The views Barns holds are clear, but a journal article might have proved a sufficient vehicle in which to make them. This is what makes *What's Wrong With the Liberal Party?* such a frustrating read. Many of the questions Barns floats are timely and relevant, particularly seeking answers to the Party's current dismal showing in all States and Territories, but his treatment of them is superficial if they are addressed at all. The passion with which he holds his views is obvious, but it seems to blind him to the need to present a credible case in support of his conclusions.

Reviewed by Michael Keenan

Corrupting the Youth: A History of Philosophy in Australia
by James Franklin
Sydney: Macleay Press
2003, 465pp, $59.95
ISBN 1 876492 08 2

'Oh! Gossip is charming! History is merely gossip . . . But scandal is gossip made tedious by morality.' So goes one of Oscar Wilde's famous aphorisms. Wilde may well have enjoyed being a member of the Sydney libertarian movement, the 'Push', had time and nature coincided.

And this book really is charming—an exceptional history, but largely a 'history' according to Wilde's definition. That is to say, it is not the book one expects to find judging by the impressive cover and size of the publication, something we all do though we say we shouldn't. What we expect is a full and technical account of Australian philosophy *per se*, the fine detail of the thought and ideas our philosophers specialised in and taught (a book that still needs to be written).

What we actually find is a comprehensive, very interesting, extremely readable, sometimes 'scandalous' history of the lives of Australia's philosophers. This is particularly disappointing as the Preface begins with such important and large questions that promise so much: 'Does life have meaning, and if so what is it? What can I be certain of, and how should I act when I am not certain? . . . Why should I do as I'm told?'. Important questions indeed. 'They are questions that may be ignored, but they don't go away.' True. Yet the book largely ignores these important philosophical questions, and I was still left with them when I finished it.

The philosophy is not entirely absent, though. It makes important cameo appearances here and there to provide some context and background, a milieu for the high drama and political excitement of Australia's 20th century intellectual lifestyles (!). And the scandal is there, too: chapters on the 'Gross Moral Turpitude' of the Orr Case, a bastard and fraud intellectual who scammed the University of Tasmania and others besides, only to end up at the High Court of Australia hopelessly challenging a verdict against him for seducing a female student (very important to the development and progress of Australian philosophy); and not to forget the suspicious 'murder' case involving CSIRO boffins, Bogle and Chandler, and two bodies by the Lane Cove River, New Year's Eve 1962. Chandler was saved from the rabble press only by the closed circle and tight lips of the 'Push'. As Wilde may have exclaimed: 'Scandal!'

Episodes like these in the book, including the rather lengthy description of John Anderson's affair with an emotionally unstable and unpromising young female philosophy student, serve to make this book more of a gossipy personal biography of the central figures employed in philosophy in the 20th century (which no doubt helps to sell copies)—but is tedious because it is so lacking in relevance to a work of this potential, scope and importance.

The book seems not to know if it is meant to be a scandal sheet or a comprehensive study of the history of Australian philosophy. Amused by the former I kept hoping the book would turn into the latter with the passing of each chapter.

Another weakness lies in the over-use of the personal accounts of just a few well-known Australians—Donald Horne chief amongst them. The many lengthy quotes from *The Education of Young Donald* are presented as some sort of 'last word' on the mid-century experience of youth and Sydney University (despite Horne being 'no philosopher'). The fact that Donald Horne's career has been as a Sydney-centric, left-wing social commentator and national cynic does much to skew the view.

This over-reliance works by intention or otherwise to discount the mainstream, regular majority of middle-sort-of-Australia that was surviving, learning and living in other parts of the country through the upheavals of World War II, anti-Communism and the explosion that was 'The Sixties'. The few references to and quotes from more conservative (even if embryonically so) identities—like Peter Coleman, John Kerr and Garfield Barwick—make for just a few interesting counterbalances, but regrettably not enough.

In fact, one of the main letdowns of this book—yet entirely

in keeping with its nature—is that it largely concentrates on Sydney University and its notorious identities to the exclusion of the rest of Australia—to the point where Melbourne University must be given its own chapter seemingly to redress the imbalance. Primarily a vehicle for Sydney University and the 'Push', the book gives starring roles to Germaine Greer, Richard Neville, Wendy Bacon et al. and their libertarian antics in Australia and London.

It is true that Sydney did dominate the philosophical and academic scene in Australia for practically the whole of the 20th century (perhaps still), but it also became isolated academically, not just from the rest of the country's universities but also from the rest of the international philosophical community. Franklin makes this point several times, particularly in relation to Anderson and many of his protégés who followed him into teaching. To think of Sydney as representative of the whole of Australian philosophy is to think of a fishbowl as illustrative of the whole of the sea.

As for the title of the book 'Corrupting the Youth'—the predictable reference to the trial of Socrates—even Franklin seems to grow tired of the number of times the fate of Socrates is wheeled out either to defend or condemn another 'free-thinking' intellectual with wandering hands or a mouth like the bottom of a birdcage. It is certainly tedious, barely scandalous with or without the attendant moralising, particularly as it is well accepted that Socrates was actually condemned to death for being too close to several notorious anti-democrats soon after democracy was re-established in Greece.

The 'corruption of youth' was a vague and trumped up charge to justify the murder. Principles of freedom of philosophical thought or speech weren't really on trial. It was pure politics that mattered then. I dare say it is politics that matters most now in this history of Franklin's. Politics . . . and of course religion too.

Certainly religion (its philosophy and its politics) acts as one of the main themes throughout the book, although it too gets off on the wrong foot early on in the piece when Franklin states 'the Australian colonies were planned foundations of the age of Enlightenment, in which there was never an established church.' There is an argument here, perhaps somewhat semantic, as to whether the Church of England was the 'established church' of Australia's colonies *as colonies* of England. Moreover, I was under the impression that Australia was largely established as a penal colony to empty the slums of London and remove the prison hulks clogging the Thames, and that the principles flourishing under the 'age of Enlightenment' barely got a look in in this brutal outpost of Empire.

There are many wild (even Wilde) statements in this book—it is full of opinions and therefore exudes the personality, interests and appealing intellect of the author. That's what makes it such a truly interesting exposé of Australia's 20th century intellectual class and a pleasure to read. While it promises to be 'more' and could so easily have delivered, it does what it does brilliantly. As Wilde also said: 'Anyone can make history. Only a great man can write it.' I certainly think it a great read; as to the rest, readers must make up their own mind.

Reviewed by Amalia Matheson

A Perilous and Fighting Life: From Communist to Conservative, The Political Writings of Professor John Anderson
by Mark Weblin (ed)
Melbourne: Pluto Press
2003, 292pp, $29.95
ISBN 1 864032 480

Forty years after his death, John Anderson remains Australia's most notable philosophical thinker. Anderson was to 20th century Australian philosophy what William James was to philosophy in the United States and Bertrand Russell in Great Britain, and the continued republication of his work comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with its quality. This most recent republication of writings, concerned mostly with political agitation and the purposes and significance of Marxist thinking, is marked by Anderson's preoccupation with 'freedom' and 'enterprise' that even in the darkest days of his flirtation with Sovietism (or 'proletarianism' as he later called it) distinguished his approach to socialism from that of every prominent figure in the Australian left of his time.

Mark Weblin has attempted a representative selection, and it includes the most memorable of Anderson's polemics and political analyses from the time of his arrival in Sydney in 1927 to the year after his retirement from the University in 1958. But *A Perilous and Fighting Life* excludes the pieces that most forcefully express Anderson's adoption of 'history as the story of liberty' (and 'the perilous and fighting life') as his personal credo. For although the latter part of this book includes some important political pieces from the late period, Weblin's decision to republish no material from previous anthologies means that we need to refer to key journal articles republished in *Studies in Empirical Philosophy* and