

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

Art and Reality to understand both the deeper *philosophical* purposes behind Anderson's shift from the 'left' to the 'right', and his *attitudinal* shift from social to cultural activism. (The reader of Weblin's collection should consider supplementing it with 'Marxist Philosophy', 'Marxist Ethics', 'Freudianism and Society', 'The Meaning of Good', 'The Servile State' and 'The One Good' from *Studies*, as well as Anderson's once-notorious 'Art and Morality', republished in the 1982 collection of Anderson's writings on aesthetics edited by Graham Cullum and Kimon Lycos, *Art and Reality*.)

Anderson, when a Marxist, was a Marxist of a rather peculiar sort. First and foremost he was a philosopher, and the philosophy on which he cut his teeth in the University of Glasgow of the early 20th century was the Absolute Idealism of Caird, Latta and Henry Jones. As an Hegelian, Anderson was never particularly tolerant of those 'Hegelians' whose use of the 'dialectic' to carve up History as a portable and preachable commodity had left Marxism with the dubious honour of knowing more about the future than it was prepared to understand about the past. This probably explains the relative freedom with which Anderson pursued aesthetics and ethics. Though not as powerful a thinker on aesthetic and literary criticism as he was in general philosophy, Anderson never espoused the blinkered and barren 'necessitarianism' that Marxist historiography (and ethics and aesthetics) imposed upon its adherents.

Even at the time of what Weblin calls his 'communist' phase, Anderson repudiated Hegel's identification of 'philosophy' with 'the history of philosophy' (that is, 'progress'). But Hegel's general position on History was more complex than that of 'dialectical materialism', and Anderson

remained Hegelian enough to see in the philosophy of Hegel's favourite Greek thinker, Heraclitus, the grounds for genuine historical thinking. For Heraclitus strife and conflict rule human affairs; politics is the outcome of the tensions between humans at the limits of their power. History, by implication, is the story of such tensions and limitations. In history, *power* is contingent on fluctuations in the fabric of these tensions and limitations, and *liberty*—the major theme in Anderson's political writing after 1940—necessarily lives, in the expression of Benedetto Croce, 'a perilous and fighting life':

If anyone needs persuading that liberty cannot exist differently from the way it has lived and always will live in history, a perilous and fighting life, let him for a moment consider a world of liberty without obstacles, without menaces and without oppressions of any kind; immediately he will look away from this picture with horror as being something worse than death, an infinite boredom. (Croce, *History as the Story of Liberty*)

Weblin has been researching Anderson and his ideas since the early 1990s and he provides in the introduction and postscript to *A Perilous and Fighting Life* a balanced consideration of the phases of Anderson's political-intellectual trajectory as well as of its importance to Australian intellectual life today.

Anderson began his Australian career as an influential figure in the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). As he moved away from the Stalinist rigidities of the Party in the mid-1930s (he was never a Party member), he became a significant force in the foundation of Sydney Trotskyism, until by the early 1940s his philosophy of historical conflict dismissed that 'servile' part

of Marxism in which history had an 'end' and conflicts either came to an end or could be made manageable. At the same time (in fact, at *exactly* the same time), Anderson's political activism was so overtaken by his concern about the 'decline of culture' that he increasingly repudiated the 'levelling' tendencies of the doctrines of his previous political life and consequently all but ceased to be a major force on the Australian political-intellectual scene. This change had run its course by 1946, and accounts for the final 'phase' which Weblin describes as 'anti-Communist' and 'conservative'.

It is true that Anderson became an anti-Communist. In fact, he influenced a couple of generations of anti-Communists, and for this feat he has been awarded the left's badge of lifelong disdain (a majority decision; never a unanimous one). But it could not have been otherwise. The CPA of the 1920s presented itself as 'democratic' and 'pluralist'. It tolerated Anderson's philosophy of 'ways of life'; his conception of a dynamic proletariat challenging the 'dominant ruling class'—much of Anderson's rhetoric of the early Australian period was of a 'dominant ruling class'—and even, perhaps, his anti-'totalism'. Unfortunately Anderson really did believe in pluralism, and genuinely despised 'ruling class ideology' and the 'totalism' of not only the 'bourgeois state' but also of states as such. (One of his later repudiations was of the possibility that any state *could* be totalistic.)

His fellow communists, on the other hand, believed in strong organisation and Bolshevik principles of rulership. It was arguably they who betrayed the principles guiding Anderson's politics, long before he moved towards the position Weblin defines as his 'democratic phase' and beyond. Anderson, in any case, had

never been prepared to lay cultural activity on the Procrustes bed of 'social levelling'; his commitment to culture became politically transparent by 1945, by which time his political activism had been fully replaced by *cultural* activism by way of a theorisation of pessimism.

Subsequently, in the period Weblin defines as Anderson's 'conservative' phase, his open criticism of 'democratic illusions' had become as much an attack upon *politics* as the resolution of ethical imbalances as upon democracy itself.

[T]hinking is an active process, and . . . if we do not continually wrestle with problems and examine conceptions, we are reduced to saying things from which all or most of the meaning has ebbed away. And it is, perhaps, in political and social matters that the passage from inspiring discovery to pious platitude and thence to injurious humbug is most rapid. (p.249)

Or, as he wrote in *Honi Soit* in October 1954: 'The life of thinking is only one way of living, but it is one way.' For Anderson the life of thinking effectively displaced 'politics' as not only the most fulfilling way of living, but also as the only form of activism that could give 'progress' genuine meaning.

Mark Weblin and Pluto Press are to be commended for presenting us with Anderson's political thought over the whole period of his residence in Australia. Weblin's succinct commentary in his Introduction and 'Concluding Scientific Postscript' not only provides the reader with sufficient context to make Anderson understandable in an age that apparently has lost all intellectual connection with Croce, Hegel, Vico, Sorel, Heraclitus and the other political thinkers

in the dark background of our own 'postmodern' period, but also provides the most comprehensive account of Anderson's political thinking since Jim Baker's *Anderson's Social Philosophy* of 1979.

Andersonian scholarship has moved a long way in the 40 years since his death. Perhaps we are coming into a period when the various aspects of Anderson's thought can be taken for granted rather than being celebrated as a cult. Certainly there are cult aspects in treating Anderson's politics in isolation from the rest of his thought, but Weblin is comprehensive enough in this particular anthology to remind us that the greatness of a thinker lies not in the command they have of their thinking at any particular time, but in its overall unity, its consistency despite, rather than because of, the thinker's social needs.

Reviewed by Jim Packer

Act of Creation: The Founding of The United Nations
by Stephen C. Schlesinger
New York: Westview Press
2003, 352pp, US\$27.50
ISBN 08133 3324 5

A world without the United Nations is unknown to most of us. The organisation has been around, for good and not-so-good, for almost 60 years now. Yet few know much about its creation. Historians to date have ignored this pocket of our recent past, but Stephen C. Schlesinger, a foreign affairs historian and Director of the World Policy Institute at the New School University in New York, has changed that. His new book, *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United*

Nations, tells the story of the nine weeks of the Fall of 1945 when the world's foreign ministers, statesmen and press came to San Francisco to hammer out the UN's charter. Schlesinger's historical narrative is succinct, lucid, and well-researched. Indeed, there are passages that make the hairs on the back of one's neck stand on end, so well does he capture the essence of these times. But this book really makes its mark in three key messages, not explicitly stated but aimed squarely at those dealing with contemporary affairs.

The first is that the United Nations was never intended to be a talking shop with no clout. As Schlesinger's account makes clear, its main proponents—Franklin D. Roosevelt and, following his untimely death, Harry Truman—were clear-eyed, hard-headed realists determined to ensure that the UN did not meet the same fate as the League of Nations a generation before. Their men on the ground—Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, the chair of the founding conference, and Leo Pasvolosky, the State Department bureaucrat who nurtured the UN since it was first conceived in 1939—battled a sceptical Churchill, a recalcitrant Molotov and many reluctant smaller states during their nine weeks in San Francisco to create an organisation aimed not at governing the world but at preventing another major war.

The UN was designed to respect the sovereignty of the nation-state so long as threats to the peace, breaches of the peace or acts of aggression were not committed. But if they were, the Security Council, comprising the permanent five (the United States, the U.S.S.R., China, France and Britain) and a further rotating ten countries, was to take any necessary actions, including the application of force, to restore security. Such was the power its founding states delegated to the