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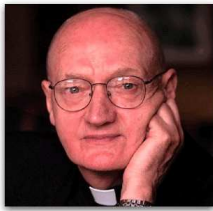
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## **Agnostic and religious ways of seeing the world**

### RELIGION

*Andrew Hamilton*



The Atheist Convention promises to become a good institution. Although it inspires some polemic, it also invites deeper reflection on the different ways in which people account for the world. *Leaving Alexandria*, the recent autobiography of a former Anglican Archbishop of Edinburgh, more lately a media figure and agnostic, is exemplary in this respect.

Richard Holloway's life took him from the poor Clydeside village of Alexandria into an Anglican religious community, to ordination as an Anglican priest, to ministry in South Africa, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Boston, to consecration as Archbishop of Edinburgh and finally to resignation from his position, Church and Christian faith.

This is an honest and self-critical book that invites the reader to respond with the same honesty.

When he was 14, Holloway went from home to a rural school and seminary for impoverished boys who wished to become Anglican clergy. An Anglo-Catholic community, whose members were destined for the foreign missions, staffed the school. Its ethos was idealistic. Its ritual and symbolic structure were rich.

Holloway was attracted to these aspects of the life, but then had to deal with the tension he experienced between the idealism and beauty of the worship and his recognition of moral frailty.

He left at the end of his schooling, but joined the congregation after national service. His decision was made lightly: nothing seemed more worth doing. He lived with detachment, never unselfconscious, always observing himself living the part he played. In the hope of becoming fully involved and of belonging fully, he repeatedly sought out difficult fields of ministry. But he always felt himself an observer.

This sense of distance helped him to see the world through the eyes of others. He had a natural empathy for people who differed from him. In his writings he took seriously the perspective of religious unbelief.

It is not surprising then that Holloway privileged the concrete and personal needs of individuals over the general and principled arguments that buttress institutional stability. This priority often brought him into conflict within his church in areas such as marriage discipline, women's ordination and homosexuality.

When he was made a bishop and had to negotiate fierce conflicts in the Anglican

communion and personal attack by opponents over these issues, his links with faith and the church were strained and broken.

The crisis led Holloway to recognise that he had not only entered but also now accepted the secular wisdom of his age. He came to the view that church doctrine and ethics, though often helpful, are a human creation, and that human life is adequately accounted for by scientific explanation.

This enabled him to accept his ordinary humanity, freeing him from the tyranny of perfection. As he minimised the claims of churches to truth and authority, he was no longer torn between the needs of persons and the demands of the institution.

He continues to wonder at the beauty of nature and of the human world, particularly through poetry.

Holloway's long journey through and from Alexandria is honestly and compellingly told. For those who, like me, share his taste for entering other views of the world, the tension he felt between a natural inclination to observe and the compensating attraction to gestures of total self-giving, and his instinctive preference for the concrete and personal over universal principles, the question he poses is not where he went wrong, but why we would not follow him. It is answered less by argument than by observation.

The key point of difference is not that we are more religious, more doctrinal and more church-centred than Holloway was. It lies in a quality of attention to all the particular relationships, commitments and actions which shape our engagement with the world.

We see all of these as illuminated by a God who always lies beyond the horizon of our lives. We do not experience God but we recognise traces of God's everywhere in our world. And we are drawn to wonder at and to respect the world that bears God's traces.

For Christians, too, what kind of a God lies behind the horizon and the implications for our lives of God's love for the world are seen in the life and death and rising of Jesus Christ.

All this needs much unpacking in conversation, of course. But in such a view of the world the observer who can enter many opposed views of the world has a place. So does the occasional leap of faith from which we ruthfully pick ourselves up. Our natural business is to contemplate the variety and wonder of a world that no single perspective can contain. Our home lies beyond the horizon.

We should also expect that both we and others will identify the God who lies beyond the horizon with the things and words, including church things, and will act inhumanely to control them.

From this perspective Alexandria is always for leaving because we are drawn

companionably to a world that will always be ahead of us.

## When Catholics dropped the Bible

### VIDEO

*Peter Kirkwood*

The chilling sight of Norwegian mass-killer, Anders Behring Breivik, giving a fascist salute when he appeared in an Oslo court this week is symbolic of a worrying minority trend: in the face of a perceived threat from the complex pluralistic world we live in, a retreat by some into the fortress of narrow militant extremist ideology.

In all religious traditions, this is seen the world over in the rise of fundamentalism, sometimes linked to violence and terrorism. This has raised several key question for religions: how to interpret sacred scriptures, how to educate ordinary believers about appropriate interpretation, and how to apply this to everyday life.

The man featured in this week's interview on Eureka Street TV has devoted his life to these questions. Australian Salesian priest, Frank Moloney, is one of the world's leading biblical scholars. In this 50th anniversary year of the start of the Second Vatican Council, he reflects on the momentous changes brought about by the Council on the way Catholics should interpret the Bible, and its place in the life of the Church.

Born in Melbourne and educated by the Christian Brothers at Moonee Ponds, Moloney joined the [Salesians](#) of Don Bosco in 1960, and taught in their high schools after completing his bachelor's degree.

In 1966 he went to Rome to further his studies. In 1970 he gained a Licence in Sacred Theology from the [Salesian Pontifical University](#) , and in 1972 a Licence in Sacred Scripture from the [Pontifical Biblical Institute](#) . From 1972—75 he studied at Oxford University in the UK, gaining his PhD for a thesis looking at the term 'Son of Man' in John's Gospel.

He returned to Australia where he became Professor of New Testament at the [Catholic Theological College](#) , part of the Melbourne College of Divinity. During this period he was also visiting professor at a number of prestigious institutions overseas including the Salesian Pontifical University and Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, and the [Ecole Biblique](#) in Jerusalem.

In 1984 Moloney was appointed by Pope John Paul II to an important advisory role, to the [International Theological Commission to the Holy See](#) . He served on the Commission for an unprecedented 18 years.

In 1994 he became Foundation Professor of Theology at the [Australian Catholic University](#) and made a key contribution to the university in its formative years.

In 1999 he was appointed Professor of New Testament at the [Catholic University of America](#) in Washington DC where later he was elected Dean of the

School of Theology and Religious Studies. Within a few years of arriving in the US, he became the first foreigner to be elected President of the [Catholic Biblical Association of America](#) .

In 2006 he returned to Australia to take up the role of Provincial Superior of the Salesians. He was the first theologian to be elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities in 1992, and a few years later was honoured with an Order of Australia for his services to Australian religion and culture.

Moloney is a founding editor of the Australian theological journal [Pacifica](#), and an associate editor of [The Catholic Biblical Quarterly](#). He is a prolific author, penning a huge number of scholarly and popular articles, and more than 40 books. In 2007, with popular novelist Jeffrey Archer, he co-authored *The Gospel According to Judas*.

## The torture of adultery

### FILMS

*Tim Kroenert*

***The Deep Blue Sea* (M). Director: Terence Davies. Starring: Rachel Weisz, Tom Hiddleston, Simon Russell Beale, Barbara Jefford. 98 minutes**

Is canasta a game or a sport? Is mere enthusiasm something to be derided, when the alternative is passion, with its connotations of rawness and freedom?

The exchange between weary housewife Hester ( [Weisz](#) ) and her wealthy mother-in-law (Jefford) is a finely wrought specimen of passive aggressive repartee. But it's also a summary of Hester's state of mind: although her husband Sir William (Beale), a judge, does not yet know it, Hester's enthusiasm for their marriage has been negated by her passion for another man, RAF pilot Freddie (Hiddleston).

This flashback is stained by the knowledge that we, the audience, have of the trauma that is to come to Hester on the road that she has chosen. When her infidelity is discovered, she is rejected by the deeply hurt William, but readily flees to the arms of the cocky but haunted Freddie. Her desire for him is excruciating in its ferocity, especially once it becomes clear that his feelings for her are less profound.

Having rejected one partner and being now neglected by another, Hester lapses into a viscous depression. Which is where we find her at the film's commencement. Most of the film takes place over the course of a single day; Hester's failed suicide attempt during the opening scene draws the genuinely caring William back into her life, but repels Freddie — the reverse of Hester's hoped-for outcome.

A scattering of dreamy flashbacks (including of that terse exchange between Hester and her mother-in-law) reveal Hester's histories with these two men: one who offers the safety and mundaneness of love and nurture; the other who promises the heat, colour and even danger of passion. In short *The Deep Blue Sea* is a portrait of a woman trapped in the tumult between two failed relationships.

As a housewife escaping from the oppression of domesticity into the recklessness of adultery, Hester can be seen as an heir to the spirits of Lady Chatterley or Madame Bovary. In a sense, the perennially discontent Hester is more difficult to sympathise with than these predecessors. Yet Weisz's performance is utterly captivating, as it ebbs and billows and sometimes blazes within cinematographer Florian Hoffmeister's long, slow takes.

Captivating, yes, but also devastating: Hester's story may on the surface seem prosaic, but it is executed with breathtaking emotional intensity. Writer-director Davies' adaptation of Terence Rattigan's 1952 play is a film not just to watch but



to become immersed in.

Along with those stunning, lingering gazes at characters' faces and emotional reactions, the visual highlights include (during a flashback to wartime) a bravura tracking shot of Londoners joined in tremulous folk song while sheltering in a subway from the bombs bursting in the streets above them.

The prominent use of Samuel Barber's 1939 Violin Concerto throughout the film further epitomises *The Deep Blue Sea's* lasting impression on the viewer; tortured, tortuous and unrelenting in its emotional grip.

## **Greens moral vision safe in Milne's hands**

### **POLITICS**

*Tony Kevin*

Just how special a human being Bob Brown is may be seen from reading the full text of his third [Green Oration](#) , given to the party faithful days before he announced his retirement from parliamentary politics.



Mocked and pilloried by lesser minds, it was a visionary speech, freshened by a sly sense of humour and irony. It set out his irrepressible optimism and sense of our common humanity across this fragile planet, and of the duties of compassion and mutual respect we owe to one another as shared stewards of our wondrous earthly home.

This is the Greens moral vision. It is the same grand vision [Tony Judt](#) came to in the later years of his rich scholarly life: that we all share the same universal rights as human beings, not as rich or poor or as citizens of one powerful country or another.

Vale, Bob — enjoy your well-earned retirement and continue to inspire us with your wisdom and humanity.

Christine Milne inherits the Greens' ecological and humanist vision. In every sense, she is Brown's rightful heir. The next promising generation of Greens leaders will be nurtured and grow under her leadership. There are many of them: the party continues to grow and attract real talents.

Milne shares Brown's Tasmanian roots and wilderness inspiration. They manned the forest barricades together. At 59, she has fire in her belly and years of productive politics to come.

An interesting paradox — a feet-on-the-ground Tasmanian country woman, a farmer's daughter, who became a fervent Green, now sees her prime task as being to build coalitions of trust and policy cooperation between the Greens and the threatened rural and small business communities of Australia, against the power of plutocracy.

There will be interesting new coalitions of interest taking shape under Milne: she will network with people who might otherwise go to Barnaby Joyce or Bob Katter, keeping a decent Australian populist vision alive.

Her apparent ordinariness will be an asset. Don't be fooled by this, for she has a keen mind and a firm grasp of the Australian political style.

Enemies of the Greens are painting her as a rigid eco-ideologue, a cold fanatic who cannot compromise and do pragmatic deals as they say Brown could do so well. Such a critique falsely paints Brown in retrospect as an avuncular teddy-bear

politician who knew how to compromise better and more gracefully than Milne will.

Don't believe it. Brown ruthlessly pulled the rug from under Kevin Rudd's failed climate policy, precipitating Rudd's loss of credibility and fall from power. Brown and Milne share the same steel and political acumen.

I know from personal experience Milne's grass-roots humanity, her attention to human detail in her concern, for example, for the safety of life at sea of asylum seekers, and her refusal to be fobbed off with lies and half-truths whenever things have gone bad.

She has the same human concern for the threatened security of people in country towns and along our inland rivers. As I see her, her feet are firmly on the ground of Australian country decency and hospitality, with a sense of human scale and of our possibilities to be a better nation than we are now.

The Greens are lucky to have her ready now to inherit Brown's mantle.

Can she command from the Greens party faithful the same fervent loyalties Brown attracted? This is the wrong question, proceeding from a hostile misreading of what kind of party the Greens are. They are hard-nosed pragmatists, but united by a shared ideological vision of moving towards more responsible stewardship of the nation and of the planet. They are not woolly-heads, easily swayed by personality-cult leadership politics.

The Greens' present fortuitous window of direct policy-influencing power as junior partner in a minority-led coalition government may soon be passing. Or it may not. The electors will decide at the next election. In either event, I believe the Greens under Milne will continue to thrive as a vigorous creative force in Australian politics, pushing and prodding the major parties to come up with better policies in the national public interest.

The Greens are the party that says we Australians are capable of a better vision for the future than either major party is currently offering us. They will continue to throw sand in the gears of the competing plutocratic vision, of Australia as a feckless and profit-hungry world quarry, indifferent to dying country towns and the erosion of real jobs and working communities everywhere.

## **Fund facts about living with disability**

### **POLITICS**

*Patricia Mowbray*



At the end of each day, one of our three adult sons will ask, 'What's on tomorrow?' They don't ask this lightly. They have Down syndrome. Whether they participate in the community, go to work or remain at home depends on what funding we can access. For other families like ours the right funding can mean a new wheelchair or access to new treatment or training.

Basically, appropriate funding gives people with disability, their families and carers freedom and choice in how they participate in and contribute to our society.

Australia's current approach to disability services is crisis-driven and welfare-based. Our three sons have different types of funding. Our eldest, who has Down syndrome and autism, requires the most amount of support to access the community, yet receives the least amount of funding. These sorts of inconsistencies create challenging situations.

Most people in our society are free to make choices in regard to employment and recreation. However most people with disability are not. At the moment, funded support hours are provided by service providers who, in most cases, dictate the time and activity. For the person with disability it's not about how they would like to access work or participate in the community, it's about taking what they can get.

The inconsistency in the funding model means I need to be home to support our sons. I'm fortunate that my employer is 'carer friendly'. I'm able to work part time at home while providing support for our sons. But many individuals I know have been forced to retire from work to provide support for a son, daughter or partner.

These are some of the many reasons why we, and many other families like ours, support the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The proposed NDIS is intended to change the current funding model and will provide funding for essential care, support, therapy, aids, equipment, home modification, access to the community, education and training.

The NDIS has the potential to revolutionise the care and quality of life of persons with disability. It will help to give people with disability, their families and carers a choice in what works best for them as individuals and as a family. It will also abolish inequalities that currently exist for those without insurance.

Part of my work with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference was to prepare a [submission](#) to the Productivity Commission on the NDIS. In the submission, the bishops agreed with the overall premise that the current system needed to be

overhauled, and that individualised funding would provide more control and more choice to individuals and their families, and more accountability by service providers.

The benefits of the NDIS will be numerous.

It will offer greater choice in treatment, early intervention and equipment. Our friends have waited many years for a new wheelchair after their daughter outgrew hers. There isn't much dignity involved in squeezing into a wheelchair too small for a growing person.

There will be benefits for those with disabilities and their families who face marginalisation and lack of services in remote and rural areas, including remote Aboriginal communities. Distance is a huge barrier. Without appropriate services the person with disability is not given an opportunity to develop or participate in the community.

An additional crisis area is in the care and support provided by older parents in their home for adult children with disability. I have spoken to an 80-year-old woman who is still caring for her 60-year-old daughter with disability. The woman worries every day about what will happen to her daughter when she dies.

The NDIS has the potential to alleviate situations such as these.

It will also benefit young carers — under-25s who provide care to a family member or friend with an illness, disability, mental health issue, alcohol or drug problem, or who is frail-aged. Australia has 300,000 young carers, 150,000 under 18. Research indicates that, when inadequately supported, their own health and wellbeing can be seriously affected. The NDIS would give them a voice in decisions about funding and support.

One hoped for outcome of the NDIS will be to ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all people with disability, and promote respect for their inherent dignity. This inherent dignity needs to embrace all Australians. The Productivity Commission estimates that about 410,000 Australians have significant disabilities that require ongoing support, but only about 295,000 receive it.

The 2012-13 Federal Budget on 8 May will explain how the NDIS will be delivered and funded. Prime Minister Julia Gillard's championing of the scheme, and Opposition leader Tony Abbott's offer of bipartisan support, are greatly encouraging. Hopefully this bipartisan support continues and will move the NDIS a step forward.

## The call to celibacy

### RELIGION

*B. F. Moloney*

To be called by God to the priesthood, to serve the community in God's scheme, is a high calling generally accepted by humanity. Higher perhaps than politics, higher than poetry, for the calling howls for absolute faith and trust, in God and in the people the priest serves.

The priest, so that he may perfectly perform his duties, must absolve himself from everything that is earthly and earthy as much as possible. He has the sacraments to himself, the mass, the Eucharist, the hierarchy that leads him up the pastoral pathway to god. These are things that separate him from the rest.

But this is not enough. He must not have sex.

Michael Parer, in his achingly tormented book *Dreamer By Day* tells how the expectations of the church unhinged his love of God. He could not see the difference between his love for God and his need for love from and for a woman; a love that would not be complete unless consummated. The loves were exactly the same. Beautiful, absolute: the consummation spiritual and physical. One cannot be without the other.

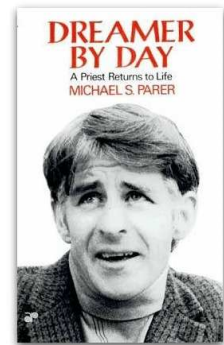
This was at the time of Vatican II, and just two years before the Summer of Love. Heady times, and a priest vulnerable to them was bound to struggle. He enjoyed his pastoral duties and contributed a lot to his community, and was well loved. Ultimately Parer left the church and married, though not his faith.

Parer questioned the doctrine of celibacy through his struggle with his sexuality. The promise was that his faith would be strengthened while meeting these struggles, for they are normal to priesthood and a test. The emotional labours of Augustine come to mind when thinking of a priest's struggles.

But what can the church offer a man or a woman who chooses celibacy? A cynic might say a comfortable life, materially, and a life of prayer. They will wear the cross of the celibate Jesus as a charm against temptation.

The man becomes priest upon taking his vows of celibacy. He is no longer a man who would work and care for family, enjoy his leisure and be father to his children. He is no man; not man, but an earthly angel called by God to serve. In his robes and vestments he is for the flock, but not of them.

He is neither superior nor inferior to them. He is not them. He is like the celibate Jesus walking among them. He is shepherd and guide to them. He is the possessor of the profound and sacred that inspires the sinned masses to seek eternal salvation and the kingdom of heaven. He is walking the gutters smiling and



ministering to the poor, the needy, the sick, the mentally ill, the infirm. Those who are looking up at the stars are half way there.

The priest is a man who sees the whole of life better than the bureaucracy that feeds him. If he is good he will join them. His hormonal life is short; he will overcome. Pity those who cannot overcome and thus stay, and pity more the women who love them.

The honourable Parer can hold his head high. He saw sex as the church sees it. A beautiful experience oystered in the sanctity of marriage, before a God that truly loves those that procreate in the name of love.

The church cannot have sex. That would render its words meaningless, and it cannot take that risk. To experience sexual union as a body is too much for the church. The joy of sexual love is inexpressible. There would be no need for dogmas, declarations, councils, liturgy, let alone theology.

There is a man, strikingly handsome, who walks among his community that nurtured him as a child. He sees to their physical and emotional problems, although he is unqualified. He grew up in the expectation that he will look after the community. And that expectation is being fulfilled to this day.

He has his faults. He is given to anger and despair, and he is uncomfortable around the community's women who adore him. He goes about without a name and the children follow him everywhere.

And then one day, troubled by his position as healer, he left and went into the bush and stayed for a month. The community were frantic and searched for him but could not call for him for he had no name. He came back and stood before his community. He said 'I am a priest and this is what you will call me from now on'.

## **Problems with atheism**

POETRY

*Various*

### **The problem with being an atheist**

The problem with being an atheist  
is the lack  
of imagination.  
no one to talk with  
when we were first begun  
to share the pain  
of dying  
the joy of living  
to delight in our first words  
our singing notes  
our pictures on the walls.

The problem with being an atheist  
is the lack of gratitude  
having no one to thank for being here  
nothing to join hands with  
and dance the dance of life.

The problem of being an atheist  
is the lack  
of creation  
the determination  
that we shall be  
that we art that  
that we are formed  
with intention,  
with a smile  
a deliberation



that you are you  
and no one else.  
The problem with being an atheist  
is the lack of possibilities  
a world to come into being  
a kingdom to be worked for  
blood and sweated for  
any hope of future travels  
curtailed with science.  
The problem with being an atheist  
is the lack of mystery  
why the Boudhi tree and not a palace garden,  
why the woman at the well  
and not a real estate agent in Vaucluse  
why the air becomes the Holy Spirit  
and causes us to shake a little  
to grin a little  
to write in the dust  
and find songlines in the earth.  
the problem with atheism  
is the lack ...

*Jorie Ryan*

**Passing through**

*(a response to Peter Goldworthy's 'Eye of the Needle')*

i

To go from this earth to the next  
you can remain yourself  
but your self must  
travel very light.

ii

No coffers full of old customs,  
no cases full of old attachments.

The have-nots, the poor in spirit  
will be the only ones  
who'll carry little enough.

iii

At the end of your worldly tunnel  
no one will be coming towards you  
to support you and your heavy head.

iv

Your heavy heart is a different matter —  
it will be blessed with weighing less.

That, at least, remains of  
the promise of the Light.

*Frank Jousen*

### **The new year's stars**

And so, we ventured away from the lights of the house,  
Away from compliments and cups of kindness sung  
Into the tipsy night,  
Peering into a darkness fragrant with the breath  
Of lemon, eucalypt, mint and thyme.  
Two paddocks away, an astrologer's dog  
Was barking at the heavens,  
Having caught the scent of celestial bears.

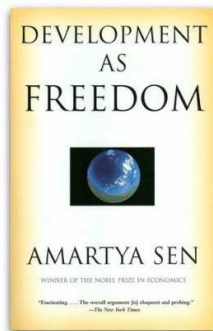
And so, as we looked up,  
The cooling earth seemed to reel in the lee of Mount Sturgeon;  
And, in their majesty, the stars passed in their transcendence,  
Mapping our poles and times and expectations,  
As randomly, it seemed, as if wild Caravaggio  
Had flung his silvered dice without relent,  
Exhausted only by the prospect of mundane dawn.

But, as one, spent star fumed its quiet death,  
It seemed that from within the bright caravans of galaxies,  
The stars, in choir, were singing of life,  
And that we, whiskied, warm and staring,  
Might yet become the grace notes  
Within the promise of that stupendous song.  
On this New Year's night  
Attended at our peripheries  
By fleets that trawl celestial seas  
And bright caravans of lesser galaxies,  
It seemed that in serried choir  
The stars were singing,  
And that we, small and staring upwards,  
Were the grace notes within that enormous song  
*Grant Fraser*

## The best and worst of international aid

### POLITICS

*Duncan Maclaren*



Rumours are rife that the Government's projected aid budget increases will be cut in the forthcoming Federal Budget to ensure a surplus. Until now Australia had been on track to achieve its pledged aid target of 0.5 per cent of GNI by 2015, a pledge endorsed by Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard and, presumably, current Foreign Minister Bob Carr, and which had also received rare bipartisan support from the Coalition.

Aid is not generally a vote winner. There are notable exceptions, such as in those Scandinavian nations where popular support for aid policies has seen them achieve an aid budget of over 0.7 per cent of GNI.

In Australia though aid is not popular, due largely to the many myths surrounding it; a heady mixture of racial prejudice, the afterglow of colonialism and the chipping away at the social justice agenda by neo-cons whose 'trickle down' economics from the rich to the poor was discredited long ago.

Horst Köhler, former head of the IMF, was asked when he was President of Germany if he regretted some of the IMF's policies, such as aggressive structural adjustment to force poor countries to cut social expenditure to pay back debts from loans given too easily by Western banks and governments. His reply was that they had pushed ahead with economic theories without taking into account the effect of those theories on people's lives. Quite.

Of course, some aid doesn't work. I was horrified as a young aid worker in the '80s being told that an open sewer in an Addis Ababa slum was a World Bank project. The 'donors' did not consult the local community, let alone allow them to participate in the design to bring sanitation to the slum. Never admitting failure when logistical difficulties arose, they returned to their hotels and no doubt the next 'aid' project.

That is the big lesson for successful aid projects — the participation of the local community is vital. They should not be the 'beneficiaries' but rather, in the words of Nobel-prize winning economist, Amartya Sen, should be the 'doers and judges' of any aid project.

One of the simplest and most successful aid projects I was involved in was with a group of women in Kenya. They had been abandoned by their husbands and had taken to prostitution to feed their children. Through [Freirean](#) methodologies, a local NGO organised them to discuss their problems and come to their own solutions.

With some seed money from the 'donor', they were able to buy land as a cooperative, grow crops and sell them in the markets — thus giving up their old habits — and to survive and prosper sustainably through efficient organisation and working together. One of them said: 'The best thing is I can hold my head up high in church.' Her dignity had been restored. That is key to aid being effective in the long term.

Aid is obviously not enough to eradicate dehumanising poverty, but it works if targeted (especially towards women), if owned by the people it was meant for, if there are adequate training components, if it doesn't encourage dependency, if it is channelled through local community-based organisations and if, in a world where violence simmers under the surface of many societies, it fosters peace.

It should, of course, be a genuine gift from the rich to the poor and not tied to purchasing Australia's goods and services. That's called 'trade'.

Unlike the mining industry, which can spend millions of dollars on advertising campaigns telling us not to tax them more (when it costs just \$3 to immunise a child against preventable diseases), the poor of Oceania, Asia and Africa have no voice here other than that of Australian voters willing to make aid an election issue.

Good aid gets rid of poverty, gives people dignity, promotes sustainability and fosters peace. Not a bad return on investing 0.5 per cent of the gross national income in people's lives. Wayne Swan, please take note.

## Philip Adams in schism with the Dawkinsonians

EDITORIAL

*Michael Mullins*

While the second Global Atheist Convention at the weekend was a highlight for some, it disappointed others. Some [would be attendees](#) stayed away because they could see that the dominance of comedy and derision would exclude any serious or productive exploration of the issues. Others went along prepared to live with the frustration, or perhaps enjoy the event as if it was part of this month's Melbourne Comedy Festival.

Last Monday's ABC TV Q&A debate between Richard Dawkins and Cardinal George Pell represented a different kind of trivialisation in that it was promoted as a fight rather than comedy. In a sense this is much closer to the contest of ideas that we would hope to see in an exchange between a believer and an unbeliever. But it lacked the mutual respect that any form of dialogue requires.

The *Sydney Morning Herald's* Leasha McKenny [referred](#) to the 'barely concealed mutual disdain between Dawkins and Pell', implying that hostility was the defining characteristic of the event. Neil Ormerod also made this point in *Eureka Street* last Wednesday when he [contrasted](#) the Q&A 'match-up' with the 'gentlemanly affair' that was February's Oxford debate between Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams and Dawkins ('on his best behaviour').

In the shadow of the blockbuster Q&A and Global Atheist Convention was a much more poignant encounter earlier this month between broadcaster Philip Adams and the Jesuit Fr Gerald O'Collins. Adams is the longtime (but arguably fallen) doyen of Australia's atheist movement, while O'Collins is one of the English-speaking world's most published and respected Catholic theologians.

The conversation [took place](#) on Adams' *Late Night Live* program on ABC Radio National, and there was not merely a degree of respect, but positive affection. In the opening moments of the interview, Adams referred to 'the bridge between us', and O'Collins said to Adams: 'We always think of you with affection and gratitude.'

Such an instant bond need not soften the positions held. And it didn't. Adams attempted to chisel away at O'Collins' belief in the Resurrection as an actual event. O'Collins stood firm in declaring the physical Resurrection 'central and obvious' to him in his life. Adams countered by admitting that while he does live in a universe that is ultimately meaningless, he's very happy, and life as an unbeliever 'is not too bad'.

But there was far more agreement than disagreement, especially with their common distaste for religious and atheist fundamentalism. 'I find fanaticism hard to take,' said O'Collins. Adams mentioned with a degree of pride: 'I've fallen out of favour with many Australian atheists because I'm not sufficiently Dawkinsonian.'

In view of the natural bond between Adams and O'Collins, it seems there could also be an affinity between the one-eyed Dawkinsonians at the Global Atheist Convention and fundamentalist believers of all religious faiths. It's a pity that they are more likely to engage in fistfights than dialogue. Or maybe not.

## **Oakeshott's Malaysia Solution loophole**

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

*Frank Brennan*

When Parliament resumes next month, our elected representatives will revisit the Malaysia solution for dealing with boat people seeking asylum in Australia.

Independent Rob Oakeshott has introduced to the House of Representatives his own Migration Legislation Amendment (The Bali Process) Bill 2012. If passed, this bill would amend the Migration Act, removing the peg on which the High Court was able to hang the Malaysia solution out to dry.



Under the unamended law, the Minister for Immigration is required to declare in writing that any country to be used for offshore processing provides access to effective procedures for asylum claims and protection for asylum seekers while their claims are processed, and meets relevant human rights standards.

In August last year, the High Court of Australia ruled that the Minister could not make a valid declaration in relation to Malaysia as it was not a signatory to the Refugees Convention, and the arrangement between the two governments was not legally binding.

Oakeshott's bill is so designed that Malaysia could pass muster without High Court interference. It would permit the Minister to designate Malaysia as an offshore assessment country because it is a party to the Bali Process which at its last meeting a year ago included 32 countries working on a Regional Cooperation Framework.

If Oakeshott intended meaningful public decision making by the executive government and appropriate parliamentary scrutiny, he has failed. Participation in the Bali Process could not be reckoned a sufficient precondition for a country to pass muster with human rights protection and appropriate asylum procedures. For example, Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran are all participants in the Bali process.

The only other precondition in the Oakeshott bill is that 'the Minister thinks it is in the national interest' to designate a country as an offshore assessment country. Anxious to avoid any further High Court scrutiny, his drafters have stipulated that the international obligations and domestic laws of a country are irrelevant.

In considering whether designation of another country would be in Australia's national interest, the Minister is required to have regard to the assurances offered by that country's government about the assessment of asylum claims and the non-refoulement of asylum seekers whose claims have not yet been decided. These assurances need not be legally binding.

The Minister is required to place a statement of reasons before Parliament



within two sitting days of making a designation. He is also required within 14 days to make a request of UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) seeking a formal statement of their views about the arrangements proposed in the designated country.

It would make more sense if the Minister were required to make the requests and receive the statements before making his decision to designate a country, and before tabling the decision in Parliament. That way the UNHCR and IOM positions could help to inform both the Minister's decision and Parliament's assessment of the decision.

The bill provides that 'the sole purpose of laying the documents before the Parliament is to inform the Parliament of the matters referred to in the documents and nothing in the documents affects the validity of the designation'. Parliament has no power to disallow the designation, and a failure to table the documents would not affect the validity of the designation.

So the Oakeshott bill is designed to ensure that neither Parliament nor the High Court could hang a designated country out to dry. The bill is simply a convoluted means for allowing the executive government to declare an offshore processing country without any meaningful scrutiny by Parliament or the High Court. It does nothing to advance the cause of public scrutiny of government decisions to provide offshore processing of asylum claims.

A completely toothless tiger, the bill still provides the opportunity for Parliament to agitate again the debate about Nauru, Malaysia and onshore processing.

We now know that the best advice available from the Commonwealth public service is that Nauru will not work second time around. In October last year, Andrew Metcalfe, Secretary of the Immigration Department under governments of both political persuasions, told Liberal Senator Michaelia Cash in Senate Estimates:

Our view is not simply that the Nauru option would not work but that the combination of circumstances that existed at the end of 2001 could not be repeated with success. That is a view that we held for some time — and it is of course not just a view of my department; it is the collective view of agencies involved in providing advice in this area.

Malaysia is still problematic when you consider the case of the unaccompanied child who comes to Australia fleeing persecution and who would undoubtedly be found to be a refugee.

If you send such a child to the end of a queue which is 100,000 long in Malaysia, the solution is immoral. If you leave the child in Australia, you send a signal to people smugglers that children are exempt from the Malaysia solution and thus you set up a magnet inviting other unaccompanied children to risk the dangerous voyage from Indonesia. The Malaysia solution then becomes unworkable.

While the offshore processing option has been off the table, the Gillard Government has done good work revising its onshore processing arrangements, providing an identical procedure for appeals whether an applicant came by boat without a visa or by plane with a non-protection visa, and providing bridging visas for many asylum seekers once their health, security and identity issues are resolved.

Also the Government has enacted complementary protection legislation allowing a person in Australia to contest their return home when they will face the death penalty, the threat of death or cruel and degrading treatment.

Introducing his bill, Oakeshott claimed, 'The truth is that 148 of the 150 members of parliament in the House of Representatives agree that offshore assessment should be an option for executive government.' Despite the electoral appeal of slogans in this complex policy area, it is time for these 148 members to admit that neither of the existing Malaysia and Nauru options passes muster as both moral and workable.

After all we are one of the few signatories to the Refugee Convention in this part of the world, we take our international obligations seriously, and the number of asylum seekers reaching our shores is slight compared with the numbers in Malaysia and Indonesia.

## Bewailing Wikipedia's white male bias

MEDIA

*Ellena Savage*

In my first ever politics lecture at uni, the bespectacled, craze-haired lecturer told us not to use Wikipedia for our research. This was unsurprising, as we'd been prohibited from Wikipedia all through high school (knowing it was full of lies, we all relied on it anyway). But this time it was not because of Wikipedia's perceived amateurism.

'It's a good resource for starting out. But the vast majority of contributors are North American white males. It's a fairly limited perspective,' she said to us. This elicited comic groans in the lecture hall, mainly from the white males who had yet to understand — or perhaps to fully experience — their own privilege.

Statistically, white men are less likely to be murdered in the US than black men, and in Australia, are far less likely to be arrested, die in custody, or commit suicide. Men are more likely to win jobs and to be paid better than women with the same qualifications. White male privilege is real, and the basic ways we report and consume information protects that bias: 87 per cent of Wikipedia's editors are men, the majority in their 20s .

Which is not Wikipedia's fault. Wikimedia projects are radical, and are changing the world for the better. Articles are becoming more scholarly, and university feminists around the world are putting their students to work to contribute more knowledge. But Wikipedia exists in a world already weighted towards the white male experience.

A few weeks ago I checked [D'Angelo](#)'s wiki article to find out about his new album. Where Marvin Gaye was the king of soul, D'Angelo (pictured) is its prince (I know this because I read it on the internet). Yet a large portion of the wiki article was dedicated to D'Angelo's 'Legal Issues' (a subheading seemingly exclusive to black musicians, intellectual property pages and anzac biscuits), including a DUI charge and a marijuana possession charge.

My friend and I deleted them — their relevance to D'Angelo's career is negligible, and their level of interest as biographical facts is debatable.

We searched Wikipedia for entries on other musicians we knew to be guilty of similar indiscretions. The manner in which famous white drug-users are represented is notably different.

The entry on [Keith Richards](#) , the grandfather of recreational drug use and all comedy based on chemically-eroded intelligence, includes detailed information on his drug use and trouble with the law. But he does not have 'Legal Issues'; his story is a rich and balanced biography. Even [Lou Reed](#) , who wrote songs about drugs as well as under their influence, apparently never possessed them.

[R. Kelly](#) , on the other hand, has serious 'legal issues' pertaining to an alleged statutory rape. Yet this disturbing crime is lumped in with a sound pollution charge for playing music too loudly in his car. This juxtaposition is offensive: who cares about a sound pollution charge? Certainly not the young survivor of sexual assault.

The murder of [Trayvon Martin](#) has catalysed a broad criticism of the real-world effects of white male privilege. Sure, Florida's 'Stand Your Ground' laws sound bizarre and dangerous to almost anyone living outside the state, and to many within it. But the main reason this death became so political is because the law was actively, and openly, protecting the killer, a white man, and not his victim, a black man.

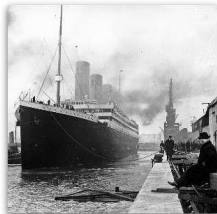
We saw laws that were created by white men used to validate an irrational and murderous fear of black men. The huge political response to the murder articulated an urgent need for the white male perspective to give a little.

When I checked D'Angelo's page a few days later, his 'Legal Issues' were back up.

## Titanic lessons in the age of swagger

### REFLECTION

*Andrew Hamilton*



The sinking of the Titanic is an event that punches even beyond its considerable weight. The loss of any ship on her major voyage with the death of over 1500 people deserves to be remembered. But the sinking of the Titanic continues to fascinate more than does any other shipwreck.

The Titanic was a symbol of swagger: the insouciance that flows from self-absorption and an insuperable conviction of invulnerability. It was the biggest passenger ship in the world, setting world records in every statistic. It was proclaimed to be indestructible, armoured against any demons of the sea. It was to take risk out of ship travel. On its maiden voyage it gathered the great and the good of the age who partied on even as the ship was holed.

In retrospect the Titanic has become the larger symbol of the end of a swaggering era that was marked by great self-confidence and belief in inevitable progress. Its sinking was the drum roll that welcomed the trenches of Belgium, the beer halls of Munich and the sealed train entering Russia. The dead multiplied exponentially.

Other historical events have been freighted with the same symbolic loading as the loss of the Titanic. The invasion of Rome by the Visigoths in 408 CE was the climactic event of late antiquity.

The Roman Empire made swagger an industry. The choreography of imperial travel, of punishment, of rhetorical celebration, of battle and of history making proclaimed Rome immortal and invincible. The sack of Rome was inconceivable. But the fact that it happened pointed to a long-standing reality that the Empire relied on Barbarian armies for its own defence. When they were double-crossed Rome's vulnerability became manifest.

The stock market plunge on 29 October 1929 is also a symbol for the end of a swaggering age. The self-confidence and the conviction that a speculative bubble could never end were accompanied by a titanic flaunting of wealth and febrile relationships. Although the Great Depression had many subsequent spikes and falls, the plunging of the Dow Jones Index and of speculators from windows are the abiding images of its ending.

It brought misery to millions although, unlike the Titanic's Edward Smith, the captains of industry generally found well-appointed life boats.

Then there are minor Titanics: the times when a swaggering organisation suddenly hits a reef. The discovery last year that a Murdoch newspaper had

hacked the phone of murdered English schoolgirl Milly Dowland may yet be seen as a Titanic moment for the News print media. Certainly the company has never lacked swagger, displaying an unrivalled self-confidence, an assurance of trustworthiness and the capacity to intimidate critics and politicians.

That aura has now dissipated under the constant disclosures of doubtful practices. But the fact that the company's shares continue to rise suggest that the implosion requisite for a comparison with the Titanic may never eventuate.

The lesson of the Titanic is that swagger has its costs. Installing lifeboats for only half of those who travelled on the ship was a gesture of supreme self-confidence but also of supine regulatory failure. It led to an avoidably high loss of life. When we remember the tragedy, those who [died](#) should matter more than the ship and its pretensions.

Similarly assurance in the making of money that is not guided by an ethical compass is exciting to watch. But in commemorating financial disasters we should focus on the price paid by the poor and unemployed in nations that were despoiled by the profit takers.

The story of the Titanic also suggests that when swagger begins to walk the streets it is time to head for the lifeboats. Fascination with the Titanic may imply that we always need to relearn this lesson, and that we find it hard to apply it to the circumstances of our own times. In the world of finance, the churches and the press, mirages of oases surrounded by palm trees always look solid, especially to those who speculate on them.

## Gay Christians' church trauma

### FILMS

*Tim Kroenert*

'God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve,' quips the pastor from the pulpit. The congregation finds this hilarious, but not young gay Christian Ben, who feels secretly shamed. Later, when a string of Christian counselling programs fail to 'heal' his homosexuality, Ben takes to his wrists with a razor blade. A trusted pastor attributes Ben's self-harming to demonic possession. Needless to say, Ben finds this distinctly unhelpful.

Another boy realises he is gay at around the same time that his father comes out of the closet, an event that causes an emotional rift in the family. Though still virtually a child, he feels a responsibility to repress his own feelings in order to avoid causing further damage to the family. He grows up to be, for a time, a practitioner of a counselling service that seeks to help gay Christians transition to heterosexuality.

*The Cure* aims to softly condemn the (primarily evangelical Christian) 'ex-gay' movement, which since the 1970s has sought to convert homosexual Christians to the 'straight' and narrow. It draws heavily upon the personal experiences of its interviewees, who speak frankly about their attempts to repress their sexuality, and of the emotional and psychological trauma that they have suffered as a result.

All feel their religious faith strongly, which makes their churches' disdain for their sexuality — something that they feel lies at the core of their being — all the more devastating, and the desire to repress it all the more desperate. One ex-Mormon reflects fondly on the faith's community and family values, before admitting to the severe depression that he has suffered during years of immersion in the ex-gay movement.

Director Corkhill's thesis is clearly that repressing a homosexual nature for religious reasons can lead to trauma and depression, while embracing it promotes growth as a whole and healthy person. Importantly the film promotes sensitivity and acceptance as the proper response by religious groups to their members who experience homosexuality. This is a commendable message that is unfortunately undermined by apparent bias.

Even viewers sympathetic to the message cannot miss the onesidedness. Of the six interviewees, five have had a negative experience of the ex-gay movement. The main interviewee is [Anthony Venn-Brown](#), co-founder of the gay Christian network [Freedom2B](#), and at the end of the film, several of the interviewees are seen wearing Freedom2B t-shirts. It is as if the participants were hand-picked to support a predetermined conclusion.

Yet *The Cure's* focus upon human experience is a great strength. It is hard to dissent in the face of the still youthful Ben's grateful tears for his recently

discovered belief that God loves him regardless of his sexuality. Or with 39-year-old Hannah who, after years of depression and a severe breakdown, has accepted who she is, rather than a church-prescribed version of who she should be. She says she's never been more content.

This kind of personal testimony tends to elicit sympathy; this is true, too, of the lone voice who speaks in defence of the ex-gay movement. Pastor Ron Brookman, from the [Living Waters](#) counselling program, reflects candidly upon his own youthful experiences with homosexuality, and on the process of prayer and self-examination that brought him to the point where he now identifies as heterosexual.

The pseudo-psychological explanations he offers for the source of his earlier homosexual tendencies are dubious. And his admission that he sometimes still 'notices' men's legs tempts ridicule. Yet like the other interviewees he speaks frankly and from personal experience. It is no one's place to judge that his experience of moving into heterosexuality is less valid than that of the interviewees who found fulfillment in their homosexuality.

The Cure *premieres this weekend at the [13th Brisbane Queer Film Festival](#).*



## **HSU corpse fouls Julia's nest**

### POLITICS

*Moira Rayner*

The HSU corpse is stinking out not only its own but the house of any union, and the hung parliament's as well. No, it isn't Julia's fault.

Most of the media bazookas are trained on her for refusing to condemn Craig Thomson, the unfortunately non-photogenic backbench Labor MP who was an HSU office-holder until he entered federal parliament in 2007, and was only later accused of misusing HSU credit cards for tawdry personal purposes.

His warm seat is also toasting the shapely behind of the Gillard Government, which is one parliamentary vote ahead of political oblivion, which Abbott claims is the PM's motive for distancing itself from the allegations and the Fair Work Australia investigation of those and other alleged irregularities, under the Fair Work Act.

But of course, Thomson's status as 'innocent until proven guilty' is also a critical element of the rule of law in this country whatever the Coalition might say, and Gillard is a lawyer, and she's right.

Abbott's, Murdoch's and Fairfax's other rocket launchers are also fixed on the HSU's national president, NSW-based Michael Williamson, but also on the 'whistleblower', Victorian-based Kathy Jackson.

Jackson's call for a clean-out of the executive of the HSU, after the non-event of the report on three-years-long review of the HSU by Fair Work Australia, which none but the DPP has seen, will not have any purifying effect. What might happen after former anti-corruption chief Ian Temby's report is complete in a few days, and the FWA recommendations are revealed, cannot possibly be the root and branch renewal that Jackson says she seeks.

Nobody's proved a thing, and nobody has been charged, and so it will remain. The HSU will struggle on, to the edification of none.

President Williamson might well be urged by his executive (or most of them) to resign as both national president and head of the HSU East branch, but he can't be forced to. He has only been accused of embezzling union funds and stood down on pay since last September. Whatever Temby might find, he can't be dismissed.

A member of the HSU national executive can be removed only if they are found guilty of misappropriation of union funds, gross misbehaviour or gross neglect following an investigation by the union's ombudsman. That hasn't happened and won't unless NSW Police — not even Ian Temby QC, a private citizen now, who is conducting an audit of the HSU East branch — provides 'authoritative' evidence of gross misconduct.

Thomson denies that he did anything wrong in his time with the union. He can't be forced out of parliament unless he is convicted of a felony. NSW police said last year they weren't interested in investigating it.

Jackson doesn't have 'the numbers' to get an advantage from a spill, since most of the recently-merged mega HSU membership is in NSW and those members are thought to harbour antipathy to Jackson. Proving that dirt sticks, she too has been 'accused' (by whispers and rumours) of funny dealings with union funds and resources, though on a very different and trivial scale from the men involved.

Even if she gets her wish and the HSU national executive is spilled, it won't be democratically elected, but elected by a council whose membership is determined by the number of branches — who won't be affected by any 'spill' and whose voting tendencies would presumably fall along factional allegiances if not personality politics.

As business journalist Leon Gettler pointed out on Tuesday (on Facebook) union members therefore have the privilege of providing their fees without having any say in how the union is run.

Nobody will ever know whether union men have really done bad things because no one will, in my humble opinion, ever be charged. The police in NSW see nothing to investigate, and FWA's report is useless to the DPP which does not conduct investigations either so cannot determine whether anything further should be done in the way of, you know, throwing the book at folks.

FWA did what it could under the Fair Work Act, but it doesn't prosecute people who may have mismanaged their registered associations. We can be very sure that what it investigated and what police might be expected to investigate are entirely different res, and it's in nobody's interest to lay all the blame on just one man.

Things have gone mightily wrong, and all the checks and balances in the world have done nothing to prevent it.

So pity poor Jackson. Cassandra-like, she was disbelieved. What she feared, happened. Hounded, threatened and unpopular with big boofy blokes in her own union and a hypercritical media other than those conservative commentators who call her a truth-teller and fighter for justice, she should know what happens in the end of Homer's epic. Cassandra fell by uncaring swords in a fight that wasn't hers and which ruined a population.

Thus is it ever with a whistleblower, especially women who whistle in male-dominated organisations:

The rain it raineth on the just  
And also on the unjust fella;  
But chiefly on the just, because

The unjust hath the just's umbrella.  
Ah, the shame of it all.

## The footballers who booted out Australian racism

FICTION

*Brian Doyle*

In recent months many fanciful stories have been told of the Mighty Currawongs, a new Australian Rules football club with offices and training ground in Box Hill, a suburb of Melbourne, the large southeastern Australian city where footy, as its adherents call it, was born in a paddock in 1858, rather like an ungainly colt.

Having established its footing, the game, again like a colt, developed into a stunning combination of grace and speed, and soon took not only its native city but its home nation by storm; by the teenage years of the 21st century, there were footy teams in all corners of Australia, and a steady enough demand for the sport that there was a steady parade of expansion teams, of which the Currawongs were one.

This note, then, is to correct some of the misconceptions about the Currawongs, and to set the record straight about the happy serendipity of events that befell the club, leading to its current popularity and fervent fan base.

It was wholly by chance, for example, that the club's officials hired former Geelong Cats stalwart Cameron Ling as their first coach; Ling, after a stellar career in midfield for the Cats, with whom he won three league titles, retired just as the Currawongs finished planning for their opening season, and club officials, much impressed with Ling's work as captain and relentless defender, chose him to train their young players properly in the fundamentals of the game.

The first press releases issued by the club about this hiring, however, referred to Ling only as C. Ling, because, as it was discovered later, a public relations intern whose name has never been revealed, probably a Melbourne Grammar graduate, was unsure of the spelling of the name bestowed on Ling by his blessed mother upon his moist entrance into this plane of existence in the winter of 1981.

Thus rose the waters of confusion, and became a raging flood, and did overflow the media, one member of which casually in a blog post bruited the opinion that the Currawongs, which he called the Wongs, were a Chinese team, just as, by purest chance, the first player promoted to the big club from junior football was the fleet and muscular Jason Yang, a lad whose grandfather hailed from the Pearl River delta in southern China, and the second, a tall boy built like a gum tree, was the now-renowned ruckman Kevin Kao.

These signings, and the rumour that the Wongs were building a roster of Australian Chinese players, led to a stunning surge in season ticket sales among the Chinese community, in both the traditional hotbed centered around Little Bourke Street in Melbourne proper, and the outer populaces, notably Box Hill and Bendigo.

Yet another happy chance, an attentive player agent in Adelaide named Howard Lo who represented the talented South African prodigy Stephen Sung, brought young Sung to the Wongs, and Sung's signing ceremony, itself a memorable event to this day in Box Hill, led to the swift recruitment and signing of the rest of the now-famous roster: Han, Teng, Feng, Tung, Wei, Fan, Jen, Wan, Kang, Lin, Yen, Hou, and the older Tu brothers, not to be confused with their younger twins, who still may be swayed from their love of cricket to the beloved immense ovals on which Australia's national game is played.

At this juncture in the young life of the Mighty Currawongs the usual rabid bigotry poured forth as if from a wound that had not healed. One columnist raged and sputtered about invasions and secret agendas and pusillanimous kowtowing to political correctness, even going so far as to make a series of snide remarks about certain people being identifiable as evil by their small stature, until Kao paid a personal visit to the offices of the paper where said columnist worked, still a memorable event to this day in Southgate, where, according to some reports, the streets were lined with people cheering Kao's blunt insistence that in the Australia he loved and was born and raised in, a man's colour and size and heritage had nothing whatsoever to do with his patriotism, integrity, accomplishments, and opportunities for career advancement, except perhaps in the ruck, where a certain burly alpinity, as Kao entertainingly told a reporter for a rival newspaper, really helps.

Many observers, in fact, point to this particular interview with Kao as the key moment not only in the nascent existence of the Mighty Currawongs but in the history and story of Australia itself; it was the e-magazine *Eureka Street* which perhaps most eloquently characterised the amazing events in the weeks following Kao's striding along the Yarra River to 'deliver the message of the real and best and deepest Australia', as he described it.

The burst of street protests against racism in every corner of Australian life; the masks of every colour that Australians from sea to sea wore hilariously on Michael Long's birthday; and the boom in stories from Australians of every colour about their comic and joyous experiences with Australians of every other colour finally put to rest forever the idea of an Australia riven and bruised by racial animosity and misunderstanding.

As the editors of *Eureka Street* noted, no force on earth can make us colour-blind, for we are finally mammals of enormous sensitivity to otherness, having been trained over millions of years to trust only our own clan and suspect ill will of others; and while Australia since the moment of its founding as a mighty nation has battled racism against its own first peoples and peoples from Asia who once represented a bitter enemy in war, it is now cheerfully eloquent, blunt, and pointed in international discourse about the savage idiocy and cruelty of racism, which costs not only untold pain and suffering among both hated and haters, but billions of dollars in lost time, creativity, and productivity at every level of society

and commercial enterprise.

Indeed it was the new prime minister Patrick Dodson, a man proudly both Yawuru and Australian, who, in a recent speech, lauded the death of racism in Australia, credited the Mighty Currawongs for the precipitant incident in a truly remarkable moment in the long story of his beloved nation, offered Kao a position in the national ministry upon his retirement from football, and noted, to what can only be characterised as a roar of approval from Australians far and wide, that, with respect for the adherents and supporters of so many football clubs around the nation, it was the Wongs for which every Australian citizen barracked in his or her heart.

## Bruises all round in Pell-Dawkins street fight

RELIGION

*Neil Ormerod*

Late in February 2012 Richard Dawkins, internationally renowned atheist, and Rowan Williams, soon to retire Archbishop of Canterbury, debated the meaning of life, the universe and everything at the Sheldonian Theatre, [Oxford](#). The moderator of the event was Sir Anthony Kenny, the famous British philosopher, ex-Catholic priest and current agnostic. The debate was podcast live around the world.

It was a gentlemanly affair. Dawkins was on his best behaviour, perhaps caught up in the solemnity of the occasion. Certainly Kenny did not let him get away with much. And Williams is a much respected figure even among atheists, and a genuine scholar. The audience packed the theatre but kept their place, reserving their applause until the end of the event.

In Australia we do things differently. Here we set Dawkins against Cardinal George Pell and put journalist Tony Jones in the moderator's seat. Rather than a gentlemanly debate the event was billed like a street fight, with Jones calling it 'a remarkable match-up', a 'title fight of belief'. Certainly the blogosphere expected a one-sided event with comments like 'Dawkins is going to crucify Pell' and 'I hope Pell doesn't mind being humiliated'.

Jones is no Kenny and Pell is no Williams, but Dawkins is still Dawkins, and in this instance was no longer restrained by the setting, the moderator or any lingering respect for his opponent. Though struggling with jet-lag his switch was set to attack. Pell, too, had pre-planned debating points to make, on Darwin, Hitler and Stalin, designed to provoke a strong reaction from Dawkins, which they did.

Sadly the cardinal's grasp of scientific details did not inspire confidence. His scholastic philosophical points on the soul and transubstantiation (complex at the best of times), found little traction with the audience. He struggled to give voice to religious truths in an environment more conducive to combat than conversation or conversion.

He did well however in making it clear that atheists could definitely 'go to heaven' and that Catholics need have no problem with evolution, suggesting that the Genesis account of creation and fall is 'mythological'.

Dawkins on the other hand failed to see the limitations of claims to explain the universe from 'nothing', promoted by recent writings by Lawrence Krauss. Like many scientists Dawkins and Krauss have no conception of a distinction between physics and metaphysics. Further, Dawkins' account of Krauss' position was as garbled and hand-wavy as you could get. Clearly not his area of expertise!

Dawkins went on to overstate the scientific evidence in claiming that evolution explains the origins of life. It explains the variations and developments, but presupposes the existence of life. A couple of times he snapped at the audience who giggled at some of his less coherent lines. It was not a good look.

The problem of suffering raised the level of debate somewhat, not for Dawkins for whom there is nothing to explain, but certainly for Pell, who admitted that this was a problem that he struggled with. Here there was some genuine religious depth, in his dealing with pastoral concerns for real-life situations.

It is hard to know what such TV debates achieve. They are not about a meeting of minds; both sides 'preach to the choir' only each has a different choir in mind. The issues are not conducive to sound bites and quick quips.

Trying to get a scientist to understand the difference between physics and metaphysics is not an easy task, as Kenny found trying to moderate the debate between Dawkins and Williams. There, once the discussion turned to philosophical issues, Dawkins was clearly out of his depth.

Still, complex questions such as transubstantiation and the resurrection of the body do not survive our media-driven 15-second attention span. The poll at the end of the night overwhelmingly gave the 'debate' to Dawkins, but more thoughtful tweets the next morning simply say 'no-one won, they both lost'.

All this is of course a lead up to a couple of weeks of atheist chest-beating and self-congratulations with this weekend's [Global Atheist Convention](#) in Melbourne. We can expect more of the same in the near future. But it is important to keep these things in perspective.

It is true that Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion*, has sold over a million copies in North America, but as Alasdair McGrath has pointed out, in the same period a Christian devotional work by Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, sold over 30 million copies. While at best a couple of thousand might attend the convention in Melbourne, hundreds of thousands attend religious services every weekend in Australia.

No wonder the atheists get so frustrated.



## Raising boys who play with dolls

### COMMUNITY

*Catherine Marshall*

It's every feminist's dream: a four-year-old girl standing in the pink-doused aisle of a toy store, issuing forth about the lack of choices for girls. 'Why do all the girls have to buy princesses and all the boys have to buy superheroes?' the girl, Riley, asks with exasperation of the man — presumably her father — who is [filming her](#) .



Riley is clearly displeased at the manner in which manufacturers and advertisers have attempted to pigeonhole little girls, but her outcry is gender-inclusive, for it acknowledges — after some hesitation — that girls are not the only losers in this great big marketing machine.

'Some girls like superheroes, some girls like princesses, some boys like superheroes, some boys like princesses. So then why do all the girls have to buy pink stuff and all the boys have to buy different coloured stuff?'

'It's a good question, Riley,' her father answers.

A good question indeed, and a reminder that for every little girl who feels she is being forced to choose between a thousand shades of pink, there's a little boy hemmed in by society's expectations of what a boy should be.

No child — not even those raised as 'gender-free' — is ever entirely immune to the societal value and meaning that is attached to their sex: in the past, studies showed that babies dressed as girls received more smiles than those dressed as boys; that parents gave more positive non-verbal responses to their toddlers when they picked up 'gender appropriate' toys, and more negative responses when they picked up toys associated with the opposite sex; and that parents and schools employed imperceptibly prejudiced practices vis-à-vis boys and girls.

If these studies were to be replicated today, their findings would surely reflect our enlightened consciousness. But they might also find that while girls have become well-practised in articulating their distaste for the narrow stereotypes applied to them, there is conspicuous silence on the concomitant lack of choice for boys. Girls have been revolutionised by the feminist movement; boys have simply been encouraged to make way for girls.

'No-one ever tells him what to be, only what not to be,' says American filmmaker Jay Rosenblatt in his documentary *The Smell of Burning Ants*. 'Boys become boys in large part by not being girls. The ones who don't figure this out are the same ones who get beaten up.'

While girls are increasingly empowered by public discourse in what they do, who they are and how they assert themselves, the role of boys is too often defined in

relation to the needs of girls — and the expectations of what a man should be — rather than their own individuality.

‘Girls we love for what they are; young men for what they promise to be,’ said Goethe.

And one aisle up from where Riley is railing against all that pink, shelves groan beneath hammers, trains and trucks, action men and Lego blocks, superheroes, cricket sets, science kits and waterguns. There are no dolls here, and certainly nothing pink. Boys’ mode of play, it is implied, will be fast, mechanical and aggressive.

These shelves and the weight of societal influence under which they labour remind me of a friend whose husband refused to allow their sons to play with dolls, despite the fact that one of them gravitated towards girls’ toys. His mother would bring him to my house so that he could play surreptitiously with ours; I recall the delight on his face as he pushed around a doll’s pram and lovingly arranged soft toys about my sleeping baby’s face.

But even parents who strive to circumvent gender stereotyping will find themselves thwarted along the way. *Huffington Post* blogger Amelia [wrote recently](#) of her son’s declaration, at the age of seven, that he was gay. She and her husband told him they loved him; a relative told him girls had boyfriends and boys had girlfriends.

‘I don’t think this person was trying to hurt my kid; they were just telling him how their world worked. But even without malicious intent, it’s not okay for anyone to tell my son that what he’s feeling is wrong,’ Amelia wrote.

Just as it wasn’t okay for a family member to refuse to paint my toddler son’s fingernails because ‘boys don’t wear nail polish’. I demurred forcefully, my son begged, pointing to his sister’s bright red fingertips, and the family member finally agreed to dab some polish on each of my son’s thumbnails.

The passage of time has not eased the expectation that he strictly adhere to the masculine stereotype: today, at 17, he wears his hair long and is resolutely oblivious to the glares of respectable types in shopping centres and the people who tell me with veiled contempt that I have not two but three ‘beautiful daughters’.

Subjective socialisation is never a good thing, no matter the gender of the person involved. Women, in particular, would do well to use their growing influence for the betterment of both genders, because female empowerment will lose its value unless they take men on the journey with them.

They can effect such change by assuring the boys in their lives that they have the right to wear nail polish and play with dolls and cry in public if that is their wish, just as girls may dress like superheroes and wear their hair short and dream of one day fighting on the frontlines.

## **The virtues of hoarding**

POETRY

*Various*

### **Clutter**

They throw things out they do — no clutter there  
Rooms bare like haiku

What comes in the front door goes out the back

Virtue for the household's not to hoard

No remnants kept of rack.

Let me have things about me not thrown out!

Reminding things are made by hands, spent from the earth,

You can't take any with you, that is sure,

Nor likely leave behind.

But when they ask, 'Do you have a widget, a grommet, a poem by ...?' yes, I have.

These old signifiers, tools, curiosities, taking up space

Papers in piles, things for re-use, jars, books, ancient dolls.

What do you worship? This clutter? Or a bare shelf?

Oh, what a busy house, clutter of work, clutter of minds.

The world with us, noise, phones, computers, people, cars day and night,  
problems, fights,

And within the cluttered home for the body

A small space for the soul

Nothing

but light and a straw mat.

*Valerie Yule*

### **Recapitulation**

In the end

everything

comes home.

So home

must have  
no walls  
to limit the return,  
nor roof  
to block  
the upward  
gaze of wonder.  
Home must  
be as particular  
as the memory  
of rain  
on a certain  
window  
on a certain  
day  
in childhood.  
Home must  
be as empty  
as a monk  
waiting  
for a god.  
Home must  
be as spacious  
as a desert plane  
full to bursting.  
Home must  
be the thoughtful  
space  
where  
pieces fall

together  
though may not  
ever fit;  
belonging  
without  
contrivance;  
as tender  
as the fall.  
when the universe  
expands  
to its limit.  
In the end  
everything  
comes home.

*Rob Donnelly*

**Something to celebrate!**

We are not what we seem  
We are made of memories  
Not flesh and bone  
We are the special experiences  
Both rewarding and challenging  
We are the quiet moments  
Not just the big occasions  
We are the thoughts  
The conversations, the feelings  
That we celebrate and deny  
No, we are not the surface  
The appearance, the shield  
From the world  
We are not that, never were

Never could be such a static thing  
We are life in action  
Developing, evolving  
In every moment  
Something exceptional  
Something to celebrate!

*B. W. Shearer*

**Zen retreat**

I dive under a still surface,  
Pay homage there,  
Perhaps for days,  
To the door dogs  
Sleep and Boredom.  
Then, maybe,  
A green translucent silence will  
Engulf me,  
Depth shield me,  
In a flow rich and thick with slow time.  
Sounds can enter there.  
The wind is its waves.  
The clash of kitchen dishes,  
A sigh of the person sitting next to me,  
Are coloured fish  
To watch as they pass steadily by.  
And mind knots, nudged,  
Nourished, by birdsong and passing thoughts  
Slowly unravel  
Into free waving seaweed.  
On and on it flows.  
And I know

That even if the sun were to rise from the west,  
This sea is elemental,  
And cannot be disturbed.  
*Nola Firth*