there to be a successful synthesis between rights and responsibilities in Australia, the rights agenda has to be equally strong. Yet, according to Pearson the rights agenda is seen as politically irrelevant. He argues that it is not possible for one actor to play several roles in the dialectical process, and that it is up to someone else to take charge of Indigenous rights leadership.

Since this book was compiled, Pearson has resigned as Director of the Cape York Institute to fight Queensland’s wild rivers legislation, which on environmental grounds would restrict economic development beside rivers flowing through Indigenous land. Has his life come full circle back to his early career as an Aboriginal land rights activist or has he given up waiting for someone else to take up the mantle of Indigenous rights leadership?

Clearly, Pearson sees himself as a leader of his people, and though not everyone welcomes his campaign, he is not wrong in doing so. Pearson has proved that he is prepared to take the burden of responsibility that goes with leadership. He was not prepared to sit back in opposition and just offer perpetual commentary with only one trick up his sleeve—the power to say ‘no.’ Instead, he chose to set aside his personal distrust or dislike and work with the leaders of the day to put his ideas into practice.

The theme of leadership permeates throughout the book. It forms the basis of Pearson’s introductory chapter, where he discusses who have been Australia’s great leaders and what it takes to be a good leader. At times, this focus on leadership becomes a little tiresome, but it is interesting to read about Pearson’s growing respect for John Howard, his antipathy towards Kevin Rudd, and his take on Barack Obama’s presidency.

For this and many other reasons, Up from the Mission should appeal to more than just readers of Indigenous issues. Although the language is occasionally verbose and fanciful, most of the time Pearson demonstrates his ability to cut to the chase and get his point across. He can ram points home with a witty phrase and effective use of metaphorical imagery like ‘the welfare pedestal.’ His articles written for The Australian newspaper show that he is master of this genre. Despite the word restrictions, these are not superficial rantings but heartfelt and deeply thought out prose.

This is an illuminating book—both for exposing the causes of Aboriginal disadvantage and for its insight into the life of a very interesting and enigmatic individual. His career as a lawyer, activist and writer support his argument for Aboriginal people to gain the education to live in ‘both worlds.’ That there is an Aboriginal Australian of his calibre from such a small remote community like Hope Vale is cause for hope. He has shown the way—may others follow in his path.

Reviewed by Sara Hudson

For the Common Good: Principles of American Academic Freedom
by Matthew W. Finkin and Robert C. Post
Yale University Press
New Haven, 2009
US$18.15, 263pp
ISBN 9780300143546

I recently received an irate letter from one of Australia’s moderately well-known politicians. According to my correspondent, academics from my university were distributing pro-Palestinian ‘propaganda’ via a website.

Some of his constituents found this irksome, and it was incumbent upon me as vice-chancellor to make these academics stop.

On investigation, I found that some of our academics were indeed broadcasting their views on Middle East politics on a website that did not belong to the university. Still, as I wrote in reply, even if the website were ours, I would neither be able nor willing to make them stop. This is what academics do, I explained. They express their views. This does not mean that I, or my university, agree with what they say. However, in a phrase often misattributed to Voltaire, we defend their right to say it.

Even as I posted the envelope, I knew this was not the response my correspondent desired. I soon received a copy of a letter he had written to the federal Minister for Education asking her to intervene. She demurred; universities, she pointed out, were under the jurisdiction of state not federal governments.

The politician and I shared a few more desultory exchanges and then our correspondence died out as it had on many similar occasions in the 13 years that I have been a vice-chancellor. Everyone champions freedom of expression in the abstract but few can resist calling for censorship when they do not like what is being expressed.

Even in the United States, where the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, there were once Sedition Acts that made it illegal to criticise the president; even today, there are laws banning libel, obscenity and hate speech. To paraphrase the title of a popular book on free speech, it is very difficult to get people to grant freedom to ideas they hate.

As Matthew Finkin and Robert Post make clear in their book, there
have always been ideas that those in power considered too dangerous to be expressed. Socrates and Galileo come to mind. Finkin and Post describe dozens of others who were gagged, fired or banished because of their views on flag burning, evolution and, of course, sex.

As already noted, the freedom to express one’s views on these and other controversial topics is protected in the United States by the First Amendment and by common law, and implied constitutional guarantees in Australia. However, as Finkin and Post make clear, academic freedom is something different. It is the ‘freedom to pursue the scholarly profession according to the standards of that profession’ (p. 7). Their book is not concerned with legal rights or precedents. Instead, they review the history of academic freedom by examining cases considered by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), a professional body, not a court.

A modern starting point was Stanford University’s dismissal of economist Edward A Ross in 1900 for advocating ‘free silver.’ The university argued that, as an employer, it had the right to dismiss staff who professed doctrines with which its Trustees (Council in Australian universities) disagreed. An editorial in the New York Times suggested that those who objected to this principle should find some backers and ‘establish a university of their own’ (p. 12).

In 1915, the AAUP issued a Declaration directly contradicting this view. The AAUP claimed that university academics are not like other employees; they are more like court judges. Once appointed, a competent judge’s conclusions cannot be second-guessed by those who appoint them. Academics are similar. They are appointed to advance knowledge. To do this, they must have ‘independence of thought and the ability to undermine widely held beliefs’ (p. 35). Offence and disapproval are not grounds for silencing researchers.

In a compact and clear history, Finkin and Post chart the growth of academic freedom (along with a few setbacks). The 1915 Declaration was gradually refined as it became clear that academic freedom does not mean that academics can say or do whatever they want. Protected academic opinions must derive from the work of scholars using the methods of their profession in an accurate, reasonable and fair way.

Note that this formulation of academic freedom is fundamentally different from legal notions of freedom of speech. You are free to say the earth is flat or that two plus two equals five. No one can stop you. But this does not entitle you to hold a professorial chair in geography or mathematics. Competence is essential. Academics earn the right to special latitude because they are professionals who can competently assess evidence using the methods of their profession.

Of course, the shape of the earth or the sum of two plus two are not really open to question. Problems arise when academics address controversial matters such as Middle East politics where scholars hold different opinions. The rhetoric becomes particularly strident when academics express controversial opinions (usually referred to as ‘biases’ by those with opposing views) in the classroom.

A recent example is the Australian Senate’s Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2008 report Allegations of Academic Bias in Universities and Schools? A series of witnesses complained to the committee about academics who were biased against conservative philosophers or Christians or Jews. Witnesses argued for balance and fairness, for education not indoctrination.

As Finkin and Post point out, balance is not only impossible it is also undesirable. The whole point of higher education is to show how ideas are weighed, assessed and analysed and how they are ultimately accepted, rejected or modified. Ideas cannot be treated equally in the classroom. Otherwise, biologists would have to teach creationism, philosophers would have to teach the Kabala, and economists would have to teach the free silver ideas that got Edward Ross into so much trouble at Stanford. Finkin and Page argue that what the public should expect from academics is competence in their fields and that they are good role models for the professional techniques and values of their discipline. It would also be a good idea if they avoided introducing irrelevancies into their lectures (such as ‘well, thank God the Howard government is gone’).

In addition to the freedom to conduct research and freedom in the classroom, Finkin and Post describe what they call freedom of intramural and extramural speech. The former can be rephrased as freedom to criticise the vice-chancellor while the latter is freedom to speak in the media.

Stopping academics from pointing out the many failings of their vice-chancellor is impossible (believe me, I know). Talking to the media is trickier. Most universities require academics to stick to their professional
area or make clear that their opinions are their own. As Finkin and Post make clear, universities that adopt such policies are implicitly approving what academics say in their area of expertise; probably not what the policy intended.

This excellent book leaves the reader with the strong feeling that academic freedom is worth protecting. Occasionally, academics will say things that annoy some people, but this is the price we pay for advancing knowledge.

Reviewed by Steven Schwartz
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Endnotes
1 Anthony Lewis, Freedom for the Thought That We Hate: A Biography of the First Amendment (Basic Books, 2008).
2 Allegations of Academic Bias in Universities and Schools, Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (Commonwealth of Australia, 4 December 2008).
3 As above, 14.

Lords of Finance:
The Bankers Who Broke the World
by Liaquat Ahamed
William Heinemann, 2009
US$27.75, 576pp
ISBN 9780434015412

For those interested in political economy and international finance, the events of recent years have been astounding. Jumbo-sized banks being brought low by poor investments and rogue traders, whole countries sinking under the weight of financial sectors that their economies cannot support, investors switching from market-melting despair to stratospheric optimism and vice versa in the space of a day, extraordinary interventions by governments and central banks, international conferences useless for anything but grandstanding and photo-ops. We’re seeing it all.

And we’re not the first. Those living in the 1920s and ’30s were witness to the same events, although their experiences were more vivid and horrible than ours. The story of this period, and of the people who shaped it, is told in Liaquat Ahamed’s wonderful Lords of Finance. Five years in the making, and with its release timed almost to perfection, Ahamed’s book details how the great and the good of Europe and the United States imposed pre-World War I institutions on a world that, distorted by inflation, war debts, and US preponderance in trade and finance, could no longer bear them, and then watched helplessly as their policies drove the world into deflation and despair.

One of the most striking aspects of the story is the lack of creativity among the lords of finance as they made policy in the 1920s and early ’30s. Well-educated, worldly and sophisticated, and placed in social circles brimming with experience and debate, they showed few signs of being able to adapt their thinking to the new circumstances after the war.

Their personalities didn’t help. Montagu Norman at the Bank of England was a flaky and arrogant control freak, dismissive of the new science of economics and relying only on his untutored instincts. Hjalmar Schacht at the Reichsbank was a self-aggrandising careerist with appalling judgment and a character bypass. Emile Moreau at the Banque de France was a veteran Treasury whiteshirt who saw financial policy as yet another instrument for extending la gloire de France. The only person with both feet on the ground was Ben Strong at the US Federal Reserve—Ahamed sees him as the model of a modern central banker—but he died just as the world began tipping into the abyss.

Worse, the international situation weighed against them. The French, having been bled white in conflict and terrified of a resurgent Reich, had pushed the Allied powers to impose punitive reparations payments on Germany. The Germans, never having accepted responsibility for the war, and with their own economy in a shambles, tried every trick in the book—including hyperinflation—to avoid paying reparations. Without reparations from Germany, the French could not repay their loans from the British, and the British and the French could not repay the Americans—who in turn dug in their heels against debt restructuring.

Meanwhile much of the world’s gold had gravitated either to the now-dominant United States or—by virtue of an undervalued franc—to France, leaving the Bank of England with little backing for its efforts to re-peg sterling at $4.86. Strong’s efforts to support with low interest rates Norman’s dream of recreating London as a financial centre led to a bubble on Wall Street and extravagant lending to a shaky Germany. The withdrawal of cheap money in the late ’20s caused both processes to reverse, crushing the US and German economies. But the bankers’ attachment to ‘sound money’ and the gold peg meant that