Chapter 10  The Inspiration of Youth and the Pursuit of Virtue

In a Settlement, where the irregular and immoral habits of the Parents are likely to leave their Children in a state peculiarly exposed to suffer from similar vices, you will feel the peculiar necessity that the Government should interfere in behalf of the rising generation and by the exertion of authority as well as of encouragement, endeavour to educate them in religious as well as industrious habits.
— Lord Castlereagh’s instructions to Governor William Bligh, 1805

In a small penal colony, there is room for only one public culture, or public philosophy. The State will decide what it is, as it decides everything else. The locus of conflict about the shape of the State cult will be the ‘education question’, since there the State will need to provide detail about how the youth are to be instructed in the meaning of life.

The question was, what to inspire the youth with? Who was to exhort the young to virtue and what model of virtue were they to supply? In England, the problem was in principle solved by the existence of an Established Church. The Prime Minister appointed the bishops, the churches were hung with regimental flags and the Tory Party at prayer heard the word of God read in familiar accents. In return, God granted his favoured race dominion over palm and pine. As for transmission to the next generation, the whole package could

be safely left in the hands of schools and their chaplains, and the Anglican clergy who made up the staff of both universities. This happy symbiosis did not transplant well to the Australian colonies. Demographics were against it, for a start: too many Irish, Scots, non-conformists, Jews, virtual atheists, embittered radicals, ticket-of-leave men on the make, bush lawyers and general misfits, ‘Germans, Californians, Chartists and Socialists, and all manner of undesirable people’; not enough squires. Currents of thought marginal in England could flourish in the colonies like the rabbit and blackberry, unchecked by their natural predators. The Anglican Church was never fully Established in the Australian colonies, in the legal sense, and did not in practice get the help from the State to which it thought it was entitled. According to Governor Bourke,

> In a New Country to which Persons of all religious persuasions are invited to resort, it will be impossible to establish a dominant and endowed Church without much hostility and great improbability of its becoming permanent. The inclination of these Colonists, which keeps pace with the Spirit of the Age, is decidedly adverse to such an Institution; and I fear the interests of Religion would be prejudiced by its Establishment.

The Anglican bishop, Broughton, expressed the opinion that though the Government might tolerate other churches, it should subsidise only the one it believed true. Instead the Government subsidised the clergy and schools of all denominations, leaving an unmistakable impression that it believed none of them. When Broughton demanded that the Governor do something about his Catholic counterpart Polding’s styling himself ‘Archbishop of Sydney’, his pleas were not entertained. The benevolent Government stood above particular warring creeds but underwrote the lowest common denominator that was considered to be essential to the moral welfare of society. Bourke said further:

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6 Bourke to Stanley, p. 232.
I cannot conclude this subject without expressing a hope, amounting to some degree of confidence, that, in laying the foundations of the Christian Religion in this young and rising Colony by equal encouragement held out to its Professors in their several Churches, the people of these different persuasions will be united together in one bond of peace, and taught to look up to the Government as their common protector and friend, and that thus there will be secured to the State good subjects and to Society good men.\(^7\)

The character of education, and to a large extent of public life in general, fell instead under the control of the men of the Enlightenment. Much to the distress of the clergy, the ideology that established itself most firmly in the colonies was one that many of them had come to regard as their prime enemy. It was not, indeed, the radical, anti-clerical and materialist thought of the French Enlightenment, but the more benign — or insidious — Enlightenment of England, Scotland and the American colonies, of men like Joseph Banks, Benjamin Franklin, Jefferson and Washington. Its program was anti-sectarianism, toleration as far as possible in religious and political controversy, morality and the ‘religion of humanity’ against dogma, priesthood and superstition, classical Rome as an ideal, constitutionalism in government, allied with the development of a virtuous and educated people able to govern themselves and promote Progress.\(^8\)

Several of these Enlightenment themes are clear in W.C. Wentworth’s *Statistical, Historical and Political Description of the Colony of New South Wales*, published in London in 1819 to attract settlers and to promote ‘liberty’ (that is, constitutional development) in the colony.

The prosperity of nations is not so much the result of the fertility of their soil, and the benignity of their climate, as of the wisdom and policy of their institutions. Decadence, poverty, wretchedness, and vice, have been the invariable attendants of bad governments; as prosperity, wealth, happiness, and virtue, have been of good ones. Rome, once the glory of the world; now a bye-word among the nations: once the seat of civilization, of affluence, and of power; now an abode of superstition, poverty, and weakness, is a lasting monument to the truth of this

\(^7\) Bourke to Stanley, pp. 229–30; cf. *Proclamation: For the encouragement of piety and virtue and for the preventing and punishing of vice, profaneness and immorality* (Sydney, 1837).

assertion. Her greatness was founded on freedom, and rose with her consulate ... The empires of Persia and Greece, were successively established by the superior freedom and virtue of their citizens; and it was only when the institutions, which were the source of this freedom and virtue, were no longer reverenced and enforced, that each in its turn became the prey of a freer and more virtuous people.  

The leading figures in colonial education who followed Wentworth, John Woolley and Sir Henry Parkes and their counterparts in other states, disagreed on many issues, but their vision of a secular yet moral education was substantially a unity, and it was the one eventually implemented in the colonies’ system of free, secular and compulsory education. Their success has meant that the core content of Australian education has been much more closely related to philosophy than to religion.

The secularisation of the education system proceeded from the top down. Wentworth’s first victory came with the establishment of the secular and state-supported University of Sydney. Wentworth believed contemporary English universities were Anglican in name but Romish and heretical in reality, a lesson ‘that the cause of education should be no longer controlled by religious bigotry.’ The University was to be ‘a fountain of knowledge at whose springs all might drink, be they Christian, Mahomedan, Jew or Heathen.’ The Churches were allowed to set up residential colleges, but the University itself was secular and its teaching excluded sectarian and dogmatic theology. Polding objected, ‘from the nature of the case, and from what has been the result of similar measures in Europe, that the imagined neutrality in religion of a body of Professors is an impossible thing ... such a body of Teachers must form a sect teaching as effectually religious opinions opposed to those of the vast majority, as if they had an express dogmatic system.’ But the Churches had lost the numbers, and the more they protested, the more fear of sectarianism they aroused.

11 *SMH* 5/10/1849, p. 2.
Melbourne University, following the same path, went so far as to prevent men in holy orders being professors.\textsuperscript{14} Wentworth in Sydney had originally hoped to exclude ordained clergy from both the governance and the teaching of the University, but was happy to choose as Principal John Woolley, who, though ordained, submitted an impressive printed application with 121 testimonials including one from Wordsworth and was regarded as close enough in views to a layman.\textsuperscript{15} Woolley’s opinions turned out to be all that could have been desired, and set the tone for the University’s development. At the inauguration ceremony, he rejoiced that Sydney did not even have London University’s vestigial sectarianism, voluntary examinations on the New Testament, and looked forward to the toleration and mutual respect that would result from the mixing of creeds.\textsuperscript{16} He espoused a non-dogmatic religion of humanity, to be spread not only by the University but throughout the land via Mechanics Institutes and Schools of Arts.\textsuperscript{17} They would become palladia of nationality and give to the colonies what the Greek colonies had but the Australian colonies still lacked: a unifying moral resource, a feeling of fellowship and of assembly for common purposes.

His views had much in common with the later Absolute Idealists, in being religious in general but looking to the supersession of the dogmatic creeds of the present by a higher and more inclusive future synthesis of religions and philosophy.\textsuperscript{18} He resembled the Idealists too

\textsuperscript{14} Proceedings ...of the Inauguration of the University of Melbourne (Melbourne, 1855); Nadel, Australia’s Colonial Culture, pp. 223–5.
\textsuperscript{16} J. Woolley, ‘Oration delivered at the inauguration of Sydney University’, in Lectures Delivered in Australia (Sydney, 1862), pp. 7–8.
in expressing these uplifting sentiments often and at length in elevated prose. ‘The unity of the state is neither police nor force, but the fire which comes down from heaven, kindling every hearth, and burning on the central altar, a visible symbol of inner sacramental brotherhood.’ As a teacher, his influence was limited by the fact that the University in his time attracted very few students, though he was remembered with affection by some. He did however lecture widely to the public, though his effect was not always the intended one. His lecture on ‘The selfish theory of morals’ was attended by an assayer at the Sydney Mint, W.S. Jevons, who came away more impressed with the theory itself than with Woolley’s refutation of it. In due course he made it the foundation of the utility theory that made him the leading economic theorist of his time.

Woolley became a friend of Henry Parkes, then beginning to make a name for himself, and together they worked on extending secular education into schools. They were leading figures in the next success, the founding of Sydney’s most prestigious school, Sydney Grammar. As with the University, it was set up on strictly unsectarian and classical lines combined with a high sense of moral purpose. The government endowed it and Woolley effectively determined the syllabus.

Then Parkes took up the question of the entire education system. He was for secularised and anti-sectarian, but moral, education, for adults as well as children. The religious denominations, he held,
rightly teach their own opinions, but morality as well as intellectual knowledge are common and therefore the concern of the state.\textsuperscript{25} Morality must be explicitly taught:

The quantity of arithmetic or geometry acquired in a school, or the quantity of language or other branches of study, is far from being the primary consideration. These things should all be so used as to exercise and discipline both the moral and intellectual powers, and to brace up the whole mind for the duties of self-government, the pursuit of noble thoughts, and the maintenance of unflinching virtues. To deem the man well educated who wants these acquirements is to misunderstand his nature and destinies.\textsuperscript{26}

Parkes could let fly with Enlightenment anti-clerical rhetoric with the best of them:

a struggle between Light and Darkness — between the expansion of that glorious intellect which God has given us, and its extinction — between that grovelling superstition which seeks to fetter and degrade and that pure religion which tends to liberate and exalt. Rome has furbished up her rusty arms ... they have sought to hide the real motive by which they are actuated. That motive is not to insure the spread of morality and extend the influence of religion, but to prevent the multitude from becoming enlightened ... They are aware that the superstitious fears which give them so mighty an influence over the common people must be dispelled by a sound and rational education. They have therefore systematically opposed every effort which has been made to render such education universal.\textsuperscript{27}

Those were views from his early years, but they had changed little by the time of his final victory, when he claimed that Catholic priests were opposed to his bill ‘because enlightenment — the rearing of the children in the free exercise of their faculties — is death to their calling. The peculiar genius of the Roman Catholic Church is to thrive

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upon the enslavement of the human intellect.' These remarks make clear a further reason why the Enlightened took so much interest in the ‘education question’. Education just is Enlightenment — or at least it would be, if only control of it could be wrested from the forces of darkness and superstition.

The same views were held by William Wilkins, the energetic public servant in charge of the syllabus and its implementation. He too promoted a generalised religiosity that formed the common core of Christianity as the appropriate foundation for moral education in schools. The differences between sects, he said, are matters for advanced study only, like the conic sections in mathematics, and irrelevant to the basics suitable for children. ‘We shall plainly discern the identity of those parts of religion which we have already shown to be the proper and most valuable constituents of the education of children, with those now indicated as the common ground of Christianity.’

The secular victory had come even earlier in Victoria, where the secularists were led by George Higinbotham. The formation of the Australian Church, the embodiment of Absolute Idealism noted in chapter 6, was occasioned by a speech by Higinbotham which urged the laity to revolt against the denominational in-fighting and dogmatic ignorance of their clergy. During the education debate, he too

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had promoted ‘common Christianity’ as a sufficient basis for school education.\textsuperscript{32}

The struggle for ‘free, secular and compulsory’ education and the withdrawal of State aid to Church schools was won in Victoria in 1872, New South Wales in 1880 and in all the colonies by 1895. It defined the shape of Australian education thereafter, dividing Australian youth into three categories: those in private schools, usually run by a Protestant Church, those in Catholic schools, and the majority in the secular State school system, being trained as the men of the Enlightenment wished. The motives behind the struggle included a simple love of education, since the weakness of the earlier Church schools was that their fragmentation prevented them covering the ground in thinly populated regions; only the State could provide universal education. Nevertheless, the widespread suspicion that the movement was an anti-sectarian, and especially anti-Catholic, plot\textsuperscript{33} is lent support not only by the expressed views of the leaders like Parkes, but by the fact that complete withdrawal of State aid is not called for by the logic of State education. It did not occur in Britain.

Secular education has been dominant for so long that it is hardly possible any longer to see it as anything but a natural culmination of progressive historical forces assisted by all men of goodwill. To gain a focus on its particular philosophical content, it is, as always, helpful to look at events from the point of view of the opposition.

The Catholic Archbishops Polding and Vaughan, being philosophers themselves, were keenly aware that their opponents were no longer so much rival Christian sects as those who took a wider philosophical view that hoped to transcend sectarian quarrels. They saw also that the crucial arena of the conflict was education, in that secular education inevitably reinforced eclectic opinions. Polding’s pastoral letter of 1859 identified the tendencies that would be reinforced by a secular education system:

One is the presumptuous, but speciously religious, attempt to select certain virtues as the kernel of Christianity: to wit, kindliness, delicacy, charity, unselfishness, &c., ... Many have feared that Free Masonry is partly an attempt to substitute a scheme of benevolence for the Gospel of Christ ... The second characteristic of our day is a quiet, civil infidelity. The Church, and her message, the Gospel, are not now openly blasphemed by those who are the most dangerous infidels. They occupy themselves with mental and physical science, they avoid controversy, they


\textsuperscript{33} G.V. Portus, Free, Compulsory and Secular (London, 1937), pp. 23–6; Gregory, Church and State, p. 140.
use even Christian phrases, meaning by them certain amiable and
philosophical social virtues.”

Vaughan thought Polding had been altogether too accommodating
and that it was time to raise the temperature of the fight. The high
point of the struggle came with Vaughan’s First Pastoral on educa-
tion, attacking Parkes’ plan for free and secular education. Vaughan’s
position was that secular education is impossible. After some remarks
on how the ‘hideous blots that disfigure the highest morality of
Rome and Athens’ — here he responds to the uncritical classicism of
the Enlightened — showed the inability of philosophy by itself to
underpin civilisation, he concluded that ‘it is self-evident that educa-
tion without Christianity is impossible: you may call it instruction,
filling the mind with a certain quantity of secular knowledge, but you
cannot dignify it with the name Education’. Then, more controver-
sially, he attacked the secular schools actually in existence: ‘a system
of practical paganism, which leads to corruption of morals and loss of
faith, to national effeminacy and to national dishonour’ and — in a
phrase that caused particular offence — ‘seedplots of future immor-
ality, infidelity and lawlessness, being calculated to debase the standard
of human excellence, and to corrupt the political, social and individ-
ual life of future citizens.”

These allegations, as was pointed out at the time, implied that the
State schools that had already existed for several decades ought to
have been turning out youth of exceptional levels of depravity, a pre-
diction not borne out by observation. The political result was that
State aid was withdrawn from denominational schools for the next
eighty years, and Catholic people had to finance their own system in

34 J.B. Polding, Pastoral Letter …on the subject of Public Education (Sydney,
in Australia, 1788–1970 (Melbourne, 1965), ch. 7; earlier, see Nadel,
Australia’s Colonial Culture, p. 208.
35 Archbishop and Bishops of N.S.W. Pastoral, Catholic Education
(Sydney, 1879), repr. in O’Farrell, Documents, vol. 1 pp. 386–99, at pp. 388, 390, 393;
and also partly in C.M.H. Clark, Select Documents in Australian History, 1851–
1900 (Sydney, 1955), pp. 720–4; see M. Adams, ‘Archbishop Vaughan and
35; similar Catholic views in Victoria in Gregory, Church and State, p. 177
and J. O’Malley SJ, Secular Education and Christian Civilisation (Melbourne,
1875), part III; earlier similar Protestant views in Gascoigne, The
Enlightenment, p. 110; whether secular education has made Australian
historians blind to philosophical and religious questions discussed in P.
addition to, through taxation, the State’s. Nevertheless, at a conceptual level, the Archbishop had a point. What system of ideas were the State schools going to use to inspire the youth to virtue, or even inform them as to what was virtuous and what not? There was no thought at that time of abdicating responsibility, by simply confining schooling to instruction in matters of fact.


It is worth looking briefly at each of these, since their total effect was to inculcate a thoughtworld now lost, one whose unity was barely acknowledged at the time but which has played a crucial role in making Australia what it is.

The New South Wales Act, following the Victorian, laid down ‘the words “secular instruction” shall be held to include general religious instruction as distinguished from dogmatical and polemical theology.’ On the one hand, ‘No sectarian or denominational publications of any kind shall be used in school, nor shall any denominational or sectarian doctrines be inculcated.’ On the other hand, ‘It shall be the duty of all teachers to impress on the minds of their pupils the principles of morality, truth, justice and patriotism; to teach them to avoid idleness, profanity and falsehood; to instruct them in the principles of a free Government; and to train them up to a true comprehension of the rights, duties and dignity of citizenship.’ Though there were continuing complaints that there was very little moral instruction in fact, moral and basic scriptural lessons were instituted by

36 Public Instruction Act, 1880, in Public Statutes of New South Wales, 43 Vic. no. 12–51 Vic. no. 15 (Sydney, 1888), p. 15.
38 G. Sutherland, Moral Training in Our Public Schools (Sydney, 1893); similar much later in J.M. Wallis, Chaos in the Classroom: Free, Compulsory and Secular Education in Australia from the 1870’s to the 1980’s (Bullsbrook, WA, 1984), ch. 1.
Wilkins and his colleagues in other states to put these guidelines into effect.39

The major reforms in New South Wales education of 1904, instigated by Professor Francis Anderson and carried through by the Director of Education, Peter Board, provided for more emphasis on the freedom, initiative and responsibility of both pupils and teachers. Here Absolute Idealists gave effect to their worship of freedom. This meant, if anything, even more emphasis on moral training on schools. The first words of Board’s preface to the new syllabus were:

The school aims at giving to its pupils the moral and physical training and the mental equipment by which they may qualify themselves to meet the demands of adult life with respect to themselves, the family, society and the State. By its influence upon character it should cultivate habits of thought and action that will contribute to successful work and to upright conduct.40

That was not window-dressing. It was implemented by a subject called ‘Civics and morals’ in the higher primary school years, which incorporated Authorised Scripture lessons and dealt with such subjects as moral courage, pride in thorough work, temperance, the evils of gambling, patriotism, courtesy, kindness to animals and gratitude to parents and teachers. The teacher was advised to use moral examples rather than abstract ethical principles. ‘The moral influence of the teacher should be felt in a special manner in the freedom of the playground.’41

And the virtues the schools hoped to inculcate were soon seen in behaviour. In the decades up to 1940, there were large falls in the rates of murder and suicide; drunkenness was contained; the age of marriage rose and births fell to levels not seen till decades after the Pill. The story of the spread of restraint in the first half of the twentieth century, when great sections of society pulled themselves out of the cycle of poverty, violence and alcohol addiction through intense

effort devoted to temperance, thrift, self-control and hard work, has yet to be told.  

SPORT was found to have remarkable advantages in supplementing and reinforcing in practice the lessons of the classroom. The immediate contact between thought and action, and the interplay of personal decision with the structure of the rules of playing and scoring, meant that the lessons of sport were not lost in abstract theorising. The nature of sport, especially team sport, meant that the classical virtues of character were the ones naturally instilled: ‘physical and moral courage, loyalty and co-operation, the capacity to act fairly and take defeat well, the ability to both command and obey.’ That summary is from a modern author, but it agrees with what was said by admirers at the time:

The recreative effect of games is always of great importance, as through them so much can be done to make the lives of children brighter, more joyful and less monotonous. The educational effect on the mind and character is equally valuable. Children can learn more easily perhaps in this way than in any other the value of co-operation with others, and the need to sacrifice when necessary personal desires and wishes for the common good. The faculty of initiation is at the same time developed, and the habit of obedience is encouraged.

Sport had the additional educational advantage of permitting the great mass of students a share in the excellence and achievement they were manifestly failing to achieve in mathematics and English.

These purposes of sport were associated with Victorian ‘muscular Christianity’ derived from the tradition of the English ‘public’ schools — an ideal more muscular than Christian, given the little attention paid in the Bible to Jesus’ sporting activities.

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44 ‘Organised games for junior cadets (from notes supplied by the Department of Defence)’, Public Instruction Gazette (N.S.W.) 5 (1911): pp. 334–6.
‘Sport had been left out in the genius of Germany, but how magnificently the Australian boys had played up to it’, said the Lieutenant-Governor of New South Wales, Sir William Cullen, at Shore school’s speech day in 1917. As Chancellor of Sydney University and president of the Boy Scouts’ Association, Sir William was on hand to celebrate another way of putting youth on the path to virtue, when the University awarded Baden-Powell an honorary doctorate of laws in 1931 for his work in founding the Boy Scouts. After a speech by the Dean of Law, Professor Peden, praising his service to the Empire, he was presented to the Chancellor. His speech in reply modestly disclaimed any knowledge of law, but surmised that his honour might have something to do with the Scout Law which he had laid down for his organisation. ‘The law is that the Scout must not be a fool ... The law of “do” means rendering service and all our law leads up to rendering service to the community and the country.’

What the Scout Law said was more detailed:

1. A Scout’s honour is to be trusted.
2. A Scout is loyal to the Queen, his country, his Scouters, his parents, his employers, and to those under him.
3. A Scout’s duty is to be useful and to help others.
4. A Scout is a friend to all, and a brother to every other Scout, no matter to what country, class, or creed, the other may belong.
5. A Scout is courteous.
6. A Scout is a friend to animals.
7. A Scout obeys orders of his parents, Patrol Leader, or Scoutmaster, without question.
8. A Scout smiles and whistles under all difficulties.
9. A Scout is thrifty.
10. A Scout is clean in thought, word and deed.


The same law was prescribed by the Guides for girls, in addition to which the primary manual of girl guiding, *How Girls Can Help Build Up the Empire*, has a chapter on morals headed ‘When in Doubt — Don’t’. Baden-Powell was emphatic that the technical aspects of Scouting — the camping, jamborees and good turns — were simply means to the end of forming character. The purpose of the exercise was to ‘seize the boy’s character in the red-hot stage of enthusiasm, and to weld it into the right shape and to encourage and develop its individuality, so that the boy may educate himself to become a good man and a valuable citizen for his country.’ It is obvious from the Scout Law that the ideal of character in question is a precisely defined one, combining military virtues like loyalty, honour and obedience with what could be considered techniques for surviving a Depression: thrift, combined with self-reliance and aiding others, and forced cheerfulness as a backup.

The details of the Scout Law contain some dubious features. Obedience ‘without question’ is obviously one, and may account for the brittleness of such a simplistic ideology when confronted by the Andersonian suggestion that questioning is of itself a good thing. But perhaps the cheerful whistling is even more objectionable. In case anyone had not got this message, it was included in the oath of loyalty taken weekly in public schools at various periods:

I love God and My Country
I salute the flag
I honour the King
and cheerfully obey
parents, teachers and the law.

The Anzacs were added to the list of authorities: ‘cheerfulness, courage and originality ... in these qualities lie the reason for the appreciative, if impracticable, suggestion that the magpie’s borrowed name should be altered to that of “Anzac-bird”’. But ‘Christian

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cheerfulness, Church of England fashion’, as Manning Clark called it, or the prohibition on ‘whingeing’, is a deliberate suppression of the tragic in life. It is going to lead to the return of the repressed.

There are indeed larger issues as to whether an ideal like the Scout Law that emphasises the outward-facing human virtues has been in part responsible for the lack of an internal mental and spiritual life that a number of observers have alleged to be typical of Australians: ‘they’re awfully nice, but they’ve got no inside to them’ (D.H. Lawrence); ‘hard-eyed, kindly, with nothing inside them’ (McAuley); ‘thou shalt not commit any form of introspection whatever’ (Conway). If so, the ideal would also have to bear some responsibility for the emotional distance of Australian fathers, widely lamented in recent times. Mass psychoanalysis is a discipline with overwhelming evidentiary difficulties, but it seems as least clear that the ideal in question has a strong tendency towards promoting a lack of inwardness.

The reasons for choosing this particular ideal do not appear, but Scouting does not wholly lack an explicit philosophical basis. The love of the outdoors was associated for Baden-Powell with a touch of pantheism, ‘the elemental foundation of all religion’, and Scouting ideology promoted a kind of lowest common denominator of faiths, making it acceptable to all religions that did not insist too strongly on dogma. The Australian Scout Handbook had this advice on philosophy:

There are many questions that arise out of the normal and natural experiences of life — plain human questions. The answers are always of faith. Nobody knows what the correct answers really are. They can only be given on the basis of a man’s belief — answers of faith. To say, ‘I believe there is no meaning in life’ is a belief, as surely as the one which says, ‘I believe in God who made me and loves me.’ But you can never find proof of either statement ... Scouting embraces all faiths. Every religious faith has its own particular discipline. Know

54 Manning Clark, Quest for Grace, p. 143.
what it is and practise it well, for beneath the outward sign of religion can be a great depth of meaning.”

The Scouts came to combine the ideals of bushman, Empire, anti-Communism, mateship and Nature. ‘They learn to play the game in Nature’s school because they cannot help it.’

Just how much some admirers hoped for from the Scouts appears in an alarming passage written by C.E.W. Bean in 1943 — a rather late date, considering its content:

The Boy Scout and Girl Guide movements give in many ways ideal character training, with eyes firmly on true values; and many educationists, including the Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University, believe that we should take a leaf out of the Nazi educational system by adopting the admirable plan of labour camps. These are compulsory for young Germans but their aims are not unlike those of the National Fitness camps established in Australia by Mr Gordon Young and other leaders on the excellent model of those in the United States and Canada. The labour camps, of course, go far beyond these. All classes go into them together. The false values of snobbery are broken down. The six months spent in this way are a source of health and happiness, and even the wealthiest citizen thus experiences, for part of his life, that closeness to nature without which civilized people are apt to become soft and unrealistic, and liable to fall easy prey to the more backward nations whose hard struggle with nature furnishes the material and motive for aggressive soldiery.

The National Fitness movement,

school cadets,

Outward Bound

and the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme were among the imported plans for toughening and uplifting the youth. There were occ-

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61 C.E.W. Bean, War Aims of a Plain Australian (Sydney, 1943), p. 109; Bean’s reference is to J.D.G. Medley, Education for Democracy (Melbourne, 1943), p. 19.


asional complaints from Labor parliamentarians that young people were quite capable of finding ways of occupying themselves, but the time for such ideas was not ripe.

Australia’s special contribution was the Surf Lifesaving Movement, headed for many years by Sir Adrian Curlewis, the man whose inquiry into youth set off the Gough–Kinsella affair described in chapter 5. It is true that the movement had something to do with saving lives in the surf, but that does not explain why there was so much attention paid to marching up and down beaches in lines. A children’s novel by Curlewis’ sister revels in the spectacle: ‘The cobalt sea and tan-gold sand made a brilliant background as the teams came swinging along the beach rank on rank of lithe, well-knit, brown-skinned men marching in perfect rhythm. Each team was preceded by its banner ...’ The comparison with the Hitler Youth was more obvious.

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64 Irving, Sherington & Maunders, Youth in Australia, p. 31.
to outsiders than locals; a German sea-captain, speaking to an English visitor to Sydney in the 1930s, noted the parallel as well as some contrasts: ‘Their festivals and drills are a never-to-be-forgotten spectacle. These men are volunteers; here is true discipline with no comic-opera salutes or Strength through Joy uplift. This is life-saving.’ The life of the club-house was also part of what the movement was for. Like the government schools, surf club-houses were explicitly non-sectarian, and no political or religious discussion was allowed.

Although Baden-Powell had some success in establishing scouting in European countries, it remained primarily associated with the British Empire. The Empire, as we saw in chapter 6, was pre-eminent as a means to inspire both youth and adults.

The British Empire was often compared to the Roman. The comparison was generally not carried too far, lest scrutiny be invited to the best-known phase of the latter, its Fall. This was only mentioned by those who thought they had a solution for any similar problems that might arise for the British Empire. The first edition of Baden-Powell’s manual for scouts ordered, ‘don’t be disgraced like the young Romans who lost the Empire of their forefathers by being wishy-washy slackers without any go or patriotism in them. Play-up! Each man in his place, and play the game!’

Normally, however, the classical studies that played a central role in education, especially the education of high achievers, concentrated on an earlier period of Rome when admiration for it could be unqualified.

The point of studying the classics was explained in a speech at the inauguration of Sydney University by Sir Charles Nicholson, who had great influence in choosing both the staff and the architecture of the University:

No better discipline for the intellect of the young can be found than that which is afforded by a careful and thorough initiation into the forms of the Greek and Latin languages. Such a process involves with the learner a practical acquaintance with those fundamental principles of logic of which the grammar of every language is more or less an exemplification. To regard a knowledge of the ancient languages as a mere futile exercise of


memory is to betray an ignorance or a perverseness which it is scarcely necessary to attempt either to enlighten or combat. From whence can the poet, the orator, the statesman draw such pure draughts of inspiration as from the immortal literature of Greece and Rome? As the majesty, the unequaled grace, and unapproachable beauty of the Parthenon have been the envy and admiration of all ages, so will the works of Homer and Aeschylus, of Demosthenes and Plato, be regarded as the archetypes of all that is sublime in poetry, eloquent in oratory, and profound and original in philosophy.¹⁰

As Nicholson says, the classical texts perform their ennobling task in two ways, through their form and through their content. Logical precision arises from studying the languages themselves, while contact with the sublime thoughts of the classical authors comes from reading their works. After Woolley perished in a shipwreck in 1866 along with the manuscript of his book on logic, the next intellectual leader of the University was Charles Badham, Professor of Classics and Logic and editor of a number of Plato’s dialogues. According to Badham, university men mentally trained in the highest discipline, namely the emendation of classical texts, would form a core of society, ‘full of reverence, refinement and clear-headedness ... by the very conditions of this discipline temperate in opinion, temperate in measures, temperate in demeanour.’ But dry training in logic must be balanced by contact with Absolute Beauty, which alone prevents philosophy becoming ‘barren and self-bewildering logic’, and turns its attention to ‘moral and practical enquiries’.⁷⁰ Some students at least, such as Edmund Barton, responded enthusiastically.⁷¹

The benefits of the classics as a training for the mind, toughening it as sport does the body, were continually pointed to by defenders of


⁷¹ J. Reynolds, Edmund Barton (Sydney, 1948), pp. 8–9.
compulsory Latin in schools and universities. Sir Mungo MacCallum, Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor of Sydney University, complained that other subjects in Arts are ‘very vague, and, especially in the case of the pass student, offer an opportunity to the amateur and the dabbler. It is hard to prevent Literature from fostering in many persons an inclination to vapoury sentiment and fine phrasing; for not a few, History merely means the acceptance of unverified statements; and Philosophy often leads to crude viewiness. The study of the Classics is a useful corrective. In it there must be honest work, independent thought and no make-believe.’ Without compulsory Latin, a BA could be made up of English, French, History and a little Botany, ‘the sort of subjects that formed the staple for girls’ schools in the Early Victorian period before the movement for the higher education of women began. Under these conditions it may be suggested that the style should be altered to B.L.A., Bachelor of Ladylike Accomplishments.’

The training of the classics in exactitude of thought was a theme of Sir Owen Dixon, often thought to be Australia’s most eminent Chief Justice. ‘Whatever else may be the result of a classical training it does implant what is a very useful thing in the law — a fear of error’. He notes a slip by his predecessor, Sir Samuel Griffith, in writing ‘fons proxima non remota spectatur’: ‘In the Privy Council, on reading this, one of their Lordships asked Sir Stanley Buckmaster how it happened that “fons” had lost its gender in its journey to the Antipodes.’ The ponderous humour is built on a consensus about a scale of


values which places exactitude higher than it would be in arrangements of the virtues that might be preferred by religion or philosophy. A concern for applying the rules exactly may be at the expense of inquiry as to whether those rules are the best ones to apply. Some wrote forceful letters to the newspapers about split infinitives. We will see in chapter 15 where Dixon was led on questions of the relation of law to ethics.

A role of the classics arising from their content, possibly their most important role of all, lay in providing models of civic virtue. As often observed, Christianity is not an entirely suitable choice as a State religion. Gibbon may have been exaggerating in claiming that the Fall of the Roman Empire was due to the withdrawal into monasteries of the men who should have been saving it; still, the injunction of Jesus to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s is said without enthusiasm, while the Christian suspicion of ‘the world’ has the potential to create difficulties in reconciling Christian principles with a commitment to public life. By contrast, the classical tradition sees civic service as the highest form of life. In addition, it has a positively different scale of virtues from Christianity’s and to some extent also from liberal democracy’s. The pagan ideal is more worldly than both, not so much in concentrating on wealth and status, but in seeing success as realised in public action, in participation in the civic world, rather than private intention. Aristotle’s ‘great-souled’ man works hard and honestly for his position of respect in society, and is not unduly humble about it nor inclined to prefer a transcendent world of values in comparison to which the standards of this world are as nothing. He suspects there is truth in the Roman proverb that is the motto of Fort Street High School, *Faber est suae quisque fortunae* (‘each the builder of his own fortune’). He deserves his knighthood for ‘services to the community’.

Another point of view on the difference is that the religious tradition exalts the ‘divine’ or ‘theological’ virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity (or Love) at the expense of the four ‘moral’ or human vir-

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10. Inspiration of Youth and Pursuit of Virtue

...while the classical tradition does not. This difference is clearly marked at the institutional level. The churches have a near-monopoly on Faith and Hope — though the Communist Party was a challenger in its day — and most of the larger charities are affiliated with the churches. But the law and the rest of the justice system is secular, as are the official representatives of Courage, the armed services. The Temperance Societies and later anti-drug campaigns had some connections with the churches, but were not run by them. And the Australian Mutual Provident (that is, Prudent) Society and other insurance companies, though full of evangelical fervour in their earlier years ('A poor law degrades the character of a man, but Life Assurance or a Deferred Annuity, exalts and improves it'), became soon enough temples of Mammon.

While the classical and religious streams were generally thought to be compatible, and even at a stretch mutually reinforcing, in that many claimed to be inspired by both simultaneously, the possibilities for conflict are exhibited in Keith Campbell’s naming of the ‘Christian vices’, credulity, self-abasement and self-denial. These create, he says, a passive personality incompatible with the courageous determination to take responsibility for our own lives.

The sacred texts of the classical ideal are the works of Livy and Cicero. Livy treats the history of the rise of Rome as a source of moral examples, ‘fine things to take as models, base things, rotten through and through, to avoid.’ His ideal, much imitated by Enlightenment political figures like George Washington, is explained by Harry Evans, clerk of the Australian Senate: ‘A free country can flourish and remain free only through a virtuous citizenry, by its people exhibiting those qualities which later came to be called republican virtue. The principal ingredients of this virtue are patriotism, devotion to duty, a willingness to rule and be ruled in turn, courage,

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resolution, fortitude, an incorruptible personal morality, a sense of honour and a contempt for personal gain. The meaning of Livy is perhaps best caught by the often-repeated story of Cincinnatus, which was widely used even in the ‘moral stories’ in Australian primary schools, alongside those of British heroes. At a time of crisis in the republic, the envoys of the Senate find Cincinnatus at his plough, and appoint him dictator with absolute power. Having won the necessary military victory and saved the State, he resigns his office and returns to tilling his fields.

A sound training in Livy and Cicero will produce men devoted to the public good, incorruptible and full of gravitas, able to chair commissions of inquiry into more or less anything. Men of this stamp have been leaders of the professions — in law, medicine, engineering — headmasters and generals. Sir Victor Windeyer, Sir Adrian Curlewis, Sir Hermann Black are prototypes. There have been whole dynasties, such as Sir Terence Murray of Yarralumla and his sons Sir Hubert, long lieutenant-governor of Papua, and Sir Gilbert, classical scholar and leading figure in the League of Nations Movement. Politics has been less kind to the type, as the sordid bearpit of democracy is not an ideal milieu for the practice of temperance and honesty, but even there men like Barton, Latham, Casey and Hasluck have approximated the classical ideal. Certain later figures in politics have been touched by a version of the Roman spirit, but perhaps more that of the Imperial ‘either Caesar or nothing’ than the self-controlled virtues of the early republic.

If a single example of the type were to be taken, the best choice might be Sir John Peden, Challis Professor of Law at Sydney University from 1910 to 1942. Except for being an academic, Peden was a quintessential public figure. He was President of the NSW Legislative Council and led that body in the fight against Lang’s attempts to flood it with his appointees. Following Lang’s dismissal, he reformed the Council’s constitution to make it impossible for a Labor government

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to gain control of it without being in office for many years. His interests centred on constitutional law, with a special interest in the Royal Prerogative; Evatt became ‘Doc’ Evatt by impressing Peden with a thesis on that topic.\footnote{L. Foster, \textit{High Hopes} (Melbourne, 1986), p. 108.} It was rumoured that he had advised the governor Sir Philip Game to dismiss Lang; the truth seems to be uncertain, but the story was taken seriously by students like Peden’s star pupil and protege, John Kerr.\footnote{J. Kerr, \textit{Matters for Judgement} (Melbourne, 1978), p. 44; R. Hall, \textit{The Real John Kerr} (Sydney, 1978), pp. 20–3.} He took on the leftist ratbagtery of his fellow Challis Professor, Anderson, by being involved in the moves to secure a second chair of philosophy to ‘balance’ Anderson. He was the subject of an article ‘A Roman character’ by his nephew, another figure of the same order, (Sir) Norman Cowper, which expressed unusually clearly what was admirable about such men. After recalling the severity of his Calvinist forebears and describing Peden’s education at Sydney Grammar and Sydney University (BA with first-class honours in Latin and Philosophy, University Medal in Law), Cowper contrasted the more philosophical bent of Melbourne Law School with Sydney Law School under Peden: ‘He was not interested in clever theorising. He was concerned, not with the law as it ought to be or might be, but with the law as it was.’ Though often ferocious with students, ‘the simple uprightness of his own character led him to accept without question the reasons proffered for absence from lectures, and some students found this so embarrassing that they resolved that the next time they would tell the truth.’ Cowper concluded:

He never failed anyone who came to him for help. He was punctilious and courteous in the carrying out of his duties, however unimportant. All his successes and dignities had left him unassuming and unaffected.

While waiting for the ambulance to take him to the hospital after the painful accident which caused his death, he insisted on dictating several letters to his son-in-law. He was a man who derived deep satisfaction from the performance of his duty. At the end he could have had few regrets. He was a citizen of whom any State might be proud.\footnote{N. Cowper, ‘A Roman character’, \textit{Australian Quarterly} 18 (3) (Sept 1946): pp. 64–8; cf. N. Cowper, ‘Sir Galahad, the dauntless imp, and others’, \textit{Australian Quarterly} 32 (2) (June 1951): pp. 35–56; confirmed by Bavin and Evatt in \textit{Jubilee Book of the Law School of the University of Sydney}, ed. T. Bavin (Sydney, 1940), pp. 29–37; also \textit{ADB} vol. 11 pp. 190–2.}

If success is measured by passing on the torch to the next generation, Peden also rates highly. Norman Cowper, a lieutenant-colonel in the War, became one of Sydney’s leading solicitors, making Allens
the pre-eminent firm in the city, and was President of the Law Society of NSW. He chose Barwick as the barrister to defend the banks against Chifley’s nationalisation proposals. He was Chairman of Angus and Robertson and other companies, President of the Australian Club and of the Australian Institute of Political Science. Long chairman of trustees of Sydney Grammar, he was recalled from his plough to force the resignation of a headmaster who was creating disharmony in the School.

This classical scene was re-enacted by Sir John Kerr a few years later, at Yarralumla.

It is not an accident that what Cincinnatus was doing when the envoys of the Senate came upon him was ploughing. This symbolises a last aspect of the classical legacy, which formed the philosophical background to the ‘land question’ that agitated the colonies in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and more widely, to the place of rural life in the Australian character. James Matra’s proposal of 1783 had envisaged New South Wales as a place where convicts would settle on land and be reformed as useful and moral members of society, and Governor Phillip’s instructions on the founding of the colony had urged him to settle on farms both convicts of ‘good conduct and a disposition to industry’, and soldiers. The model stands in contrast to the degeneracy of urban slums from which many convicts came, but also to the ideal of the noble savage, which appealed to some philosophers in Europe but not locally. Watkin Tench, after an account of the Australian Aborigines’ mistreatment of their women, concluded:

A thousand times, in like manner, have I wished, that those European philosophers, whose closet speculations exalt a state of nature above a state of civilization, could survey the phantom, which their heated imaginations have raised: possibly they might then learn, that a state of nature is, of all others, least adapted to promote the happiness of a being, capable of sublime research, and unending ratiocination: that a savage roaming for prey amidst his native deserts, is a creature deformed by all

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those passions, which afflict and degrade our nature, unsoftened by the influence of religion, philosophy and legal restriction."

In New South Wales, there was to be less passion and more work. ‘The soil is capital and the climate delightful’, said one of the Scottish political prisoners transported in the 1790s, ‘it will soon be the region of plenty, and wants only virtue and liberty to be another America.’ Officialdom was not so sure about liberty, but expressed its commitment to virtue and work in the State’s first motto. On 21 September 1791, the colony was delighted by the arrival of His Majesty’s Ship Gorgon, bearing a quantity of food, fruit trees and cows, and a public seal, extremely well executed in silver. It bore ‘a representation of convicts landing in Botany Bay, received by Industry, who, surrounded by her attributes, a bale of merchandize, a beehive, a pick-axe, and a shovel, is releasing them from their fetters, and pointing to oxen ploughing, and a town rising on the summit of a hill ... and for a motto, “Sic fortis Etruria crevit”.’ The motto, meaning ‘Thus Etruria grew strong’, was replaced as that of the State but retained by the Bank of New South Wales. As used by the bank, the ‘thus’ was unexplained because the words appeared alone, and one was no doubt supposed to vaguely associate ancient virtue with the solidity of bank architecture. It is of value to resuscitate the original context, which fills out the suggestions on the seal, since it describes a model of life that has had an enduring success in Australia. The quotation is from the description of the Golden Age in the second book of Virgil’s Georgics. The farmer is not troubled by the cares of office, the delusions of wealth or the restlessness of travel. In harmony with the rustic gods, he ploughs the earth from year to year, happy to maintain his few acres and herds, and his cottage-home. He encourages his herdsman in the manly country sports, javelin-throwing and wrestling.

Such was the life the Sabines lived of old:
Such Romulus and Remus: even so

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Etruria grew to strength, and Rome surpassed
All other states in glory ...

The model of virtue that Virgil outlines is essentially rural and
strictly democratic. It is the ideal that came to be celebrated as the
‘Australian bushman’.

The importation of Virgil’s model was taken in hand by Michael
Massey Robinson, Macquarie’s secretary and Poet Laureate. Repre-
senting himself as Virgil to Macquarie’s Augustus, he paints a picture
of sturdy swains filling the Australian landscape with hamlets and
abundant harvests. The verse is execrable. The theme is developed
by W.C. Wentworth in his much better poem, Australasia, of 1823.
By discovering the inland grasslands after his crossing of the Blue
Mountains, he could be said to have acquired a certain right to ar-
ticulate a vision of what ought to go there. After an account of Aus-
tralia’s initially savage state, its discovery, and the fine buildings and
industrious comings and goings of Sydney Town, the scene moves
west, and after a few lines that quickly pass over the barrenness of the
Blue Mountains, the new settlements of the West are described. The
‘fresh-cultured glade’ is said to be already spread with ripening har-
vests and herds in thousands:

\text{pp. 43–4; also in F.J.H. Letters, Virgil (Westmead, [1943(?); London, 1946),}
\text{pp. 83–4; detailed analysis of the passage in J.R.C. Martyn, ‘Vergilius
\text{satiricus’, in Cicero and Virgil, ed. J.R.C. Martyn (Amsterdam, 1972), pp.}
\text{169–91; quoted with a favourable allusion to Mussolini by F.A. Todd in
\text{Celebration of the Two-Thousandth Anniversary of Virgil’s Birth Held by the}
\text{University of Sydney (Sydney, 1930), p. 17; similar in Horace Odes III.xvi (in}
\text{P.E. Smythe, A Literal and Explanatory Translation of Horace Odes III (Sydney,}
\text{n.d.)); cf F. Muecke, ‘Philosophy at the Sabine farm’, AUMLA 81 (1994):}
\text{pp. 81–92; a similar passage in Horace Epodes ii.1 imitated in W. Woolls, ‘The
country’, in My Country: Australian Poetry and Short Stories, ed. L.
Kramer (Sydney, 1985), pp. 23–5; Woolls on the Georgics and Australia in
Miscellanea (1838), excerpt in Documents on Art and Taste in Australia: The
Colonial Period, ed. B. Smith (Melbourne, 1975), p. 52; Sir Thomas Mitchell
on Virgil in Stapylton with Major Mitchell’s Australia Felix Expedition, ed.
Expedition into the Interior of Tropical Australia (London, 1848), p. 295; a more
critical view in C. Brennan, prose, pp. 429–31; also P. McGushin, ‘Virgil and
\text{The Odes of Michael Massey Robinson, ed. G. Mackaness (Sydney, 1946,}
\text{repr. Dubbo, 1976), pp. 35, 58, 64–5, 69, 78; discussion in R. Dixon, The
Course of Empire: Neo-Classical Culture in New South Wales 1788–1860}
\text{(Melbourne, 1986), ch. 2; an earlier parallel in ‘The cottage’, Sydney Gazette}
\text{26/5/1805, p. 3.} \]
Soon, Australasia, may thy inmost plains,
A new Arcadia, teem with simple swains.
Soon a Lycoris' scorn again inspire
A Gallus' song to moan his hopeless fire.

The reference is to the pastoral Utopia of Virgil’s tenth Eclogue. The rise of Rome from humble — even criminal — beginnings is recalled, but it is hoped that Australia’s progress will be less blood-stained; the model is Virgil’s rural arts of peace, which are contrasted with the devotion of other countries to the goddess of war:

In other climes, Bellona’s temples shine,
Ceres’, Pomona’s, Bacchus’, Pan’s be thine,
And chaste Minerva’s; from thy peaceful plains
May glory’s star ne’er charm thy restless swains;
Ne’er may the hope of plunder lure to roam
One Australasian from his happy home;
But rustic arts their tranquil hours employ,
Arts crown’d with plenty, and replete with joy.

The several arts in question are evoked, including forestry, ploughing, and the growing of pears. On this productive superstructure will be built settlement with village spires and crowded cities, graced in due course by academic pursuits of an Enlightenment tinge:

And thou, fair Science! pure ethereal light
Beam on her hills, and chase her mental night;
Direct her sons to seek the perfect day,
Where Bacon trac’d, and Newton led the way;
Till bright Philosophy’s full orb arise,
To gild her noon, and cheer her ev’ning skies.  

The Australian inland did come to be occupied by prosperous rural communities devoted to the arts of peace. The rise of Philosophy’s full orb is still awaited.

Descriptions of Australia produced for the emigrant market — not all written by authors who had actually crossed the equator — claimed that the Golden Age was already in progress in ‘an El Dorado and an Arcadia combined ... where every striving man who rears a race of industrious children, may sit under the shadow of his own vine and his own fig tree — not without work, but with little care — living on his own land, looking down the valleys to his herds—towards the hills to his flocks, amid the humming of bees, which know

95 Despite an early start in P. Cunningham, Two Years in New South Wales (1827, Sydney, 1966), pp. 87–8.
no winters.” In the colonies themselves, these ideas were given a political dimension by the belief that the path to the realisation of the agricultural dream for the common man was blocked by the forces of evil, namely, the squattocracy. The doctrine of \textit{terra nullius}, which had deprived the original inhabitants of their land on the grounds that those who did not work the land had no right to it, now told against the pioneers; for the squatters, though occupying the land and deriving profits from it, were not themselves working it with true virtue, that is, with the plough. As the \textit{Age} said, ‘Pan, the god of shepherds, half-man, half-brute, went before Ceres, the beautiful and beneficent goddess of corn, but did not stand in her way or dispute her claim to be considered the parent of civilisation.’ The squatters never did quite achieve total success as a ruling class. Feared by bank managers, targeted as marital partners, yes, but apotheosised by the bards of the race, no. The ‘land question’ was invested with the same agrarian high-mindedness, even by the rebels of the Eureka Stockade. ‘I knew that hundreds were in great poverty,’ said Peter Lalor, ‘who would possess wealth and happiness if allowed to cultivate the wilderness that surrounded us ... I mounted the stump and proclaimed “Liberty!”’

The political solution was selection, whereby all could choose and occupy a few acres on which to cultivate wheat and the good life. This solution is premised on the theory that not only working the land, but owning it, promotes virtue. ‘It is a maxim as old as the Egyptians’, said Woolley, ‘that there is no greater teacher of morality than \textit{property in land}. To pass over the countless merits of a numerous and independent yeomanry, it will be sufficient to signalise and insist upon this—that the hope of acquiring land, and of founding a family of “statesmen” (a race identified with the soil) will supply a motive — more powerful than any but the best of all — for abstinence, sobriety


\footnote{\textit{Age}, 6/3/1860, quoted in Macintyre, \textit{A Colonial Liberalism}, p. 98.}

The reality was back-breaking work and failure as often as not, but the darker picture of writers like Henry Lawson does not allow virtue to fade with the Arcadian dream. On the contrary, hardship is taken to be the context of the ethic of mateship in stories like ‘The Union buries its dead’.

Books like O’Reilly’s Cullenbenbong and Facey’s A Fortunate Life make absolutely clear how hard country life was, but no reader of them can doubt the reality of rural virtue.

The theory of rural virtue has been revived by Les Murray, who posits an eternal conflict between two models of civilisation, Athens and Boeotia. Urban, fashion-conscious and frenetic Athens is always contemptuous of rural Boeotia as rude, boorish, stupid and old-fashioned. The original expression of the Boeotian ideal is the poetry of Hesiod, who celebrated the sacred places of the landscape of the (literal) Boeotia and the rural pursuits of its people.

By contrast, the only great Athenian poets were dramatists. Athens’ glory lay in her drama, her philosophers and her political theorists. All of these are urban and, in our expanded sense, typically ‘Athenian’ pursuits. Boeotia, in her perennial incarnations, replaces theatre with dance or


Corrupting the Youth

pageant — or sport; philosophy she subordinates to religion and precept, and in politics she habitually prefers *daimon* to *demos*. Mistrustful of Athens’ vaunted democracy ... she clings to older ideas of the importance of family and the display of individual human quality under stress. If aristocracy is her besetting vice, that of Athens is probably abstraction. Each has its price, artistically, and it may be that poetry, of all but the dramatic sort, is ultimately a Boeotian art. It often has that appearance, seen over against our modern, increasingly Athenian art. Conflict and resolution take the place, in a crowded urban milieu, of the Boeotian interest in celebration and commemoration, modes that perennially appear in spacious, dignified cultures. 101

With the exception of Hesiod’s imitator, Virgil, says Murray, the Athenian model has been generally in the ascendant, and the balance needs to be restored. The role Murray sees for his own poetry is obvious. ‘Athens is lasting, but Boeotia is ever-new, continually recreated, always writing afresh about the sacred places and the generations of men and the gods.’

**SPORT**, the Empire and the classics are powerful ideals individually, together they are unbeatable. The combination is the theme of the most inspirational of all poems for young imperial males, ‘Vita’ lampada’ by the English poet Sir Henry Newbolt. This is worth quoting in full, as it expresses an ideology in its most concentrated form and with its full emotional charge.

There’s a breathless hush in the Close to-night—
Ten to make and the match to win—
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
An hour to play and the last man in.
And it’s not for the sake of a ribboned coat,
Or the selfish hope of a season’s fame;
But his Captain’s hand on his shoulder smote:
‘Play up! play up! and play the game!’

The sand of the desert is sodden red—
Red with the wreck of a square that broke—
The Gatling’s jammed and the Colonel dead,
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.
The river of death has brimmed his banks,
And England’s far, and Honour a name;
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:

‘Play up! play up! and play the game!’

This is the word that year by year,
While in her place the School is set,
Every one of her sons must hear,
And none that hears it dare forget.
This they all with a joyful mind
Bear through life like a torch in flame,
And, falling, fling to the host behind:
‘Play up! play up! and play the game!’

The classical element in the poem is less obvious than the imperial and sporting themes, but it is crucial to the meaning. ‘Vitaï lampada tradunt’ (the motto of Sydney’s Shore school103) is from Lucretius’ anti-religious philosophical poem On the Nature of Things, and gives the poem the image in the last few lines of the ‘torch of life’, or of tradition, being passed on by each generation to the next. Perhaps it is the best secular substitute for personal immortality that can be had.104

The poem had a remarkable penetration throughout the Empire. In Australia, it was distributed to primary schools in the Commonwealth School Paper of 1904.105 In her last major public speech, Oodgeroo Noonuccal recalled that her introduction to poetry in a State School in Queensland in the 1920s was ‘Vitāi lampada’, which she proceeded to quote from memory.106 Inspired by Newbolt, a number of schools around Australia adopted ‘Play the Game’ as their motto.107

Newbolt later attempted a poem on an antipodean theme, the sinking of the Emden by the Sydney, but with unhappy results. It contains the lines:

Their hearts were hot, and as they shot
They sang like kangaroos.

102 H. Newbolt, The Island Race (London, 1898), pp. 81–2; (English background on ‘Newbolt Man’ in P. Howarth, Play Up and Play the Game (London, 1973)).
His influence on Australia was to be enormous nevertheless.

In the year Newbolt published his book of verse containing ‘Vitaī lampada’, an Australian student was in his last year at Newbolt’s old school, Clifton. C.E.W. Bean was to celebrate the tradition of such schools in one of his last books, Here, My Son, a history of Australian private schools. He wrote ‘Melbourne Grammar School looking out on its playing fields recalls Clifton and the Close of which Newbolt sang’, and the title is also from Newbolt, from his poem on Clifton Chapel which begins, ‘Here, my son, your father thought the thoughts of youth.’

Bean’s own father, as classics teacher at Sydney Grammar, had been instrumental in introducing Thomas Arnold of Rugby’s plan of cadets, organised sport and a prefect system. The first number of the school magazine, established by Bean senior, says ‘the object of the Editors will be to exhibit the mental and physical aspects of school life in their proper relations, and, in imitation of the wisest states of antiquity, to hit the golden mean between athletic idiocy and intellectual priggishness.’ He then left to become headmaster of All Saints at Bathurst, a boarding school where the Clifton model could be more perfectly realised.

C.E.W. Bean absorbed all this, but his admiration for the English public school system was subject to one important qualification. The system was class-ridden. But since the upper classes had no genetic advantage, it must be possible for self-reliance and honesty to be distributed across the whole of society. ‘Australian experience in this matter is decisive. It goes to the heart of our national philosophy, and I believe it gives our nation something worth adding to the world’s ideals.’ Bean’s ideal was Newbolt’s, but retooled for democratic Australian conditions.

In the time between his immersion in private schools and his celebration of them, Bean created one of the most enduring and subtle

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112 The Sydneian no. 1 (1875), preface, repr. in Sydneian no. 362 (July 1969), p. 11.
113 Bean, War Aims, pp. 91, 104–7.
adaptations of a myth, when, as official Australian war historian of the First World War, he put into its canonical form the Anzac legend.

After a degree in classics at Oxford, he worked briefly as a teacher at Sydney Grammar and then a journalist. He travelled to the Darling to see whether rural virtues were to be found in the regions where Wentworth had long before predicted their rise, and reported in the affirmative. On the strength of journalism of this sort, he was chosen as official war correspondent. Landing at Anzac Cove on the first day, he saw the situation that ‘Vita lampada’ describes. ‘They had come at last to the ancient test; and in the mind of each man was the question — how would they react to it?’

Recording how they did react to it became his life work.

The last pages of the first volume of the *Official History* are taken up with a discussion of what it was that made possible the heroism the *History* has described. It was not habit, love of a fight, belief in the rightness of the cause, hatred of the enemy, love of country, or desire for fame. It was character. ‘The Australian force contained more than its share of men who were masters of their own minds and decisions. What was the dominant motive that impelled them? It lay in the mettle of the men themselves. To be the sort of man who would give way when his mates were trusting to his firmness ... that was the prospect which these men would not face.’

Earlier he had written:

The big thing in the war for Australia was the discovery of the character of Australian men. It was character which rushed the hills at Gallipoli and held on there during the long afternoon and night, when everything seemed to have gone wrong and there was only the barest hope of success.

The source of the ideal of character that Bean praised was not only poems like Newbolt’s, but Plato’s *Republic*. An early private notebook of Bean’s contains a series of connected essays on the *Republic* and Aristotle’s discussion of the virtues. On Plato’s plans to reform the State, Bean wrote, ‘What he was anxious to improve was really the Greek character; and as he regarded the State as the educating organisation, he was set upon attaining his object by introducing a method of compulsory education on lines which would be calculated

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115 Bean, *Anzac to Amiens* (Canberra, 1946), p. 79.


117 Bean, *In Your Hands, Australians* (1918), in Inglis, p. 21.
to make the best, instead of the worst, of the Greek natural genius."\textsuperscript{118} Other points in the notebook of special interest for Bean’s work in history are his discussion of Plato’s claim that the state or nation can have the same virtues as individuals, but writ large, so to speak, and refined; of Aristotle’s view that a trained habit that acts without needing to think can still be called moral; and Aristotle’s description of the ‘great-hearted’ man.\textsuperscript{119}

Bean deliberately avoided classical references in his history, to the extent that the only mention of Troy in his volumes is of a private of that name from Western Australia.\textsuperscript{120} But the Anzacs, as Bean portrayed them, were uncannily like the ideal Greeks of Plato and Aristotle. The first volume opened with a survey of the character of Australians at the outbreak of the War. The Australians had developed the British character — and indeed only in Australia and New Zealand were there British, as opposed to English, Scots, Irish and Welsh — in certain novel directions. Having begun with immigrants, who were naturally more adventurous, and having developed in an active, outdoor and well-fed life, the Australian character was peculiarly independent, able in emergencies, and nearly classless, especially the man of the younger generation ‘largely trained in State schools’. ‘The only restraint he recognised before the war was self-imposed. This characteristic gave him a reputation for indiscipline, but it endowed him with a power of swift individual decision and, in critical moments, of self-control, which became conspicuous during the war’. Unlike Americans, who admired the strong, the Australian’s individualism tended towards protecting the weak. ‘These qualities of independence, originality, the faculty of rising to an occasion, and loyalty to a “mate”, conspicuous in the individual Australian, became recognisable as parts of the national character.’ It was the War that made individual characters into a collective one; before that, there was no recognition of a national character or even a nation.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{118} C.E.W. Bean, Notebook on philosophy, c. 1902?, Australian War Memorial series AWM38 item 3DRL 6673/861, p. 45A.
\textsuperscript{120} Inglis, \textit{C.E.W. Bean}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{121} Bean, \textit{Story of Anzac}, vol. 1 pp. 5–7; further on Bean’s intentions in D.A. Kent, ‘\textit{The Anzac Book} and the Anzac legend: C.E.W. Bean as editor and image maker’, \textit{Historical Studies} 21 (1985): pp. 376–90; A. Thomson,
Bean’s attitude to religion had a close connection with what he chose to praise. A passage in his notebook is interesting as a record of how study of the classics can lead to a scepticism about religious dogmas:

The Greeks found, as every nation has found, or will find, that the fairy tales and ballads which formed their religion — or upon which it was based, were not compatible with their ideas about the gods. They had begun to speculate about what was right and what was wrong, and why this was virtuous, and that sinful; and so not only was their curiosity stimulated by this inconsistency into a further inquiry; but they began to explain their old fables as allegorical, and as really not being as bad as they appeared to be. This is a state of affairs which always has, and always will cause scepticism; farfetched explanations of timeworn theories are not unheard of in these days; and there is little doubt that they explain a large part of latter day scepticism.\footnote{122}

The answer of Plato and Aristotle to the problem, as developed by Bean at some length, was a virtue-based ethics unconnected with religion.

Like Bean himself, the Anzac was apparently ‘seldom religious in the sense in which the word is generally used. So far as he held a prevailing creed, it was a romantic one inherited from the gold-miner and the bushman, of which the chief article was that a man should at all times and at any cost stand by his mate. This was and is the one law which the good Australian must never break. It is bred in the child and stays with him through life.’\footnote{123}

Some detail was added by Bean in a later book:

Most nations practice, besides their formally acknowledged religions, the cult of some ideal of manhood or womanhood. With the primitive races it may be that of headhunter. The Japanese ‘Bushido’ code, that of a warrior devoted to duty, is famous and indeed well-advertised. But history will perhaps judge its influence on mankind to be slight compared with that of the English code of ‘gentleman’. This code is based on Christian ethics, but is probably more powerful than formal Christianity in moulding the actions of those nations that it affects. It is clearly derived from the ideal of the knight of chivalry; and its own offspring is the slightly different ideal of ‘sportsman’, which, transmitted with the spread of games, has become a world-wide standard. It is probably even true to


\footnote{123} Bean, Notebook, p. 43A.

say that the average English, American, and Australian youth, involved in a moral problem in civil life or on the battlefield, is more guided in his action by the desire to 'play the game' than by the beliefs of formal religion.¹²⁴

(Also in connection with games, the incident at The Nek where a soldier runs to his death 'like a schoolboy in a footrace', which forms the climax of the film Gallipoli, is from Bean’s account.¹²⁵) It is not wholly true, however, that Bean reduced all religion to action through character. In a poem of 1915, he did see the possibility of a God who has some beneficent but unknown purpose in destruction.¹²⁶ But in general, literal gods were as irrelevant for him as for Plato and Aristotle — and scepticism about morals as unappealing.

Bean permitted himself some allusions to classical themes in the last paragraph of his last volume:

¹²⁴ Bean, War Aims, pp. 89–90; cf. Notebook, p. 26A.
What these men did nothing can alter now. The good and the bad, the greatness and smallness of their story will stand. Whatever of glory it contains nothing now can lessen. It rises, as it will always rise, above the mists of ages, a monument to great-hearted men; and for their nation, a possession for ever. \(^{127}\)

Those who understood what Bean had done praised him in the same terms. Sir Keith Hancock, presenting Bean with an honorary degree, said he could associate himself with the aim of Herodotus, ‘To preserve from decay the remembrance of what men have done, and to prevent great and wonderful actions ... from losing their due meed of glory.’ \(^{128}\)

Bean’s positive vision survived the Great War, which tarnished and even destroyed so many European images of honour.

The philosopher D.H. Monro expressed a conventional view in writing, in 1950, ‘One main reason why there has been a moral upheaval in our time is that the generation which became involved in the 1914–18 war found the Boys’ Own Paper morality on which most of them had been reared utterly inadequate to the very grim realities which they were called upon to face.’ \(^{129}\) There is at least some truth in such comments with respect to Europe, where there was widespread disillusion with the War and the men who had fought it. The mood was well caught by David Low, the former Sydney Bulletin cartoonist, whose invention Colonel Blimp blunders about London’s bath houses delivering opinions like ‘Bayonets bring out the best of a man — and it stays out’ and ‘There must be no monkeying with the liberty of Indians to do what they’re dashed well told.’ \(^{130}\) But Australia saw little of either pacifism or reactions like the Fascism of Central Europe, the defeatism of France, or British appeasement. Instead, Australia chose to say, ‘Lest we forget,’ and ‘They did not die in vain.’

The peculiarly Australian reaction is evident in the strong memories kept alive in schools of their own war dead, \(^{131}\) and also in the public war memorials, which were built much more frequently in Australia and New Zealand than in Britain. They were ‘sacred places’,
a non-denominational, indeed non-Christian, though to a degree religious, commemoration of the fallen. The Hall of Memory in the centre of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra has windows depicting ‘what were judged to be the outstanding qualities of the Australian serviceman and woman’: West Bay: Social Qualities. Comradeship, Ancestry, Patriotism, Chivalry, Loyalty. South Bay: Personal Qualities. Resource, Candour, Devotion, Curiosity, Independence. East Bay: Fighting Qualities. Coolness. Control, Audacity, Endurance. The windows, and the huge mosaic above them representing the earth surrendering the souls of the dead to the heavens, were the master work of M. Napier Waller, the culmination of a career that included earlier works on such classical themes as ‘Virgil’ and ‘Pastoral’.

John Anderson’s view that the war memorials were idols was crude and oversimplified, but not a pure fantasy.

Australia was also unusual in making Anzac Day its main national celebration. And what it celebrates is not military glory; choosing a military failure as the occasion to mark ensures that what is commemorated is what Bean wrote of — sacrifice and character. Its meaning was explained for schools in *New Syllabus English and Australian History for Fifth Classes, with Civics and Moral Stories of 1937*, which has as its last chapter ‘The days we celebrate’. The first is Anzac Day, the lesson of which is:

We can say of these men, what the poet, Henry Newbolt, has said of English youths who died elsewhere:

’Twas the right death to die, lad,  
A gift without regret.

10. Inspiration of Youth and Pursuit of Virtue

We owe a duty to the fallen Anzacs, and we must see to it that these brave men have not died in vain.  

‘Without regret’ may be an impossible demand, but it is certainly part of the classical legacy. Aristotle says that the dying hero is sufficiently rewarded by the intense sense of true honour with which he is inspired in the ecstasy of his noble enthusiasm.” For those left behind, the best that could be done in the way of consolation, short of religion strictly so called, is another story from Livy. An earthquake opens a chasm in the forum, and the soothsayers divine that the city must sacrifice its greatest asset to propitiate the gods. Marcus Curtius, representing the youth of the nation, leaps fully armed into the abyss.

That completes an account of the implicit philosophy embodied in secular Australian education, as it stood in its heyday around the 1930s. Before looking at its decay and at attempts to replace it, it is natural to ask whether this ideology had any plan on how to inspire the youth when they grew up. There were several organisations in the field.

The most important was Freemasonry. The story of the Masons and their influence is one of the great untold narratives of Australian history. They were in at the beginning of most of the significant developments in Australia. Joseph Banks was a Mason, and in the early colony, so were Governor Macquarie, Francis Greenway, and the explorers Oxley, Hume and Leichhardt. The first recognised Lodge, the Lodge of Social and Military Virtues, arrived with the regiment it was attached to in 1814, and the Lodges spread widely during the Gold Rushes, during the 1890s, and again between the Wars. Almost all of the conservative Prime Ministers up to 1972 — Barton, Reid, Cook, Bruce, Page, Menzies, Fadden, McEwen, Gorton and

137 Evans, ‘Lessons from Livy’, at p. 28.
140 M. Hogan, The Sectarian Strand (Ringwood, 1987), pp. 197–202, 217; and in many local histories.
McMahon — were Masons, as were such quintessentially Australian heroes as Sir Charles Kingsford Smith, Sir Don Bradman and Sir Edward ‘Weary’ Dunlop. Freemasonry was particularly strong in the armed forces, the police, banks, AMP, the state and Commonwealth public services and the councils of country towns. Membership increased again after the Second World War, as returned servicemen used the Lodges to continue the mateship of the armed forces. A high point of membership was reached in the mid-1950s, with some 330,000 members in about 2000 Lodges, or one Australian man in sixteen. Since there were virtually no Catholic members and very few blue collar workers, this represents an extraordinary penetration of the target group, the ‘managerial classes’.

What did Masonic membership mean? It could, of course, mean nothing, as it seems to have for Menzies, for example. But for those who took membership more seriously, and many did, there was more on offer. Freemasonry is a philosophy.

It is not easy to say precisely what that philosophy is. That is not only because part of it is kept secret, but also because putting ‘doctrines’ into propositional form is not the preferred method of exposition of the Masonic point of view, even to initiates. Freemasonry is officially ‘a system of morality veiled in allegory’, and the allegory and symbolism, intended to assist the imagination and memory of the initiate, are the main method of instruction, and the interpretation of the symbols is to some extent left to the individual. But the general outline of the system is not secret. The only Masonic ‘dogma’, strictly speaking, is the existence of God, belief in which is a condition of entry. Belief in immortality is, however, strongly suggested. Beyond that, religious matters are left to the individual’s own sect; a Mason is expected to pursue his own faith, which may be of any Christian or other theistic persuasion.

141 Freemasonry: Australia’s Prime Ministers (Masonic Historical Society of N.S.W., booklet 2, Sydney, 1994); G.H. Cumming, Freemasonry and Federation (Sydney, 2001); some misplaced fears in ASIO file ‘Freemasonry: Communist penetration’, Australian Archives A6122 item 401.
142 NSW membership figures in M.H. Kellerman, From Diamond Jubilee to Centenary: History of Forty Years of the United Grand Lodge of Freemasonry in New South Wales, 1948–1988 (Sydney, 1990), vol. IV, ch. 5.

If this ideal is reminiscent of the one traditionally favoured by headmasters, that is no accident. The harmony of the two is the theme of an address given to the Lodge for Sydney Grammar Old Boys in 1935, which expresses concisely and accurately the ideal of character of the Great Public Schools:

To go ‘Forward’ requires four qualities, which every Mason must possess, should he desire to answer the challenge to-day, qualities which I believe are those being instilled into the characters of the boys of the G.P.S., viz.:–

(1) Courage
(2) Energy
(3) Alertness
(4) Vision
There can be no progress or success without courage. Fear is man’s greatest enemy. It destroys his moral fibre and unfit him for the conflicts which must be fought in every human experience ... By ‘energy’ I mean ‘activity’, ‘work’, ‘doing things’ as compared with idealising, theorising and meditating, which alone cannot drive forward. Masonry is a Life, not only a philosophy and a ritual ... Masonry teaches us, as did our old schoolmasters, the danger of excess in everything, to avoid vice, to curb the aspirations of unbridled ambition, to moderate the ebullitions of wrath, to conquer anger and temper and be not envious and covetous. To do this we must ever be alert and watchful.

Lastly, without a wide, big vision we cannot go forward and answer the challenge. A great prophet truly said, ‘Where there is no vision the people perish.’ Masonry will give men a wide vision, for it teaches tolerance and sympathy and points out ‘the whole duty of man.’ It gives him vision not only of this Life, but of that to come. It takes him beyond the narrow confines of this little Life, into that state ‘where the blessed ever rest in eternal peace.’ Masonry by its ceremonies and its symbols clearly points out to him that path which if followed closely, will lead from birth to boyhood to manhood to Death and then to immortality.  

Harmony has not characterised the relations of Freemasonry with the more dogmatic religions, and the reasons for conflict concern basic questions of the relation between philosophy and faith. An Australian article on Masonic philosophy, after invoking Plato and Bacon, says ‘The Philosopher-Knight is engaged in a battle, as is every Freemason, the eternal struggle of good and evil, of Light against Darkness, portrayed in the scriptures of the world’s faiths.’ Freemasonry insists that it is not a religion, but admits to being ‘religious’, or having something to say in areas already occupied by religion. Its tolerance of all religions — useful in a country with the same ethnic composition as Ulster — can easily give rise to the impression that dogmatic differences do not matter, even though that is never asserted explicitly. These suspicions led to a long-running and well-known conflict between Catholics and Masons. Behind Archbishop Vaughan’s intransigence over the education question lay his belief that he was faced with a literal Masonic conspiracy. The campaign for free, secular and compulsory education was, he believed, a plot by ‘the Sect, the Church of the Revolution, the International Secret Society, which is weaving its network around the

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world’, that is, Freemasonry. Dogmatically opposed to all dogmas, they aimed, he thought, to break down faith by secular schooling, in support of the one dogma of their own, ‘that absolute liberty and unlimited freedom to do, say, or think anything he likes, is the natural and inalienable right of every man.’ His conspiracy theory was not true (at least of Australia, though something like it was true of France). It was true, though, that the founders of the secular University of Sydney, W.C. Wentworth and Professor Woolley, were Masons, as was the man in charge of the curriculum in the state schools after the Education Act, William Wilkins.

The significance was further heightened by the fact that several other mass organisations imitated or descended from Freemasonry, to varying degrees, and shared some of its moral tendencies. The parallels between Freemasonry and the Boy Scouts were obvious enough. Masons were often surprised to learn that Baden-Powell himself was not one, but his views were close to theirs and the defect was remedied when he was succeeded as Chief Scout by Lord Somers, formerly Governor of Victoria and Masonic Grand Master of that state. In Australia especially, scouting was often run by Masons, who regarded it as an extension of their own ideas.

The benefit societies like the Oddfellows, which together provided assistance to over 40 per cent of the population around 1900, were more concerned with material assistance than the Masons, but in other respects adopted Masonic practices and ideology — ritual, regalia, symbolism such as the all-seeing eye of God, a non-sectarian and international ideal of fraternity, commitment to high ideals of personal behaviour, and a vigorous internal democracy. And these

societies shaded into Trade Unions. The Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers, or Tolpuddle Martyrs, organised itself into Lodges with a high moral tone and Masonic-style ritual, and it was the oaths at initiation that were the cause or pretext of their transportation to Botany Bay.\(^{159}\)

Perhaps the first workers’ association in Australia was the Stonemason Benefit Society, formed in Sydney (at the Freemason’s Hotel) in 1828.\(^{160}\) The tone and symbolism of such early societies are indicated by a medal presented by the Australian Union Benefit Society in 1834: ‘On one side there is, in rich embossed work, the Eye of Providence, with its rays reflecting on a device of four united hands, in which are contained the Rose, Shamrock, Thistle and Maize Stalk, respectively, surrounded by a laurel wreath, and superscribed by the motto — “United to relieve, not combined to injure.”’\(^{161}\) Later unionism stems from the unions of skilled workers in the struggle for the eight-hour day in Victoria in 1850s, the Operative Stonemasons’ Society and the Typographical Society, which were organised into ‘Lodges’ of ‘Brothers’, and acted also as friendly societies. Their aims were not simply better pay and conditions: they were indeed prepared to trade wages for shorter hours, to provide leisure for the pursuit of moral and intellectual development.\(^{162}\) Before their radicalisation in the 1890s, the unions of skilled workers like printers and Hunter Valley coalminers had an ethos that favoured co-operatives, friendly societies, adult education, thrift and temperance, and their leaders were prominent in local government and in moves for constitutional reform.\(^{163}\) The Unions did not retain Lodge-style ritual,


but ideals of brotherhood and solidarity remained, as did practices of
democratic internal self-government. W.G. Spence, effectively the
founder of the Australian Workers’ Union in the 1890s, claimed:

Unionism has a markedly beneficial effect on character. It inculcates
brotherhood. It gives the right to one member of the union to speak to
another if he thinks that he is doing or contemplating a wrong act. The
effect of discipline is seen at its best, and its effect is to make men better
citizens, better husbands, and better fathers ... Unionism came to the
Australian bushman as a religion. It came bringing salvation from years of
tyranny. It had in it that feeling of mateship which he understood already,
and which always characterised the action of one ‘white man’ to another.
Unionism extended the idea, so a man’s character was gauged by whether
he stood true to Union rules or ‘scabbed’ it on his fellows.

It is the union’s performance of a Lodge function that Henry
Lawson celebrates in his story, ‘The Union buries its dead’, in which
a few Union members pay for the burial of an unknown man found
drowned with a Union ticket in his pocket. Lawson has the man be-
long to a different sect to his buriers to illustrate that ‘Unionism is
stronger than creed.’ Lawson saw unionism as not merely stronger
than creed, but itself a ‘new and grand religion’, which would swal-
low up all the old ‘isms’.

For those excluded by these movements, such as women, but who
were still inclined to congregate in the name of virtue, there was the
alternative of the temperance movement. Though it did not approve
of ritual, it stood for the same virtues of self-control and moral
enlightenment as the Lodges, and also transcended sects. It too gave
its members practice in the running of affairs, and was thus a seedbed
of women’s suffrage. When the temperance movement faded, it was
in some ways replaced by the Country Women’s Association.


164 Bob James, ‘Benefit societies and freemasons in labour history’, Illawarra Unity 1 (3) (1998): pp. 5–21 (www.takver.com/history/tragedy.htm with
further articles at www.takver.com/history/benefit).

165 W.G. Spence, Australia’s Awakening (Sydney, 1909), pp. 524, 78; cf. C.


167 H. Lawson, ‘A new religion’ (1890), in Henry Lawson: Autobiographical and
Other Writings, ed. C. Roderick (Sydney, 1972), pp. 16–18.

168 Roe, Quest for Authority, pp. 165–74; E. Windschuttle, ‘Women, class and
temperance: Moral reform in Eastern Australia 1832–1857’, Push from the
Bush 3 (1979): pp. 5–21; A. Hyslop, ‘Temperance, Christianity and
feminism: The Women’s Christian Temperance Union of Victoria, 1887–
In the same way that the CWA was a modernised version of the Victorian moral organisations, the lodges were to some extent replaced by the ‘service clubs’ like Rotary, Lions and Apex. They abandoned ritual and secrecy, but retained the outward-looking ideals of fellowship and practical ‘service to the community’.  

By the 1950s, at the latest, the philosophy or ideology summed up in Empire, Scouts, Lodge and playing the game was beginning to look moth-eaten, pompous and narrow-minded. Traditional thinking was running on empty. The certainties of Absolute Idealism had faded, and the ideals of the founders of secular education had been lost, or at least the reasons for them had been. When this ideology attempted to explain itself in the public arena, the effect was ridiculous. The most public expression of the old ways was the extraordinary ‘Call to Australia’ issued by leading Australian churchmen and judges on Remembrance Day, 1951. The twelve signatories included Cardinal Gilroy, the Anglican Primate of Australia, Sir Mellis Napier, then Chief Justice of South Australia and former Masonic Grand Master, and Sir John Morris, Chief Justice of Tasmania and the man chiefly responsible for appointing Sydney Sparkes Orr over more-qualified but less Christian candidates. If there was ever a moment when the traditional order was secure, it was 1951. The Menzies era was just beginning, and even the defeat of his anti-Communist referendum appeared to be a victory for Australian decency; the King whose simple courage had seen the Empire through the War was still on the throne; traditional religion was expanding; radicalism of all kinds was in retreat. Constitutional forms had sur-


H. Hunt, The Story of Rotary in Australia 1921–1971 (Sydney?, 1971); R.A. Wild, Bradstow (Sydney, 1974), pp. 86–8; Henderson, Masonic Grand Masters, p. 120.

vived even socialist government. There was indeed an external threat from the spread of Communism in East Asia, but the mood of the leaders of society was instead of grave concern about the internal forces of evil:

There are times in the histories of peoples when those charged with high responsibilities should plainly speak their minds.

Australia is in danger. We are in danger from abroad. We are in danger at home. We are in danger from moral and intellectual apathy, from the mortal enemies of mankind which sap the will and darken the understanding and breed evil dissensions. Unless these are withstood, we shall lack moral strength and moral unity sufficient to save our country and our liberties ...

The dangers demand of all good Australians community of thought and purpose. They demand a restoration of the moral order from which alone true social order can derive ...

THEREFORE

we call for a new effort from all Australians to advance moral standards ...

We call for an adequate understanding of the nature of law and of its necessity as the principle of order in a free society.

We call on all Australians to take the active concern in public affairs proper to citizens of a free society ...

We call on our people to think now of the future into which our children go, that we may shape it well and wisely for them.

We call on our people to remember those whose labours opened this land to the uses of mankind; those who bore and reared the children of a new nation; those who died in battle for us, bringing splendour to Australian arms; those who worked with mind and muscle for the heritage which we, please God, shall hold and enlarge for our children and their children.

And that this may be so, we ask that each shall renew in himself the full meanings of the call which has inspired our people in their highest tasks and in their days of danger:

FEAR GOD, HONOUR THE KING.

The Call was printed in every daily newspaper, with favourable editorial comment, and also the *Times*, and broadcast on almost all radio stations. Each state had Call to Australia Standing Committees for several years. Three and a half million copies were printed nationwide, and the Call was the topic of thousands of sermons and talks in schools, Scout groups, Lodges and CWA rooms. A special effort was made at the time of the Coronation, when ‘a tastefully designed poster in colour directing attention to Her Majesty’s personal dedication of herself to the service of her peoples was produced and
6,325 copies were displayed on railway stations, in shop windows and business premises.\textsuperscript{172}

This is an ideology that has over-extended itself. Menzies himself saw the writing on the wall, and his lament is more than a simple repetition of the classical theme of the decay of modern times. He quoted a remark of General Smuts, philosopher and Prime Minister,\textsuperscript{173} which he ‘would like to hang in every Parliament and Party room, and preach in every school and university’: ‘There is today a decay of the individual’s responsibility and share in government which seems to strike at the roots of our human advance ... The sturdy individualism which inspired progress in the past, which made Rome, which made Scotland, which has created all our best human values, seems to be decaying in the atmosphere of confusion and disillusion of our day.’\textsuperscript{174}

But one person’s confusion and disillusion is another’s excitement and opportunity.

The easier times for youth were certainly part of what caused the change, since a set of ideals (thrift, for example) appropriate to a depression and earlier hard times were not necessarily so evidently useful thereafter. The ideology distressed the children of many parents of the time. Jill Ker Conway writes, ‘My mother’s code of thrift, sobriety and industry had served her well growing up in a simpler Australian society, but it had little appeal for her children, hungry for excitement and experience, and made aware of a more complex society by their urban schooling.’\textsuperscript{175}

Equally unbearable for the more intellectual of the new generation was the unwillingness of the old to engage in argument, and the association of the old order with anti-intellectualism and censorship. Shirley Hazzard recalls, ‘the battle against knowledge was fought from an emotional and incoherent concept of “morality”.’\textsuperscript{176}

It was no match for Anderson and his destructive and relentless criticism. ‘Tradition itself invites criticism’, he said, ‘because it represents certain things as worth while but is unable to give any account

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{172} Call to the People of Australia — NSW Standing Committee, Annual Report, 1952–1956.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Menzies, \textit{Speech is of Time}, pp. 219–20.
\item \textsuperscript{176} S. Hazzard, \textit{Coming of Age in Australia} (Sydney, 1985), p. 16; something more hostile in J. Rutherford, \textit{The Gauche Intruder: Freud, Lacan and the White Australian Fantasy} (Melbourne, 2001).
\end{itemize}
of their value.\textsuperscript{177} Efforts like those of Bruxner and Macdonald, discussed in chapter 1, made some sense to those who shared the loyalties of their own generation, but cut no ice with the contemporaries of the Push.

From the other direction, the gap between the generations was widened by the impression of parents that their offspring were taking from their university education a mere ability to shuffle words, unconnected with the emotional realities that the words should have meant.\textsuperscript{178}

But one should not underestimate the ability of an unexpressed tradition to survive as a pattern of actions, however comprehensively it may be mocked by the chattering classes. It is a recurrent theme of classical literature that the last exemplar of true republican values died some time ago, but perhaps, if we care to look, it will not prove that virtue was last seen down the Lachlan years ago.

The biography of Mr Justice Wood, Royal Commissioner into the New South Wales Police Force, is a recognisable one. With a family background where he ‘learnt responsibility and self-sufficiency early on’, he was a sergeant in the cadets at Knox Grammar, and a useful cricketer and distance runner. A member of the Newport surf life-saving club, he was injured by his board, and legend has it that he sat stoically while his lip was stitched without anaesthetic. After a university medal in law at Sydney University, he rose to become one of the youngest judges of the Supreme Court, while maintaining a commitment to triathlons and trekking. His work as Royal Commissioner in the mid-1990s was characterised by courageous, intelligent and unrelenting pursuit of the corruption that proved to have been ingrained in many parts of public life.\textsuperscript{179}

There was one aspect of the old world order that did survive the acid of the 1960s, at least in part. The last and possibly most widespread idea on how to inspire the youth was to teach them literature. Peter Board’s reforms particularly emphasised it, and under the heading, ‘General aim in teaching literature’, the New South Wales English syllabus of 1911 said, ‘The special educating power in Literature lies in its effect in developing the mind, filling it with high ideals, and in its influence in refining and ennobling character.’\textsuperscript{180}

\textsuperscript{178} E.g. A. Seymour, \textit{The One Day of the Year} (Sydney, 1962), p. 94.
\textsuperscript{180} NSW Department of Public Instruction, \textit{Courses of Study for High Schools} (Sydney, 1911), p. 18.
We are speaking here of a somewhat more highbrow product than poems like ‘Vitæ lampadis’, and the philosophy implicit in it is more subtle than the one so far discussed. It is not opposed to what has gone before, but it has a different tone. Where the classical model is stoical in the face of adversity rather than consolatory, masculine, and partaking of the impersonality of antique statuary, the tendency of the kind of literature favoured by teachers of English is to the effusive, the emotional and the colourful. It is Romantic rather than classical. The Romantic view envisages a communion of mind with the world, through which the mind takes on the noble and spiritual qualities actually present in Nature. The faculty that apprehends these qualities is not reason but imagination, and the natural mode of expression of the outcome is not argumentative prose or speeches but odes and sonnets. The favoured seers of the Romantics were Shelley, Keats and most especially, the one we saw Bob Menzies reading as he tramped the sacred Romantic sites of England, Wordsworth.

Wordsworth had a view of the world not unlike that of modern enthusiasts for the environment. It is a ‘philosophy of “natural religion” ... in brief it amounts to examples of the way in which Nature, unsophisticated and uncontaminated ... can instruct us “seriously and sweetly, through the affections; melting the heart, and through that instinct of tenderness, developing the understanding.”’

‘Nature’ in Wordsworth — or at least in the popular understanding of him — means especially the English landscape. A reader of his works in Australia was either an English emigrant, for whom his poetry poignantly recalled the ‘Home’ that had lain about him in his infancy, or an Australian native, for whom England was in effect a construct out of Wordsworth and similar authors.

The Australian landscape, however, was not at all co-operative. Bare and dry, usually silent, it showed little inclination either to instruct the affections or to melt the heart. Barron Field, Judge-Advocate in Macquarie’s time, apparently the first to rhyme ‘Australia’ with ‘failure’ (‘having been born within the sound of Bow Bells, he pro-

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nounces Australia as if it ended with an r, and makes it rhyme with failure, shrewdly considering the kangaroo a failure on the part of Australian Nature in her awkward attempts to make a proper quadruped for that country and later biographer of Wordsworth, attempted to cast the mantle of Wordsworthian sublimity over the Blue Mountains, but the landscape defeated him. Though some of the colonial poets, like Harpur and Kendall, were partly Wordsworthian in their approach to nature, there was little development in this direction. It is notable that Australia’s most famous nature poem, Dorothea Mackellar’s ‘My Country’, is utterly un-Wordsworthian. She makes clear her love for the harsh brown land, but there is no suggestion it will reciprocate.

But those of a strong imaginative bent are not ones to be discouraged by an unprepossessing here and now, since they are quite capable of living their mental life in more pleasant surroundings. For such people, Wordsworthianism fulfilled the same role that Absolute Idealism did for those of a more propositional cast of mind — it was a kind of natural religion, free of uncomfortable dogmas but representing the universe as congenial.

Wordsworth was a favourite of Australia’s best attempt at a prime ministerial philosopher. Alfred Deakin was always scribbling his thoughts on spiritualism, unsectarian religion, theosophy and so on. President of the Victorian Association of Spiritualists at twenty-two, he widened his views through a huge range of reading, in the search for communion with the ‘Infinite Spirit of Unity, Order and Harmony’, whose instrument he might be. He produced a book-length manuscript, thankfully unpublished, on ‘The Gospel according to Wordsworth’ (‘the keynote of Wordsworthianism is that Nature is

active, positive, vital, formative and beautiful — in a word, that Nature is living.)

Christopher Brennan gives an unusually clear statement of what the imagination does, as conceived by the poetic tradition. It is not a frenzy, or creative, as widely thought, but ‘perceptive’, in that it acquaints us with an aspect of reality, an aspect not accessible by sensation and intellect alone. ‘Imagination, then, by its own nature, is a symbol of unity which is our true spiritual being: by that scheme of correspondences which is the law of its activity, it symbolizes for us our living relation to that true being, and makes plain to us, but through delight and not through demonstration, the ideal kinship and unity of all things.’

Not long afterwards, Wordsworth’s ability to paint the mundane world in idealist colours caught the fancy of the young Menzies when, almost sixteen, he received a copy of Wordsworth’s Poetical Works as a prize for bible knowledge. His poem three years later, ‘To Wordsworth’, got to the point of what the poet had to offer:

Great Master, let us sit and learn of thee!
Give us the sense of glory that was thine!
Show us the visions that we do not see,
Of Nature’s wonders, and of things Divine!

... Then teach us, guide us ere our faith grow weak,
Show us the sunset ere its hues depart!

Ere we dismiss Ming as a harmful eccentric, we need to recall that the education of almost all Australian pupils introduced them to what one called ‘a remarkably disembodied world’ of skylarks and haw-


188 Melbourne University Magazine 7 (2) (1913), p. 57, quoted in Brett, Robert Menzies’ Forgotten People, p. 129; similar from Deakin in Murdoch, pp. 29–30; Sydney parallels in Melleuish, Cultural Liberalism, p. 96.
thorn, mediated by English poetry. Andrew Riemer, a Jewish immigrant child with no natural ties to either the physical or cultural environment, recalls:

[Tennyson’s] poetry, and that of Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley ... provided an escape from and a consolation for the ugliness and meanness of the world in which we were forced to live. Neither the physical world we inhabited, nor any of the poetry produced by it, could provide such escape or consolation. The windows of my classroom did not give onto a sylvan glade, but looked out on a busy thoroughfare where lorries laboured up a hill past the garish bunting of second-hand car yards. The literature of England conducted us into the world of the romantic imagination which served one of the essential needs of adolescence. It also catered generously for others: a heroic or noble past in which we could participate, and ethical structures to provide models for fantasies, if not for actual life.

These are contentious issues to raise in the current climate of cultural nationalism. The literature we were required to read at school — and those other books to which we were gradually drawn after many of us started to discard our infatuation with a philistine way of life — provided models of loyalty, altruism, courage and perseverance which, once again, appealed to our adolescent need for imaginative structures that seemed to avoid the compromises we were instinctively making in our daily lives. Literature gave us heroes to worship. It gave us, for instance, Henry V, whom many of us got to know by way of Olivier’s stirring film, this leading us, in turn, to reconsider our scorn for Shakespeare. It gave us Sidney Carton; it gave us some of Scott’s noble and romantic creatures. It gave us, on a more familiar and domestic level, Jane Austen’s characters and the world in which they lived, a cosy rural England, where the values of good breeding, politeness, and consideration for others were mixed with the art of conversation and other civilised accomplishments.

The loss of those models is lamented by A.D. Hope in his poem ‘The Sacred Way’:

I wake in the night. I turn and think of the age.
What image has it of man; what roots for the mind?
What names now does imagination find
To fix our heritage?

The world I grew up in now belongs to the past;  
Round my cradle, behind my pillow there stood  
Hercules, Samson, Roland, Robin Hood,  
To say: Stand firm, stand fast!

My unripe soul, groping to fill its need,  
Found in those legends a food by which it grew.  
Whatever we learned, the heroes were what we knew.  
We were fortunate indeed.

To have lost that world. How shall my son go on  
To form his archetypal image of man?  
Frankenstein? Faust? Dracula? Don Juan?  
O Absolom, my son!"
project himself into the situations of others — not as in fantasy, but in situations that are distillations of fact. The writer’s task is to present more complex and inventive situations than one could easily imagine oneself. The reader then imagines himself in the character’s position, and can test his own values in that imagined situation. Naturally, problems can arise if the writer represents one character’s point of view in heroic terms and reduces another character to the whites of his eyes. And there can be moral objections when the situation represented is not of the kind that actually happened, or where too much is conceded to an evil point of view — or both, as in the case of Helen Demidenko.

A novel may, indeed, undertake a moral task by representing evil, but it is likely to be concerned also with examining the good and casting it in realistic colours. James McAuley wrote:

If a true morality is based, as it is, on the truth about human nature and human relations, and if great literature needs a considerable measure of the same truth, then great literature will tend to be morally sound. By the same token, perversity and sophisticated silliness may be morally offensive, but they also offend artistically; they limit very drastically the sort of achievement that is possible and preclude real greatness because they preclude depth of insight and respect for human realities.

This is why a novel needs to portray characters that ‘matter’, that the reader cares about. A.D. Hope’s famous review of Patrick White’s Tree of Man, which ended with an Andersonian flourish by calling it ‘pretentious and illiterate verbal sludge’, also said, ‘He has what the


Australian novel largely lacks, the power to present people who are important to us in themselves, chief characters who impress us by something out of the common order — in this case integrity.198

If ethical questions are as much philosophy’s province as literature’s, it must be admitted that philosophy in the mid-century had largely abandoned the field. Authors like Judith Wright and Morris West were right to complain that the philosophers of their time had nothing to say about the important questions of life, and to suggest that literature had no choice but to fill the gap.199 (Though as we will see in chapter 16, philosophers have fought back since then.)

That is all very well, but from the school-teaching point of view, literature is a problem because it is hard to know how to examine it. If it is supposed to develop taste, or virtue, or discrimination, how can it be examined by asking a student to write down a list of sentences? The problem was made more acute because the most noble writers, the English Romantic poets and Shakespeare, did not condescend to argue. The poets, as we saw, consciously preferred imagination to reason, while Shakespeare, compared to the greats of other languages like Dante or Dostoevsky, is notoriously imprecise and inconsistent about matters philosophical. Alfred Deakin extracted a supposed ‘Gospel According to Shakespeare’ from the works,200 but few others have felt so confident. He is, however, usefully strong on character, and his works have supported many a diverting school essay on the subject. A superior example of the genre is Henry Lawson’s ‘Mateship in Shakespeare’s Rome’, which analyses the relationship between Brutus and Cassius with considerable insight.201

The plan in Australian schools was the same as that adopted in England as a result of the 1921 Newbolt report, through which Sir Henry had his last and possibly greatest impact on Imperial education. The Greek and Roman classics were replaced with the ‘classics’ of English literature. The logic formerly implicit in Latin grammar was now to be learned through a study of the English language by means of a Latinate grammar, while the English classics, chosen for their Romantic qualities as counters to the spirit of scientific rationality,

200 Murdoch, Alfred Deakin, pp. 135–6.
were studied through the production by the student of something called ‘literary criticism’.\textsuperscript{202} There is a difficulty with this scheme, in that the Romantic souls capable of inspiring students with a love of literature are not, in general, the same ones who would enjoy teaching grammar. Despite that, English on this plan has been the most studied of all school subjects.

Generations of students found difficulties in understanding what literary criticism actually was, or on what principles one was expected to discuss and judge literary works. The effective official answer was that one should refer to the works of Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis, and imitate them. On doing so one found a strongly moral element to the process, but one was not supposed to write that down in the finished product. The activity of criticism leads to ‘improvement’, through developing the student’s powers of discriminating between good and bad literature. ‘Good’ means partly, though not solely, morally good: Leavis refers to the ‘moral preoccupations that characterise the novelist’s peculiar interest in life.’\textsuperscript{203} Unfortunately — or, as experts in the subject believe, fortunately — this still gives no actual criteria for evaluating novels or poems. Leavis was notably, and in principle, anti-philosophical in explaining his criteria. In his school, the flow of words allegedly explaining why one work, author or period is better than another, seems to be grounded in the


sensitivity of the critic’s antennae rather than in anything factual about the work, or what the work describes.204

Departments of English made the most of the opportunity, becoming often the largest in their faculties on the strength of their possession of rights to the imagination, Shelley’s ‘great instrument of moral good’. A ‘failure of imaginative response’ to literature was the stock in trade when other literary critics were to be fought or students to be failed.206 There is no answer to that charge, and the only defence is to counter-attack in the same style, but louder. The procedure of literary criticism of this sort is neatly described by Anderson in his early paper ‘Romanticism and classicism’: ‘condemnation of a work — refusal to read wonderful meanings into the drivellings of Wordsworth, for instance — is taken as a sign of the inadequacy of the critic’s spiritual resources. Works of art, then, merely serve as texts for vague and arbitrary moralising, and strict analysis is frowned upon as calculated to “spoil” appreciation of the work.’206

Nevertheless, Leavis did stand for a commitment to the morally serious in literature,207 and there is cause to regret its passing in favour of debased philosophies like post-structuralism and deconstruction, Marxist and feminist approaches, and the like.208 In their different ways, they replaced attempts to understand what an author was saying with some form of the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, or the ‘sociopoliticization of the ethical’,209 undermining the author’s voice and trying to find a higher ground from which to fire at him. It is not clear why anyone with these views would bother studying literature, except perhaps to acquire an academic position that might be difficult to obtain in a real subject.

Anderson’s remarks recall the fact that there has been a long-running conflict between philosophy and literature. The feeling of literary folk that philosophy deals in a world of spectral abstractions, somehow divorced from their meanings in real life, is a cause of some of the anti-Andersonian feeling among his students who pursued literature. According to James McAuley,

My own first resistances centred on one of the outlying parts of Anderson’s work, which he himself acknowledged contained unresolved difficulties: the field of aesthetics. One could not even begin to apply Anderson’s view to arts other than literary, and when applied to literature it had the effect of a bath of acid, dissolving the corpus until only one tell-tale relic was left, Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’.

Another of Anderson’s students, the novelist Peter Shrubb, attacks Anderson’s reduction of the literary criticism of works to finding their ‘themes’ and listing the illusions they expose, and speaks of ‘the arrogance of the intellect which, finding an idea to nestle under, knows no more the heat of the sun.’ These charges are correct in Anderson’s case. Nonetheless, literary minds tend to find such criticisms decisive, while philosophers cannot see what reasons have been given for them.

The philosophically inclined, for their part, are apt to be impatient with the litterateurs’ insistence on dressing up everything in rhetoric. Why not the bare facts or arguments, without all the clutter? Why does ‘literature’ mean fiction, as if non-fiction is beyond the pale, and does not acquire literary merit until the true propositions are filleted out? How can the Oxford History of Australian Literature say without irony that non-fiction is not included, since it could not be done ‘without serious distortion’? And why do people not read straightforward introductions to philosophy, but instead buy by the millions Gaarder’s Sophie’s World, a not very well written introductory philosophy text dressed up as a novel?

213 Oxford History of Australian Literature, ed. L. Kramer (Melbourne, 1981), p. v; H.M. Green’s History of Australian Literature, however, is strong on non-fiction, including philosophy.
And why, for that matter, if moral characters in novels and plays are a good influence on youth, aren’t real heroes even better? Biography is not part of the high school syllabus. ‘The large question, “Which qualities confer upon heroic men and women the authority which all of them must have to act wisely?” not only isn’t asked in our schools; it isn’t asked in our culture.’ Yet there remains a strong innate response to real heroes like ‘Weary’ Dunlop and Mary McKillop.

These conflicts resurfaced in the debate over Helen Demidenko, where those with a background in literature generally argued that Ms D, as an imaginative writer, was free to re-imagine history however she wished. Those in the opposite camp, mostly from philosophical, political and other social science areas, took this to be a sign of the frivolity of litterateurs concerning matters of fact. These questions are important, not only in themselves, but because of the victory of literature over philosophy in school education. English, including some study of literature, is a compulsory subject almost everywhere; unlike in, say, France, philosophy is rarely studied in school at all. The youth receive a body of opinion on literature, but are left to pick up philosophical ideas at random.

By the 1960s, the moral consensus presumed by ‘secular, moral’ education had evaporated. That was true in high schools, especially, where all the teachers had a defined sphere of technical expertise to teach and anything else fell through the cracks. Margaret Mackie’s 1966 book on the philosophy of education, a kind of benign Andersonianism adapted to the classroom, described accurately

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enough the ‘many teachers who avoid as far as possible, on principle, introducing ethical considerations into their discussions with the pupils. This is sometimes because the teacher believes it is wrong to influence immature pupils in this matter. It is ironical that, while ethics is being avoided as controversial and unsuitable for dogmatic (or, for that matter, any) treatment, the argument that working hard at school is desirable because this leads to getting on in the world and making money is often used without any awareness that it raises a moral issue. It is assumed, without question, that “getting on” is good.’

It was what the Catholics had predicted as the result of secular education: ‘Wealth, justly or even dishonestly acquired, is the idol of the multitude ... Compared with it, honour, virtue, public and private worth are antiquated titles to the reverence of the multitude. Money, the divinity of the age, alone receives homage.’

It is no surprise that the moral sense of the Sixties generation who rejected ‘getting on’ turned out to be based on the more unformed and immature moral emotions, such as indignation.

In more recent times, there have been some serious attempts to revive at least a skeleton of basic moral education and to state the principles that are to be inculcated. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training divides the values to be ‘fostered’ into three categories: those relating to education (curiosity, logical and critical thinking, among others), those relating to self and others


Corrupting the Youth

(accepting one’s own worth, being honest, caring and punctual, and ‘accepting the importance of developing a positive personal belief and value system’), and those relating to citizenship (including being in favour of democracy, liberty, economic development and conservation, and conforming to the school rules). A primary school subject, ‘General Religious and Moral Education’, helps students to understand these matters through a ‘study that is objective and non-sectarian’, but it is much less clear what is to happen in high school. And as for the universities having a beneficial effect on the character of their students, the last person to have suggested that seems to have been Menzies, in 1939.

In the end, though, it has to be doubted whether training in values without education in the reasons for them is a credible plan. Doubtless it will work well enough for a proportion of the population, but that proportion may be smaller than is realised, because of the philosophical crisis of puberty. Typically, younger children take rather naturally to the more abstract areas of philosophy like metaphysics and logic, as the now popular ‘philosophy for children’ movement has found. But during the teen years most of the population loses a large part of its curiosity about the abstract, including both mathe-


223 Menzies, Place of a University, pp. 12–3: 25–6.

matics and philosophy, and acquires the fetishism for the ‘practical’ that is characteristic of adulthood. At the same time, however, there can be a sudden demand for meaning, as parental values are no longer treated as self-evident; the phenomenon is seen in both the idealism and the cynicism of youth.\footnote{225} The brief interval between the onset of the search for meaning and the loss of interest in the abstract is a period in which philosophical views can be set for life, never to be re-examined beyond some minor softening in the light of ‘experience’. A sudden accession of the feeling that life must have meaning can spur an enthusiasm for the religion closest to hand, or the need to establish a separate identity can produce the opposite. In this window of vulnerability, the youth is susceptible to purveyors of mechanistic theories of reality, such as Calvinists, socialist agitators, and those whose business it is to recruit Jihad-crazed suicide bombers.\footnote{226} The more precocious may even think up something dangerous for themselves. Donald Horne, on a walk in the Blue Mountains shortly before he went to University — before knowing anything about Anderson — discovered, as he remembers it, ‘I was finally able to think a thought’:

If I didn’t believe in God and I didn’t believe in life after death why was I always worrying about everything? What did it matter what I was? If there was no good and no bad why didn’t I just be bad if I wanted to? I could be as selfish as I liked, plan everything just to please myself, be unscrupulous, just take what I wanted. What was the point of believing in anything? Everything is meaningless. Why should I act according to beliefs if I didn’t believe in them and they got in my way? Beliefs were a lot of bullshit. There was no reason whatsoever why I should act one way or the other. What did should mean? Nothing. I was going to die. There was no God to punish me. Nothing meant anything. But I would have to be careful. Other people expected you to have beliefs. You should act as if you had them. That would be smart. You could act as if you believed in honesty and so forth, and all the time you were lying.


I considered these thoughts so important that I kept on repeating them for the rest of the walk, so that I would remember them. Now I felt optimistic about the future.\footnote{Horne, \textit{Young Donald}, 2nd ed, p. 168; recalled in D. Horne, \textit{Confessions of a New Boy} (Ringwood, 1986), p. 55 and \textit{Portrait of an Optimist} (Ringwood, 1988), p. 166.}

Horne gives the reader to understand that these views are somehow connected with special circumstances resulting from his father’s breakdown.

Nevertheless, the problem is perennial. A system of ideas with moral and inspirational content is a necessity for the youth. Someone will have to come up with something.