

clinging to Islamic attitudes to sex, violence and money is the cause of their suffering. In place of these attitudes, Hirsi Ali advocates the confident reassertion of contemporary Western social values that provide superior outcomes in people's lives.

For those who have read Hirsi Ali's earlier autobiographical works, *Nomad* may seem a less powerful progression. Hirsi Ali's fascinating life is well worth documenting, but pumping out three autobiographical books by the age of 40 has led to some disappointing and distracting repetition in *Nomad*.

Infidel offered raw details and often disturbing accounts of Hirsi Ali's life growing up under Islam. Her bravery and frankness in making her personal experiences public has, as in the feminist catchcry, made them political. Yet the potency of *Nomad* is the weight Hirsi Ali gives to policy rather than ideology. Hirsi Ali has a surer grip on the enormous issues she is grappling with and her certainty about positive solutions to them is closer at hand than in her earlier books. Her time at the American Enterprise Institute is reflected in her recent writing, in which she more clearly proposes solutions to the clash between Islam and the West.

Nomad is peppered with Hirsi Ali's poetic turn of phrase and the book flows intelligibly, although one discordant note is the facile list of the many airports she has travelled through and the folksy encounters with Dutch travellers. This chapter reads as though Hirsi Ali is labouring to justify the title of her book. I would argue that it is the subtitle that is more interesting and worthwhile, and something

she achieves without awkwardly spoon feeding her readers.

Hirsi Ali's aim is to change, or at least open up, the minds of millions of Muslims and multiculturalists, so her books are appropriately pitched at a general audience. While *Nomad* is insightful and easily read, it may have been more powerfully presented as a series of more formal essays or policy recommendations rather than the first person autobiographical style we're so familiar with in her writing. Having gained the world's attention, Hirsi Ali's many readers and admirers are ready for a more solid presentation of her policy ideas to instigate a new surge by the West in the clash of civilisations.

Reviewed by Leonie Phillips

Why vs Why Gay Marriage

Yes **by Rodney Croome**

No **by Bill Muehlenberg**

Pantera Press, 2010

\$19.95, 120 pages

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In 2004, the Howard government amended the *Marriage Act* to clarify that only heterosexual marriages would be granted and recognised in Australia. While pilloried by advocates of same-sex marriage, the amendments ensured same-sex marriage was off the election agenda at a time when its supporters were unlikely to win the fight.

But with shifting public sentiment and accumulating international precedents, the push to allow same-sex marriages is back. Recently Argentina's Parliament changed its law. So has Spain's. California's Proposition 8, which had successfully banned same-sex

marriage, is being challenged in the Federal District Court, while public opinion polls show Californians regret their decision. The former US First Lady Laura Bush disclosed her support for same-sex marriage in her biography. And Greens Party leader, Bob Brown, advocated same-sex marriage on morning television to rounds of applause.

The essays in *Why vs Why* on 'gay marriage'—for opening marriage to same-sex couples by Rodney Croome and against by Bill Muehlenberg—attempt to provide some clarity to inform public debate. But they fail in their task.

The arguments of both Muehlenberg and Croome are entirely predictable.

For Muehlenberg, marriage is a time-tested institution within which heterosexual couples raise children. Apparently same-sex couples don't want marriage; they are promiscuous and cannot conform to the expectations of monogamy; there is a homosexual agenda to destroy the family; and the biological incapacity of same-sex couples to have children without the assistance of a third party justifies excluding them from his sacred institution.

For Croome, accessing same-sex marriage is about equality, the rights of consenting adults, the necessity for a secular and universal law applying to every Australian, and the 'benefits' denied to same-sex couples.

But neither presents a bullet-proof case.

To justify the incompatibility between homosexuals and marriage, Muehlenberg attacks homosexual men for being promiscuous. The obvious retort is that heterosexual

people, in and out of wedlock, are also promiscuous.

Muehlenberg also fails to address the deeper issue of human sexuality when it is not regulated by social conventions. The majority of society has generally preferred homosexuality to be out-of-sight and out-of-mind, and as a consequence the gay community operated outside of the mainstream and social norms. Without established social norms such as monogamy, especially in wedlock, there is no expectation that people conform to them.

Instead of being an argument against opening marriage to homosexual couples, Muehlenberg's argument is the reverse. The best way to help regulate homosexual couples into mainstream social norms like monogamy isn't to keep them locked out of those social norms but to encourage them to participate in them. But such an argument presumes that society accepts homosexuality in the first place.

Muehlenberg's worst argument is that 'that there is another agenda at work here' to 'redefine marriage ... (to) more easily redefine and ultimately destroy family.'

There's no doubt that the contemporary family takes many forms, but it is a spectacular claim that advocates for same-sex marriage want to destroy the family itself—especially since Muehlenberg cannot explain the objective of same-sex marriage advocates in wanting to destroy the family.

By comparison, Croome's often weak arguments appear impressive. Croome regularly confuses human rights, which are universal, with civil rights, which are granted by

society. State-sponsored marriage is not a human right. Non-state-sponsored marriage can be a by-product of the human right to freely associate. State-sponsored marriage is a civil right. And until MPs in our elected representative government change their mind, same-sex couples won't be getting married.

The clearest weakness in Croome's argument is that without access to marriage, Australian same-sex couples are treated differently under the law beyond simply the right to marry. Croome is right but fails to explore the ways government can address these problems and defaults to marriage as the solution.

The denial of marriage to same-sex couples is not as crippling for Australians as Americans. In the United States, many federal and state civil rights only extend to married couples. By denying same-sex couples the opportunity to marry, the government is denying access to the institution as well as other government programs, such as welfare, joint tax-return filing, and superannuation. In some cases, the impact on same-sex couples is horrific, including some states not recognising the relationship of a partner to their ill or deceased same-sex partner and denying them judgment over health decisions and estate entitlements. But many of these problems are also faced by unmarried heterosexual couples.

For Australian same-sex couples, accessing marriage is primarily symbolic. There are examples of Australian same-sex couples being given the short shrift because they

are not married, including being required to apply to the Foreign Investment Review Board to buy a house when one partner is not an Australian citizen. But the same also applies to unmarried heterosexual couples, who only enjoy the additional choice to get married.

Instead of rehashing tired equality arguments, Croome should look at more creative solutions to achieve his objective. An entertaining path may be to get the Quaker faith, which recognises same-sex marriage, to challenge the Commonwealth's ability to regulate marriage against same-sex couples under Section 116 of the Constitution, which limits the Commonwealth legislating to impose 'any religious observance, or from prohibiting the free exercise of any religion.'

But it is also the fusion of civil and religious marriage that is making the issue difficult to resolve. Both authors accept that government has a responsibility to both legislate and confer marriage, with benefits attached. Neither asks the essential question of why government regulates marriage in the first place.

The logical solution isn't to continue with the current zero-sum political game, which Croome has lost and Muehlenberg has won. The solution is to find a pathway to government recognising marriage as a form of public contract between consenting adults and allowing religions to define and celebrate marriages in their own, private way.

With public opinion polls rapidly shifting in Croome's favour, it's



likely the burden for a creative solution will soon fall on on Muehlenberg and his supporters.

Rather than being an insightful assessment of the arguments for and against 'gay marriage,' the *Why vs Why* essays demonstrate how little is being fought over in the debate to extend marriage to same-sex couples. But it is often the smallest and most irrelevant prizes that attract the fiercest fights and the most absurd hyperbole.

Reviewed by Tim Wilson

A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy

by Jonathan Israel

Princeton University Press

New Jersey, 2009

US\$26.95, 296 pages

ISBN 9781400831609

It is too early, of course, for a thoroughgoing history of the modern era. Even a decade into the new century, things are still too unsettled. Plus, we are all compromised. Even when we try for a measure of objectivity, we are still hopelessly modern. Modernity is the frame, the ethos, through which and in which we operate. Even when we attempt to be anti-modern, or post-modern—we look to modernity for our cues. We have not yet found the solvent that will free us from its influence, and modernity has proven sticky indeed.

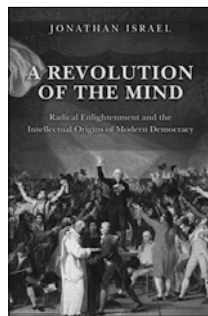
In the meantime, two thinkers are laying the groundwork for

emancipation, writing at least towards an *intellectual* history of the modern age. The first and most eminent is Charles Taylor. His *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1992) and *A Secular Age* (2007) are magisterial treatments, uncanny in the way new things are, and likely flawed in the same manner. They are breathtaking but unavoidably provisional first steps. The second thinker, whose leap forward is no less impressive for being more emphatic, is Jonathan Israel. His genius is not yet as widely understood, but his virtuosity is on display in this relatively short book.

Israel's bread and butter work is 'concerned with European and European colonial history from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century, with particular emphasis on the history of ideas.' He is an authority on 'the Dutch Golden Age (1590–1713), including the Dutch global trade system, seventeenth-century Dutch Jewry and Spinoza' and his writing has taken in 'the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688–91 in Britain, and Spanish imperial strategy especially in Mexico, the Caribbean and the Low Countries.'

It is, however, his most recent writing—a three-volume monograph on radical Enlightenment thought—that will determine his legacy. *A*

Revolution of the Mind presents only a limited set of conclusions from that wider project; it is an accessible (but not entirely general) primer published between volumes two and three of the intellectual history.



Israel's contention is simple. Most historians of the post-Enlightenment West have it wrong. Swayed by Marxism and a 'modish multiculturalism infused with postmodernism,' they overstate the importance of economic conditions when accounting for social and political upheaval. They also miss (or too hastily reject) what Israel offers as the key fact about the 'General Revolution' that swept Europe and the American colonies in the mid- to late eighteenth century: it was a 'revolution of the mind', instigated and fed by Radical Enlightenment thinkers who 'aspired one day to carry through a successful revolution of fact, leading to an entirely new kind of society.'

To prove his thesis, Israel needs to show that:

- a) certain ideas were in play—religious toleration if not outright atheism, a robust democratic framework, and a revolutionary notion of equality,
- b) there was indeed a revolution of the mind (i.e. the minds swayed were influential), and
- c) radical thought came to the fore during moments of consequence in France, in the American colonies, and elsewhere.

This he does with ease. He shows, indeed, how American independence and the French Revolution sprang from radical thinking, filling in the details with detours into Dutch, English, and