the chapter on the future of sex, where he drolly recalls its argument that "the only credible manifestation of intelligent design is the presence of homosexuals in society". Natural selection ought not to have allowed them.

Whatever flaws and fancies there may have been in God's blueprint, Williams does surprisingly little to produce projections of his own. This is a sample: "give commuters trains that are faster than cars ... and they will use them". As well they might, but what social and political interventions will disrupt and amend current circumstances? Indeed his own counsel often appears to be despair. Of the future of work, it "has grown like technology: it is messy, changeable, uncertain, fragmented and ruled by new kinds of bureaucrats".



Young people now face, Williams judges, a probable and chilling future of "a discontinuous patchwork of jobs, a gypsy-like lifetime of discontinuity". For tertiary students on the way to that future, handling numerous part-time jobs as well as their studies, Nostradamus's hunch is that they will attend universities in order to sleep. "So will we make it?" Williams confesses he is unable to answer, although in a book over-stuffed with scantily analysed quotations, he surrounds himself with pessimistic foretellers. *Future Perfect* is a sketchy diagnosis of much that imperils the human future. Bad news is very nearly relished. There is too little either concrete or venturesome. Admirers of Williams will have expected more. Allen & Unwin might be wondering whether it has published something that really is not yet a book, and certainly not the one that might have been.

Slogging through mud

POETRY

Jan Owen

Portico

What helical two-step slides through us?

Hypnotised by jamais-vu

we'd strip the face off with the mask,
the mouth for me, the eyes for you.

The black brig of the new moon tips

K's cornucopia of No,

direction tots its little sums,

the psytrons fight thought's undertow.

Rule out the hieroglyphs of loss

(a thousand armies at a stroke).

When critics make a meal of grey

may laughter midwife any joke.

The stinging tree and cunjevoi

agree on antidote and pain.

So let it be the numbed heart drum

the jussive mode alive again.

The lake at dusk calls down the sky,

the mayflies fall like dregs of light

and zeros gape in every stone,
offering no adjective to night.

Heresy hides in a crystal dice:

say slime mould colonies emigrate

as stars on the blue cupola teem,

say heaven's borders fluctuate.

The Constellation of the Crab

will scour the mirror clean of doubt:

I pruned the roses yesterday,
there's salt enough to see me out.
Though failures stack like useful bricks
the Ides of Silence always win
so house the mind in Tesla's Cage
when doorstep welcomes threshold in.

[Listen \(1.6MB MP3\)](#)



Sound Waves to Silence
The onslaught from birth,
in widening rings of sound -
voice, music, noise -
knows quietness as its faintest hope.
For recompense we pattern the silence
with words, those fossils of small change
layering space and time.
Memory touches them and they touch back:
cousin Og in the cave weighted his tongue
with picture-sounds, and gathered future
in his palm till the finger-pebble words
formally counted themselves across the ground.
The poem too is abacus to some transaction
where one word speaks the weight of ten
sliding across the silence between.
We might have made a speech from music,
each resonant truth trembling through the body
and up through the crown like the note
from my Tibetan singing bowl in B:
on and on and on;
politics as harmonics, love as the octave.
Instead this bit-talk, grit and gravel of voice,

slogs us through mud, with song for its quick half-flight.

Last night I dreamed of corners;
behind each one, the same young woman
was bathing the face of a wide-eyed child
with golden skin. They would not speak.
Since every waking moment angles silence
we might dare corners more.

We've an audience, after all, to serve -
our own winged thoughts, devil and angel,
taking the long route home to night
through number and colour and form;
ghosting, becoming, the silence,
we shatter and drink the light.