

Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, we will survey the preceding chapters, consider the implications of our argument for various fields of historical literature, and sum up.

Overview of the narrative

In Chapter One, we studied Elkin's involvement as an undergraduate in an Australian school of the moral philosophy, Idealism. Its national character implied no break with its parent, British Idealism. In each, Evangelical and Christian Socialist roots were more important than rational system. These national schools of Idealism had different problems. The British Idealists were preoccupied with the contest between privilege and opportunity. The Australian Idealists celebrated the 'equality of opportunity and conditions' that Australia afforded white men, and sought to make the white man's gains a step towards the betterment of humanity in general. His Idealist teachers showed Elkin how the cultural inheritance of liberal Christendom could be reformulated without traditional dogma.

Elkin, for reasons we investigated in Chapter Two, determined that Idealism should complement, and not replace, his commitment to organised Christianity. Conversely, religion underpinned but also challenged Elkin's scholarship. Even scholarly Anglicanism conflicted in key respects with the more secular spiritual mission of the Idealists. This tension was the prologue to his enquiry into Aboriginal religion and to the reformist aspiration that turned his scholarship towards activism.

As a graduate, Elkin found a mentor in Ernest Burgmann, a charismatic young leader in the Church; they shared Anglo-Catholic but also Idealist leanings. We compared the relation between faith, learning, and belonging that Elkin and Burgmann each indicated autobiographically. Elkin's tragic childhood disposed him to find belonging in enduring, impersonal forms. In contrast, Burgmann drew on his sanguine relations with his parents to present his self-exploration as a model of personal faith. Each saw religion and science as equal partners, but Elkin's objective spiritual dynamic disposed him to the more rigorous engagement with scientific method.

Elkin followed Burgmann's suggestions that there was a fertile nexus between Christian mission and anthropology. In Chapter Three, we studied Elkin's analysis of seminal anthropologists: the Christians Robertson Smith and Marett, and the proto-structuralist, Emile Durkheim. All four thinkers (including Elkin) were functionalists. They agreed that in primitive

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religion, ritual was more fundamental than dogma. This premise complemented Elkin's Catholic Anglicanism and his personal inclination towards objective religious forms. Functionalism also placed the working of contingent groups, such as Elkin's parish communities, at the centre of social analysis. This focus was of great importance for Elkin, because it consolidated intellectually his existential and spiritual adherence to a religious mode of communal belonging.

Against Durkheim's atheism, Elkin supported Robertson Smith and especially Marett's psychological interpretation of Aborigines' conception of divine power. Like Marett, Elkin emphasized the experience of awe in the face of nature as the basis of religious submission to a higher power. Elkin attempted to step further towards Christian apologetics by (equivocally) seeking to demonstrate that Aborigines apprehended a *personal* 'god-stuff'; that the divine being Aborigines experienced through ritual was universal; and so totemism somehow supported the specifically Christian notion of God. At the same time, he subscribed to an evolutionary ontology. Elkin's ideas about nature, science, personality, and the supernatural became somewhat confused. During the following decade, he contrived to ignore or accommodate this problem; its resolution, 1930–1931, was the turning point of his career.

Elkin's years with the diffusionists in the mid-1920s saw his scientific ambition rise, to complicate and overshadow his religious commitment. Was the 'secret society' of the priestly caste a mysterious, glamorous, multi-millennia ruse, as Grafton Elliot Smith and W. J. Perry (and Nietzsche) held? Or was it a conduit of psychological wisdom and technique, as Rivers suggested? Naturally enough, Reverend Elkin sided with the psychologist, but grew quiet in these years concerning his religious commitment – a spiritual eclipse that was influenced by his unease with British Anglicanism's class prejudice and imperialist complacency.

This religious faltering likely contributed to the uncoordinated perspectives that characterised Elkin's thinking following his doctorate and fieldwork in anthropology. In the diffusionist school of anthropology, we saw in Chapter Four, Elkin learnt to combine three influential ways of approaching the study of primitive humanity. Elliot Smith was a pre-eminent racial scientist. Rivers was a social psychologist and seminal social anthropologist, that is, he espoused both a voluntarist psychology and structural sociology. Elliot Smith and Rivers agreed that anthropology was a central 'human studies' that must be approached through historical study of cultural contingency. Thus diffusionism afforded racialist, voluntarist, structuralist, and (necessarily) historical perspectives upon primitive cultures.

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Racialism and structuralism dominated Australian anthropology in the years following Elkin's return in 1928, we saw in Chapter Five. Elkin's Christian and Idealist commitments, still relatively dim at this time, nevertheless inclined him against the determinism that characterised both racial and structural approaches. Following a year of fieldwork in the Kimberleys, north-western Australia, he wondered aloud whether Rivers' psychological voluntarism may not provide a better model than either racialism or pure structuralism.

In Chapter Six, we explored the long-standing symbiosis in anthropology between social psychology and Catholic (or High) Anglican Christian mission. We saw that Rivers' exposition of the 'psychological factor', and the young Elkin's path into anthropology each followed from the High Anglican Robert Codrington's Melanesian ethnography. We also saw how Rivers used the 'psychological factor' to inform colonial governance, and Elkin acted in accordance with it when he first intervened in Aboriginal affairs. Elkin's Forrest River Report to the Australian Board of Missions in 1928, which he wrote while in the Kimberleys and in which he applied Rivers' ideas, marked the beginning of his acculturative policy development.

But as befits a religious development, Elkin's intervention in mission policy and practice in 1928 was more a matter of moral conviction than ratiocination, our analysis of the Report showed. From moral and spiritual reflex, Elkin set in train a movement for reform of missionary methods in Australia. He advocated acculturation as the scientific expression of a Christian imperative in contact situations. By this he meant that settler Australian Christians were obliged to assist Aborigines to make sense of the invading society on their own terms, through an adaptation of their own religion and culture. Christian Mission must banish the idea of individual conversion (and so drop the goal of enculturative assimilation), and instead work from and for collective Aboriginal autonomy (and acculturation).

Following the Report, Elkin arrived at an impasse. He sought a broader, secular context for scientifically informed policy reform, but found that racist science provided more and harder evidence for the eliminationist status quo than psychology or diffusionism could garner for an alternative. In his 1929 account of Aboriginal policy options, the series of five articles he called 'The Practical Value of Anthropology' he took a national perspective (as against that of the Anglican Church), and argued that the racial view should set policy goals, and that social anthropology should determine the methods used to meet those goals. That is, he argued that settler policy-makers and administrators must base policy upon the (seemingly) objective, racial

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view of Aboriginal affairs, but also that the Aboriginal point of view demanded a social (psychological and structural) approach. This position was tenable and convenient. Elkin did not have to move beyond it; he did so for religious reasons.

The context and analysis of the 'Practical Value' series was the wide centre of this thesis, set out in Chapter Four and elaborated in Chapters Five and Six. As mentioned in the Introduction, the importance of the series consists in the fact that Elkin wrote it as a problem poser; in subsequent writings he positioned himself as a problem solver. In 1929, he candidly laid out the full range of problems – racial, structural-functional, and psychological – that he considered relevant to culture contact in Australia. Afterwards, especially (as we saw in Chapter Nine) once he was Australia's sole professor of anthropology, he strategically delimited the perspectives and data that he believed would lead to the best results for Aborigines and for settler Australia. The 'Practical Value' series is our key text for understanding what Elkin thought, as against what he decided he and others ought to think.

The series reveals the conflict between positivistic science on the one hand and a combination of Idealism, psychology, and religious commitment on the other. In 1929, Elkin sought to establish himself as a scientific expert but his attempt was compromised by an Idealist impulse he had not yet integrated with his desire to advance as a professional scientist. Paradoxically, Elkin rose to eminence as a scientist only after he subordinated the evidentiary norm and instead based his policy advocacy upon religious and civic obligation.

His religious epiphany, inspired by the intensity of Aborigines' reverence for symbols and stories, led this reorganisation of Elkin's various knowledge fields. In the central Australian desert, we saw in Chapter Seven, Elkin reformulated the common foundation for traditional Aboriginal religion and Christianity. Invoking Darwin, Durkheim, and the Psalmist of the Old Testament, Elkin built a new phase of syncretic thinking upon the attitude of reverence, as against the idea of personal freedom or a personal God. He allowed that the freedom that Christian saints had long associated with the face of Jesus Christ was not necessarily reflected in Aborigines' experience of the divine. Rather, Aborigines' relationship with the divine was based in a communal attitude of awe that produced a moral and spiritual discipline upon which depended Aborigines' very survival as a people. Reverence, which Elkin associated especially with ritual and symbol, became his key indicator of vital religion.

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From the life-giving experience of religious reverence arose the society-sustaining commitment to duty, he argued. These prime phenomena were common to Aborigines and settlers, and indeed reverence for Ideals and conscientiousness in their service formed the basis for Elkin's mature approach to Aboriginal affairs. He used his account of a desert epiphany to convey his commitment to faith and duty, as impulses that arose from the religious transformation, via the collective search for spiritual continuity through norms, or Ideals, of the universal problem of mortality. Thus mortality and reverence took the place of personality and freedom at the existential level of Elkin's theory of the human spirit and its culture, enabling him to reconcile Darwin, Durkheim, totemism and Christianity in a new idea of faith's primacy.

In the following years, civic obligation followed from religious aspiration in forming Elkin's policy. In Chapter Eight, we approached territory already well covered in the historiography, but focused on the oft-ignored years immediately before Elkin became Professor of Anthropology (1933) and President of the Association of Native Races (1934). Elkin first implied and indirectly argued for an acculturative policy in a report to a board of Christian missions, we saw in Chapter Six. In Chapter Eight, we found that the occasion on which he first decisively dropped racialism was in 1930, at a seminar he ran for clergymen. He began his campaign for a positive policy for Aborigines when he was invited to take a leadership role in a civic-religious organization, the Association for the Protection of Native Races. His expertise amplified the preponderantly affirmative mode of reformism, which the APNR had already pursued for twenty years, even as he sounded the note of national shame. From 1931, duty was the prime mover in Elkin's policy development. He took crucial steps forward in religious and civic-religious forums, and promoted science that would support his moral agenda.

In Chapter Nine, we studied the secondary but crucial role that evidence played in Elkin's policy development. For moral reasons, and despite the evidence, he dismissed Stanley Porteus' warnings about the statistically significant gap between Aborigines and Europeans' responses to basic exercises in literacy and numeracy. To promote a religious focus, and with a slim basis in evidence, he replaced Radcliffe-Brown's emphasis on the Aboriginal 'horde' as the basic social structure with a focus on the Aboriginal elder as the basic religious and political authority. In these and other ways, Elkin set his goals in pursuit of moral and spiritual (acculturative) ends; then sought evidence to show the goals were viable; and only then recalibrated his goals in the

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light of closer detail of contact situations (and still with reference to the desired end of acculturation).

Acculturation might not succeed but ought to be the policy goal, he insisted. He urged his fellow anthropologists to study contact situations in order to support acculturation wherever possible, even if enculturation was well advanced. This objective had practical as well as moral reasons. When an Aboriginal society collapsed, he observed, distinctively Aboriginal loyalties and (especially existential or religious) responses to problems and opportunities (such as those that follow a death) resurfaced. Through these, if Aborigines' neighbours 'played their part unselfishly, respectfully and without prejudice', some aspects of acculturation could resume.

To round off our chapter summary, let us survey in three short paragraphs how Elkin co-ordinated spiritual, intellectual, moral, political and scientific commitments:

In the years 1918 to 1921, inspired by Aboriginal religion, he reconciled himself to his agnostic Christianity on the grounds that vital religion was a social function, independent of dogma. In the Kimberleys in 1928, he applied a Riversian model of anthropology, built on respect for Aborigines' elders, against the Anglican (and wider Australian) norm that the Aboriginal point of view was unhelpful.

But in 1929, he curtailed that development, recommending that racial science should go on setting the policy parameters for Aboriginal affairs; humanitarians should work with the Aboriginal point of view merely to ease the transition to an Australia without a distinct Aboriginal culture.

Then, without repudiating the overall diagnosis he had drawn from racial science, from 1931, he urged his fellow Anglicans and scientists to subordinate the racial perspective to the cultural when formulating policy. This change was for reasons personal and religious, public and moral. Thenceforward, Elkin had significant success in persuading settler Australian elites to follow his own change of mind.

By detailing these personal and institutional turnings, this thesis has shed new light on Idealism and Anglicanism in mid-twentieth century political culture, and their long-lasting influence, through Elkin, upon the course of Australian Aboriginal affairs.

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Implications of this thesis for relevant fields of scholarly literature

A central contribution of this thesis has been to show that in the Australian context Elkin's acculturative agenda was an original development. Historians have established that Elkin was one of the leading players in Australian Aboriginal affairs,¹ and that he developed an acculturative mode of assimilation.² We can now see that he became a leader in Aboriginal affairs, and not just one more expert, because of his exacting commitment to the triad of religious faith, civic obligation and scientific endeavour. This commitment required of him a new moral agenda that unified Christian mission, social anthropology, public opinion and national policy. The unifying moral was settler Australians' obligation to support Aborigines' 'positive freedom' to develop modern Aboriginal society.

The importance of this project is evident in the new perspective we can bring to three highpoints in Elkin's contribution to Aboriginal affairs. Firstly, in the years 1933 and 1934, he was the figurehead of a nationwide upsurge in indignation at the 'spectacular injustice' meted out to 'Tuckiar' and other Aborigines by courts in the Northern Territory. Prior to Elkin's involvement from 1931, the civic-religious Association for the Protection of Native Races was near-impotent. In Chapter Eight, we saw how Elkin's leadership in the APNR renewed an Anglican Australian tradition of moral exhortation in alliance with key statesmen, in this case Hubert Murray. The renewal came, on the one hand, through Elkin's subordination of social science within a moral agenda, and yet, on the other hand, by virtue of Elkin's scientific expertise.

Secondly, historians have accepted Bill Stanner's judgement that in 1938 Elkin wielded unprecedented scientific influence upon national policy.³ He balanced the competing interests, moral and industrial, that the Australian Government sought to placate or satisfy. The key point our study brings to this juncture is that Elkin's policy framework was founded upon compromises: between the ideal of acculturation and the inevitability of enculturation; between

¹ CD Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society: Aboriginal Policy and Practice Vol. 1* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1970), 47, 298–299, 329–330; *idem*, *Outcasts in White Australia: Aboriginal Policy and Practice—Vol. III* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1971), 36, 73–77, 383–388; Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1889–1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997).

² Russell McGregor, 'Assimilation as Acculturation: AP Elkin on the Dynamics of Cultural Change', in Tim Rowse (ed.), *Contesting Assimilation* (Perth: API Network, 2005), 169–183; Tim Rowse, 'Introduction' in *Contesting Assimilation*, 1–24; Tim Rowse, 'The Post-War Social Science of Assimilation 1947–1966' in *ibid*, 151–168; and Robert van Krieken, 'Assimilation and Liberal Government', in *ibid.*, 39–48.

³ Rowley, *Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, 329–330.

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practical and pure science. For Elkin, following Anderson and Green, ‘practical’ meant ‘in support of basic freedoms’, not (as for Radcliffe-Brown) ‘in pursuit of final knowledge’. Elkin believed that Aborigines must be allowed to enter global society, through a supported engagement with settler Australia, even though, he wrote, the project might fail. Better a failed attempt at inclusion than successfully imposed racial policies of segregation and absorption. In the two decades leading up to his zenith as an expert, Elkin’s co-ordination of science, opinion and politics within the Idealist project had resigned him to the fact that Aboriginal affairs must be a difficult, long-term project, with unclear outcomes.

Thirdly, as Tim Rowse first pinpointed, an exchange in 1959 between Hasluck and Elkin was a crucial juncture in the history of assimilation.⁴ After several years of private criticism, Elkin publicly criticised Hasluck’s policy (specifically, Hasluck’s non-recognition of certain forms of Aboriginal group solidarity). This breaking of the assimilationists’ ranks was a turning point in the transition from an absolutely enculturative post-war policy towards the broader pursuit from 1960 of Elkin’s own acculturative ideal and other versions of Aboriginal self-determination. In the 1930s, Elkin’s priority was to establish cultural assimilation and not racial outcomes as the policy norm. By 1960, he was able to argue for a certain kind of assimilation – the kind that had inspired his mature commitment to Aboriginal affairs. His Idealist project of national ideals (such as a white Australia) working towards international ideals (racially inclusive egalitarianism), and these expanding to encompass universal ideals, equipped him well for gradual processes of reform.

An appreciation of Elkin’s gradualism has implications for historians’ dating of the assimilation era, for which Hasluck’s term (1951 to 1963) as Minister for Territories has often been the marker.⁵ Hasluck’s policy was short-lived, but assimilation continues (albeit under different names) in Aborigines’ lives and as policy. Historians who see that acculturative projects, including some attempts to support Aboriginal self-determination, are part of an ongoing assimilation policy, might date the assimilation era from 1931, and not from 1951. In Australian Aboriginal affairs, Elkin’s era contains and exceeds Hasluck’s era.

⁴ Tim Rowse, ‘The Modesty of the State: Hasluck and the Anthropological Critics of Assimilation’, in Tom Stannage, Kay Saunders and Richard Nile (eds.), *Paul Hasluck in Australian History* (St Lucia, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1993), 119–132; and *idem*, ‘The Post-War Social Science of Assimilation 1947–1966’.

⁵ *Idem*, ‘Introduction’, *Contesting Assimilation*, 1–4.

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Elkin's leadership of morality against racialism illumines several fields of historical enquiry. The history of Anglicanism in the twentieth century now has a case study (and not merely a figurehead presumed to represent the whole, as Elkin appeared in Thompson's account) in Australian post-colonial politics.⁶ The politics of acculturation that Elkin launched can now be seen as a subset of the Idealist legacy and 'new liberalism' taught in Australia by Francis Anderson. Elkin championed the 'spiritual fact' that the right to cultural continuity imposed a civic obligation upon settler Australians against rival strands of liberalism that (in effect) preferred the opportunities afforded to Aborigines by the rule of law, industry and cash. Thus Gregory Melleuish's construct of 'cultural liberalism' now has a sharp focus for the influence of Francis Anderson's legacy upon Australian national policy.⁷

We have reason to review longer historical perspectives. Our study of Christian Idealism's influence upon Elkin makes it easier to imagine a general history that reveals the influence upon Australian opinion and politics of religious continuity and change. Australian cultural liberalism continued T. H. Green's transformation of the Methodist revival in nineteenth century England into a reformist credo for knowledge elites.⁸ Green's 'politics of conscience', which in England helped launch progressive taxation and institutions of adult education, in Australia helped nurture developmental, acculturative policies in Aboriginal affairs. Stepping further back again, to take Kenelm Burridge and Sarah Sohmer's two-millennium perspective, we see that Elkin's struggle to modernise his faith continued a long history of attempts to replicate the Church fathers' moral clarity.⁹

A crucial link between Idealist developments and our study of Elkin as anthropologist is the founding sociological work of Emile Durkheim. Strong parallels existed between Durkheim's *Année Sociologique* and Green's British Idealists.¹⁰ Like Green, Durkheim sought a unified, practical worldview that would recreate the relation between individual and society in a way

⁶ Roger C. Thompson, *Religion in Australia: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002 (1994)).

⁷ Gregory Melleuish, *Cultural Liberalism in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁸ Melvin Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: TH Green and his Age* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964).

⁹ Sara Harrison Sohmer, '“A Selection of Fundamentals”: The Intellectual Background of the Melanesian Mission of the Church of England, 1850-1914', 140-167, PhD Thesis 1988, <http://anglicanhistory.org/oceania/sohmer1988/> viewed 23 March 2006; Kenelm Burridge, *Encountering Aborigines: Anthropology and the Australian Aboriginal, A Case Study* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1973).

¹⁰ William Logue, *From Philosophy to Sociology: The Evolution of French Liberalism, 1870-1914* (Dekalb, Ill.: Northern University Press, 1983).

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compatible with modern rationality. But Durkheim developed (in large part from French positivism) a comparatively deterministic sociology, in which society was a set of limiting conditions to which personality adjusted. Elkin followed the lead of Christian Idealist R. R. Marett in building from Durkheim's insights an Australian mode of anthropology founded on purpose and imagination, rather than adjustment and accommodation, as the defining qualities of the individual will.

Our thesis shows that Christian and Idealist thought has a distinct place in the international history of the academic discipline of social anthropology. Twentieth century Idealism was either presumed to be irrelevant or taken for granted by leading historians (George Stocking and Henrika Kuklick in particular).¹¹ The clearest way to indicate this gap in the literature is to consider R. R. Marett and W. H. R. Rivers' influence upon social anthropology, contrasting Stocking and Kuklick's account with that set out above in Chapters Three and Six respectively. (Historians agree that Marett and Rivers were the two most important figures in the formation of modern social anthropology in the 1910s and 1920s.)

Marett ushered in the era of functionalism by critiquing Fraser's rationalist theses along lines inspired by Durkheim, but qualified in ways that retained a central position for individual volition. Because they ignored the motives that shaped Marett's appropriation of Durkheim's ideas, these historians failed to show that Marett's innovations in social anthropology were part of a defence and renovation of (very broad and liberal) Christian faith and scholarship. Elkin's case shows why Marett's integration of an academic discipline into the Christian worldview mattered. Elkin was able to fashion science that equipped missionaries as well as fieldworkers; and to engage public opinion on moral as well as expert scientific grounds.

Similarly, the historians of anthropology downplayed W. H. R. Rivers' moral agenda. They showed how Rivers combined functionalism with structuralism, but they underestimated the importance of his diffusionist perspective on cultural change. The literature merely glances at Rivers' interaction with the Melanesian Mission, but it was this partnership that provided him with the data, the practical example *and hence the methodology* that led him to become one of the two leaders of the diffusionist school. Rivers' essays in practical anthropology were, in large part, a scientific elaboration of the gradualist, scholarly emphasis of High Anglican missiology,

¹¹ George W. Stocking, *After Tylor* (London: Athlone, 1995); Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885–1945* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991).

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as the work of Sarah Sohmer has shown.¹² Elkin pursued Rivers' 'psychological factor' as the key to applied anthropology first in an Anglican mission, then in a campaign for reformed governance; in both respects following Rivers' lead.

In Australian debates on Aboriginal policy between the wars, and thus in the wider history of Australian racialism, Elkin stands out as an Idealist who competed as an equal amongst knowledge professionals. Anthropology in Australia (Donald Thomson and Elkin excepted) was either fatalistic and academic, or racist. Warwick Anderson has analysed the influence that the medical profession and physical anthropologists in the academy had upon the Australian predilection for 'cultivating whiteness'.¹³ In contrast, scholars have taken for granted that Christians such as Burgmann and Elkin should persuade Australians to consider a person's soul, not their skin. But as the specialisation of the academy proceeded apace in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the gatekeepers of culture and race became attached to particular disciplines, none of which accorded much weight to Christian opinion per se. We have seen how Elkin reconciled his spiritual and moral inclination with the science that gave him credibility as a secular publicist. Racial science was a challenge to the Christian worldview; but few Christians other than Elkin could refute it, or even talk down its importance, as an expert in one of its fields.

But the most important aspect of Elkin's anti-racialism was that it prepared the way for the wide public reception of Aboriginal culture as an enduring and distinct aspect of Australian society. Elkin doubted whether any distinct Aboriginal culture would endure in fact; there can be no doubt of his in-principle hope that it would persist, changing in ways compatible with processes of change in Australian society generally. As an heir of British Idealism, Elkin imagined an historical progress towards unity as harmony, and not unity as power or efficiency. Harmony is only meaningful in opposition to unison: Elkin believed practical anthropology could assist in the co-ordination of compatible, different groups within society. His treatment of 'Aboriginal men of high degree' advocated the 'high degree of normality' that Aborigines achieved within a radically different structure of existential, socio-religious and political beliefs. Some Aboriginal norms, particularly in relation to the role of women, would need to change in contact with settler Australia, but Elkin worked to support the persistence of a distinctly Aboriginal mode of norm-creation.

¹² Sohmer, *A Selection of Fundamentals*.

¹³ Warwick Anderson, *Cultivating Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).

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It is fitting, then, that a recent trend in the literature on Australian ethnocide has been to discuss Elkin as an example of an Australian publicist who early conceived a mode of liberal governance compatible with pluralism. To make this point, van Krieken contrasted Elkin with Hasluck.¹⁴ The former worked to protect and support the co-existence of ‘thick’ groups, different from one another and free from government intrusion. Our understanding of Elkin’s spiritual and intellectual formation has revealed that this commitment to cultural variety both utilised and perpetuated old themes: broad Anglicanism’s vision of a liberal, federal Catholicism; Christian Socialism’s vision of political reform from below; the Ritualists’ determination to preserve historical rites despite their seeming anachronism; and Australian Idealism’s participation in the vision of a multi-society Commonwealth.

Anchorage

Elkin developed his ‘positive policy’ through his struggle to integrate three rapidly changing traditions – Christian faith, the ‘new’ understanding of liberalism based in civic obligation, and science. Within the broad Diocese of Newcastle, in Francis Anderson’s philosophy school, with Burgmann at Morpeth, and in the international Anglo-Catholic and liberal Anglican communities, Elkin was educated and assisted to resist their separation. The combined streams of Anglicanism and Idealism provided a spiritual and intellectual harbour in which Elkin was able to co-ordinate conflicting commitments in faith, morality, opinion, and science.

But there was nothing inevitable about this achievement. The political and intellectual environment in Australia between the wars was disintegrative. Even for many cultural liberals, (Charles Pearson, G. V. Portus in our study) faith, citizenship and science had been rent asunder by modern thinking. Religious leaders (Long, Worms) who valued anthropology were unable to persuade a national audience that the synergy of religion and science could guide policy. The one Australian colonial statesman, Hubert Murray, who advocated anthropology and Christianity in combination in Papua, argued that anthropology was not practicable in Australia. The fact that Elkin co-ordinated these commitments in Australian conditions was unusual. At the same time, his case was representative of religion’s capacity to guide an individual’s exceptionally dynamic

¹⁴ Robert van Krieken, ‘Rethinking Cultural Genocide: Aboriginal Child Removal and Settler-Colonial State-Formation’, *Oceania* 74 (2), December 2004, 125–151.

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or demanding relations with society into traditional (and in Anglicanism's case, consensual) channels.

We recall that Stephen Alomes, when explaining why Elkin was the most effective Australian publicist writing in the 1930s, argued that Elkin based his public position on 'fundamentals' (Elkin's word) that had society-wide resonance. Elkin, early in theory and more slowly in practice, ranked his fundamentals: morality (supported by faith) had to direct politics, which in turn determined the focus of practical science. And morality was obliged, in certain instances, 'to seek the unattainable', and make possible (even gradually) transformative change.

This co-ordination of faith, civic obligation and science comprised a comprehensive private, public and intellectual Idealism. Basic to individual and social purpose, Elkin believed, were religious qualities of reverence, faith, aspiration and duty. The foundation of the state, Elkin thought, was the social elaboration of individual volition, carried forward through public opinion, to frame policy options. The key tool of public policy, he argued, ought to be the *practical* scientist's humility: self-doubting, open to otherness, testing ideas against evidence (one area where we have seen that Elkin did not live up to his ideal) – then offering policy-makers clear direction.

As a last reprise, let us survey how his ideas about Aborigines and the state held together only after he had secured complementary anchor-points in faith, opinion and science. In 1929, in a racist milieu, Elkin had scientific second thoughts after he had compromised his detachment in the field by writing the 'Report on Forrest River'. His scholarly synthesis seemed to necessitate a compromise in which he advised the Church to use enlightened (acculturative) methods to ease the transition to the state's morally bankrupt (enculturative and ethnocidal) ends. Science and the state, on the one hand, and faith and the Church on the other, seemed to pull Aboriginal affairs in opposite directions.

But, as just mentioned, Idealism had bequeathed Elkin an understanding of the state as the accretion of individuals' moral purpose. Not science, nor historical inevitability, nor asymmetrical power relations built the state; morality did, Elkin believed. The social scientist's task was to inform the free development of moral ideals for which the state existed. And a fundamental Australian freedom was the freedom to remain Aboriginal. Thus, Elkin found his way to an integrated moral and political position in Aboriginal affairs because of the interpenetration of religious and scholarly traditions.

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His integration of faith (and the moral direction it inspired) and science was just as important as his integration of faith and politics. He developed an historical and volitional model of social anthropology that was steeped in the high Anglicanism of Oxford and the Melanesian Mission. A blend of these religious and scientific modes of scholarship grew out of his religious experience (his initial immersion in Aboriginal religion as a key to the universal, his desert epiphany in which he rebased the universality of religious experience). In agonistic embrace with Durkheim's structural and (comparatively) deterministic sociology (and other intellectual challenges), Elkin fashioned a social-scientific specialisation from the religion-friendly Idealism and cultural liberalism of his general humanities education. Crucially, the intrusion of Christian tropes, conventional in Burgmann's *Morpeth Review*, stalled his 'practical anthropology' when it served an immoral state (his refusal to cast the 'first stone', his suspicion of science as an end in itself).

The synthesis of religious and scholarly influence made Elkin an intellectual leader in both the church and the academy. From 1928, he turned the official position of the Anglican Church in Australia from enculturative to acculturative missionary methods. From 1931, he turned mainstream Australian anthropology away from the twin determinisms of racialism and structuralism, to a cultural, historical and volitional model. The result was a version of Aboriginal affairs that united moral energy and anthropological expertise.

Thus, Elkin led the development in Australian opinion and policy of acculturative versions of assimilation. This was the first of two major shifts in Aboriginal affairs in the twentieth century (discounting as intellectually abortive Hasluck's leadership of exclusively enculturative assimilation). The second enduring policy shift, the move in the 1960s towards self-determination, is best seen as a development of Elkin's project.¹⁵ If Hasluck's enculturative assimilation has been found morally untenable; and if Rowley's argument that cultural differences should be subordinated to Aborigines' political self-determination has failed; then Elkin's formula remains.

Formatively in the years from 1928 to 1933, Elkin worked out how to disentangle and secure the imperatives he found in faith, citizenship and science. His work in these years, and its still widening influence, has left us an integrated, and so enduring, version of Australian

¹⁵ 'Best seen' as continuous with Elkin's reform agenda, so that the excessive faith sometimes placed in Aborigines' *political* self-determination can be re-integrated into a persistent commitment to spiritual and cultural development, with political corollaries.

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Aboriginal affairs. Our close knowledge of the origins of Elkin's contribution in this field indicates the richer understanding of both national and disciplinary histories that is available if due attention is paid to the interaction of scholarship and faith in the first third of the twentieth century.