

Introduction

In Australian Aboriginal affairs, the acculturative strand of assimilation developed in large part from Elkin's religious and Idealist commitment, for which he won social-scientific authority. In competition with both an eliminationist politics of race and a segregationist politics of territory, Elkin drew upon religious experience, apologetics, sociology, and networks to establish a 'positive policy' as an enduring ideal in Aboriginal affairs. His leadership of the 1930s reform movement began within the Anglican Church, became national through civic-religious organs of publicity, and gained scientific authority as Elkin made religious themes a central concern in Australian anthropology. But from the 1960s until recently, most scholars have lost sight of the centrality of Idealism and religion in our protagonist's seminal project of acculturative assimilation. This thesis aims to show how Elkin dealt with problems fundamental to twentieth century Aboriginal affairs and indeed to Australian modernity more generally – problems of faith and science, morality and expediency – in developing his 'positive policy' towards Aborigines.

Recent scholarship has shown that A. P. Elkin (1891-1979) was a leading Australian theorist and publicist of acculturative assimilation for Indigenous people.¹ That is, Elkin advocated that governments, missions, and employers should assist Aborigines to adapt their societies 'from within' to settler Australian society, in the hope that corporate Aboriginal continuity would sustain prosocial change.² Such change is designated 'acculturative' to distinguish it from 'enculturative' assimilation, whereby a minority assimilates by taking on the majority's norms as a replacement for, and not with reference to, their own culture.³ It is important to note from the outset that Elkin never envisioned an exclusively acculturative national policy. He developed and advocated policy that was 'positive and developmental, rather than negative and protective'.⁴

¹ 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.

² I will use the terms 'settler society' and 'settler Australians' as a synonym for 'non-Indigenous society / Australians'. The former reflects the shift from subsistence to industrial economies, and foregrounds the attitude prevalent within the European Australian political elite that their possession of the continent needed to be made good through both wider and closer settlement (Chs. 1, 5). In this context (of sovereignty as a project), I trust that it makes sense to speak of government officials and missionaries, as well as pastoralists for example, as 'settlers'. (Not inappropriately, in the 1930s some Aborigines were also settlers in this sense: see Russell McGregor, 'Develop the North: Aborigines, Environment and Australian Nationhood in the 1930s', *Journal of Australian Studies*, March 2004, 33-45.

³ McGregor, 'Assimilation as Acculturation', 170.

⁴ A. P. Elkin, 'A Policy for the Aborigines', *Morpeth Review* III (25), October 1933, 29-35 [Address presented to APNR Annual Meeting 21 April 1932], 32.

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Wherever possible, Aboriginal societies should be assisted to adapt to new situations such that cultural continuity made the new ways durable.

Scholars have shown that, in Australian history, ‘assimilation’ is best conceived as a contested and ongoing policy movement.⁵ In the 1930s, in pursuing his acculturative agenda, Elkin also argued that enculturative measures would be necessary to support some Aboriginal communities in transitional phases. In the 1950s, the Commonwealth Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, led an exclusively enculturative national policy.⁶ In the 1960s, the sidelined movement for acculturative assimilation gathered momentum under the label ‘integration’ and, from the 1970s, became the official policy of ‘self-determination’. In this broad conception of the assimilation policy, Elkin stands out as the foundational thinker in twentieth century Aboriginal affairs.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the sociologist C. D. Rowley (1906-1985), in what remains the single most important history of Australian affairs, favourably assessed Elkin’s policy.⁷ Rowley acknowledged that Elkin had been the first to respond coherently and comprehensively to the policy challenges associated with Australian settler colonialism.

However, Rowley’s development of Elkin’s lead was more reduction than renovation. Rowley argued that the anthropologist’s emphasis on cultural difference ought to give way to a focus upon political concerns, such as group solidarity and the dynamics of corporate self-determination, which settlers and Aborigines had in common.⁸ He envisioned Aboriginal corporations as legal entities providing the ‘protective carapace’ that villages afforded more sedentary colonised peoples, such as Melanesians.⁹ As we will see, Elkin, in contrast, had built a policy framework from religious fundamentals, through cultural differences and group identities, to strategies associated with political self-determination. From about 1960, legacies of Elkin’s era

⁵ 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.*, 39–47. For an example of the monolithic and reductive view of assimilation against which Rowse and McGregor argue, see, for example, Anna Haebich, ‘Imagining Assimilation’, *Australian Historical Studies* 118, 2002, 61–70.

⁶ Cora Thomas, ‘From “Australian Aborigines” to “white Australians”’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* (1) 2001, 21–35, *passim* and especially at 26, 31.

⁷ Ramola Yardi and Geoffrey Stokes, ‘Foundations for Reconciliation in Social Science: The Political Thought of CD Rowley’, *Melbourne Journal of Politics* (25), 1998, 45–63.

⁸ CD Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society: Aboriginal Policy and Practice Volume 1* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1970), 47, 298–299, 329–330; *idem*, *Outcasts in White Australia: Aboriginal Policy and Practice—Volume III* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1971), 36, 73–77, 383–388.

⁹ *Idem*, *The Remote Aborigines: Aboriginal Policy and Practice—Volume III* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1971), 11. See also Ramola Yardi and Geoffrey Stokes, ‘Political Thought of CD Rowley’, 45–63.

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such as acculturative Christian mission became dissociated from policy debates, as Rowley's political emphasis gained ground.

From the 1980s, leading historians of Aboriginal affairs ignored Rowley's estimation of Elkin's formative contribution in the 1930s. Elkin's pre-eminent influence upon Aboriginal policy reform from 1934 to 1939 had been well reported, primarily by himself.¹⁰ Perhaps in reaction against Elkin's self-promotion and in response to his defensive posture as professor of anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s, these more recent historians characterised Elkin as paternalist, racialist, concerned mainly with the triumph of settler Australian values, and insensitive to Aboriginal interests especially in land.¹¹ While the last of these criticisms has some merit, following chapters will challenge the others.

In general, settler Australians who contributed to policy debates concerning Aborigines between the wars were preoccupied with Aborigines' prospects for survival as a race.¹² In the racial categories of the time, people born of only one full blood Aboriginal parent were not Aboriginal, but half-caste.¹³ According to this view, the sparse populations of Aborigines had to be separated from other races, or lose their distinctive existence, or even 'disappear'. This viewpoint was corroborated by social anthropologists who analysed the structure of Aborigines' societies, and concluded that these societies could not survive the usurpation of their territory by Europeans.¹⁴ In the 1930s and 1940s, humanitarians who read these social anthropologists' articles recommended that Aborigines who had not yet intermingled with Europeans be

¹⁰ See, for example, AP Elkin, *Citizenship for the Aborigine: A National Aboriginal Policy* (Sydney: Australasian Publishing Co., 1944); AP Elkin, 'Anthropology in Australia: One Chapter', *Mankind* (5), 225–242; and AP Elkin, 'The Aboriginal Policy 1930–50: Some Personal Associations', *Quadrant* I (4) 1957, 27 – 34, at 29–30.

¹¹ Tigger Wise, Elkin's biographer, argued that Elkin became defensive in the 1940s and increasingly self-regarding thereafter. See her *The Self-Made Anthropologist: A Life of AP Elkin* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985). For critiques of Elkin, see Peter Read, 'A double headed coin: Protection and assimilation in Yass 1900–1960', in Bill Gammage and Andrew Markus (eds), *All That Dirt: Aborigines 1938* (Canberra: History Project Incorporated (ANU), 1982), 9–28; DJ Mulvaney, 'Australasian Anthropology and ANZAAS: "Strictly Scientific and Critical"', in Roy Macleod (ed.), *The Commonwealth of Science: ANZAAS and the Scientific Enterprise on Australasia 1888–1988* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), 208–216, esp. at 216; Geoffrey Gray, 'From Nomadism to Citizenship', in Nicolas Peterson and Will Sanders (eds.) *Citizenship And Indigenous Australians: Changing Conceptions And Possibilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 55–69; Gillian Cowlishaw, *Rednecks, Eggheads and Blackfellas: A Study of Racial Power and Intimacy in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999); and Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 103–104.

¹² Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1889–1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997).

¹³ I have chosen to omit quotation marks around outdated and sometimes offensive terminology because most of this thesis is a reconstruction and analysis of the thinking that found expression in such terms. In drawing attention to some causes of the decline of the racialist paradigm of the 1930s, I do not endorse that paradigm.

¹⁴ See Ch. 9. Also Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 103–30.

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segregated on what remained of tribal lands, in the desert or the tropics. Thus, both racial and social analyses led to the idea that settler Australians ought to segregate Aborigines so that the race (and society) could persist.

In the 1920s and 1930s, physical anthropologists and the states and territories' 'Chief Protectors' of Aborigines, who also began from racialist premises, had drawn a complementary conclusion concerning the future for communities and individuals of mixed race. They argued that settler Australians should encourage the 'absorption' into the white majority of Aborigines who could not be segregated on traditional tribal land. That way, the increasing proportion of part-Aboriginal families would increase their opportunities in settler Australian society by mitigating their alleged racial disadvantages, rapidly assimilating to settler norms, and, more generally, ceasing to be associated with a disparaged minority group. Influential proponents of the absorption of Aborigines, including the Chief Protectors in the Northern Territory and West Australian administrations, envisioned the ('inevitable') end of the Aboriginal race.¹⁵

Missionaries were fundamentally opposed to racialist thinking, but most believed their duty was to replace traditional Aboriginal culture with a version of Christianity. A minority who respected Aboriginal culture despaired of its chances of surviving the cataclysm of European settlement. On balance, Christian mission was overwhelmingly an agent for enculturation, that is, the elimination of Aboriginal culture in order to remove an obstacle on their (Christian) road into settler Australian society.¹⁶

Thus, Aboriginal affairs in 1930 was characterised by three typical policy positions: segregation, biological absorption, and cultural elimination. We can reduce these positions to two, which were sometimes proposed in combination: the elimination (whether by cultural or biological means) and segregation of Aborigines.¹⁷ These 'imagined destinies' shared the premise

¹⁵ See Ch. 5; also Paul Hasluck, *Our Southern Half-Castes*, a series of articles reprinted from the *West Australian* (1936), AO Neville, *Australia's Coloured Minority: Its Place in the Community* (Sydney: Currawong Publishing, 1948); Warwick Anderson, *Cultivating Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 235–39. On the protectors, see Robert Manne, 'Aboriginal Child Removal and the Question of Genocide, 1900–1940, in A. Dirk Moses (ed.), *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Children in Australian History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 217–243.

¹⁶ See Ch. 6; also Rowley, *Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Ch. 14.

¹⁷ A. Dirk Moses, 'Genocide and Settler Society in Australian History', in *idem* (ed.), *Genocide and Settler Society*, 38–40.

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that Aboriginal culture was incompatible with settler Australian society.¹⁸ Significantly, they left intact the ideal of a racially homogenous Australia, albeit (in the segregationist vision) one spotted with entrapped, definitively different Aboriginal peoples.¹⁹

Between the wars, exceptions to this general rule were few. Settler Australian policy elites proposed only two plans for Aborigines that challenged the white Australia policy.²⁰ The first peaked in the late 1920s, when Colonel Genders, Secretary of the Aborigines' Protection League of South Australia, gathered the support of an array of anthropologists and prominent persons for a 'Model Aboriginal State'. They attempted to provide Aborigines with an opportunity to develop a modern polity, under white tutelage, but on Aboriginal land, segregated from dissipating influences.²¹ In 1928, the Minister for Home Affairs condemned the scheme as unworkable (Ch. 8). Genders had attempted to apply the ideal of self-determination to Australian circumstances, but with little knowledge of Aboriginal culture or administration. The other plan for assimilation through Aboriginal cultural continuity was Elkin's.²²

¹⁸ Often, the alternatives co-existed in the one policy. For instance, John Bleakley, Chief Protector of Aborigines in Queensland, who was the only administrator responsible for a large population of Aborigines who opposed the absorption policy, proposed the segregation of full-bloods and the enculturative assimilation of half-castes. See JW Bleakley, *The Aborigines and Half-Castes of Central and Northern Australia*, report to the Commonwealth, Queensland, 1928; and *idem*, 'Can our Aborigines be Preserved', EP 1/12/1, 3.

¹⁹ The widely held theory that Aborigines were Caucasian led people to believe that race-mixing would produce a white population. See Anderson, *Cultivating Whiteness*, 198-205.

²⁰ In the 1930s, communists advocated the 'decolonisation of Australia'. They were influential amongst Aboriginal protesters whose assimilationist vision did not entail the elimination of racial distinctiveness, see Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 43-53. But communists' foothold in the union movement in the 1930s did not result in changes to unions' policy or membership in that decade, see Ch. 4 and Julia Martinez, 'The Limits of Solidarity: The North Australian Workers Union as Advocate of Aboriginal Assimilation', in Rowse, *Contesting Assimilation*, 101-118. Also, assimilationists other than Elkin were influential in the 1930s, although they generally followed Elkin's lead. See Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 103-30; and compare the dates of Elkin's key statements (Ch. 8) with the dates of key statements in Alison Holland, 'Saving the Race: Critics of Absorption Look for an Alternative', in Rowse (ed.), *Contesting Assimilation*, 85-99. See also note 22.

²¹ Kevin Blackburn, 'White Agitation for an Aboriginal State in Australia (1925-1929)', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 45 (2), 1999, 157-80.

²² Three other contenders (in addition to communists in the union movement, as at note 20) deserve mention. The Chief Protector of Aborigines in Queensland, John Bleakley, was not hostile to Aborigines' racial continuity, but he encouraged enculturation via Aborigines' children, rather than acculturation via the elders and guardians of cultural continuity. JW Bleakley, *The Aborigines and Half-Castes of Central and Northern Australia*, report to the Commonwealth, Queensland, 1928. See Chs. 6 and 8. The Rev. JRB Love pursued an acculturative project amongst the Worora people in remote north-western Western Australia but his prognoses for the continent overall were strongly enculturative. See Ch. 6; and compare his *Stone-Age Bushmen of Today: Life and Adventure among a Tribe of Savages in North-western Australia* (London: Blackie & Son, 1936) with Rev. JRB Love, 'What the Missions are Doing', *Steads' Review* August 1, 1930, 14-16. Another important agent of assimilation with acculturative features, such as preservation of language and ties to land, was Dr Charles Duguid. He developed his ideas on assimilation and Christian mission 'from 1934', and initially along lines advocated by Elkin. See Sitarani Kerin, ' "Dr do-good"?:

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Our focus is the seminal years from 1928 to 1933. C. D. Rowley has shown that this period was a turning point in twentieth century Aboriginal affairs.²³ The years 1928 and 1933 were each characterised by national outrage at injustices suffered by Aborigines, but only in 1933 did this outrage find expression in a new policy. This change was possible, we will argue, in part because Elkin spent those five years resolving intellectual conflicts between realistic and idealistic analyses of colonialism, and personal spiritual questions about how his thirst for practical scientific expertise fitted with his complex and conflicted religious commitment. The result of Elkin's efforts was moral clarity (that settler Australians were obliged to attempt to support Aborigines' acculturative assimilation) directing strategic scientific enquiry (such that Australian anthropology should not support segregationist or eliminationist arguments).

This personal settlement of the relation between morality, science, public opinion and policy is the prime subject of our thesis; its issue in important policy developments is also central, but of secondary concern. Elkin's policy position, as we will soon see, has already been well understood, thanks particularly to the work of Russell McGregor. Less well appreciated has been the crisis through which Elkin arrived at that position.

Elkin radically changed the direction of his thinking about Aboriginal affairs in the years 1928 to 1931. Seemingly against self-interest, he abandoned his commitment, based on his doctoral study, to racial science as the pre-eminent guide to Aboriginal affairs. As we will see, the combination of racial and cultural science in which he was trained was an ideal portfolio for a career in anthropology, which he badly wanted. He valued racial science for the guidance he believed (until 1930-1931) it could provide to those whose responsibility it was to formulate policy for the Australian nation.

But personal morality prevailed in the crisis that is the centrepiece of our study. That crisis expressed a lifelong experiential complex, which we trace from Elkin's childhood. From a wider perspective, the crisis expressed the conflict between Elkin's conception of Christian relations with Aborigines and the prevailing idea of what ought to be the relationship between scientist and subject. These different ways of relating clashed in 1928 in the field; Elkin resolved

Charles Duguid and Aboriginal Politics, 1930-1970s', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2004, 17-20, 37-39, 64.

²³ Rowley, *Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, 255-340.

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the conflict in 1931; he built a national campaign on that resolution in 1932-33. We will study these developments, and the background to them.

The decision to concentrate on Elkin's intellectual formation and then only five of his years as a publicist in Aboriginal affairs has costs and benefits. One benefit of concentrating on the years 1928 to 1933 is chronological. By studying how one thing led to another during these seminal years, we see how Elkin arrived at acculturative policies through his own private struggles and not by building upon contemporary practices or even arguments in Australian Aboriginal affairs. Elkin then publicised his version of assimilation on the national stage in a variety of forums. It is surely significant that only after these years of publicity did any national momentum develop behind acculturative arguments and practices.²⁴

We conclude in 1933 because Elkin's career from 1934 is already well known. Elkin did not spring into history as a 'humanitarian' *deus ex machina* in 1934. Spiritual, intellectual and scientific challenges preceded his moral clarity. By detailing the struggles that led Elkin to his acculturative position, we may understand how Elkin produced a new and enduring set of priorities in Australian Aboriginal affairs.

One cost associated with our time frame is that, beyond this claim of Elkin's primacy, we cannot here assess Elkin's influence. Elkin's career was long, and his vision of acculturative assimilation continued to develop after 1933. His influence arguably peaked in late 1938 and early 1939, when he co-wrote, with Minister for Home Affairs John McEwen and the Department's Secretary, J. A. Carrodus, a national policy for Aborigines. The closer reckoning of Elkin's influence must be left to future historians. This thesis prepares the way by illuminating – in the round – the foundation of Elkin's achievement.

Elkin – priest, publicist, and professor – intended specific knowledge groups to advance the acculturative ideal. For Christian or scientific audiences, he advocated the acculturative project, and explicitly rejected the enculturative alternative. That is, for these sectors of society he propounded the view that settler Australians ought to support Aboriginal groups to adapt themselves collectively to the society that had engulfed them. He aimed quickly and thoroughly to change the minds of those in these inner circles of opinion.

²⁴ See Kerin, '“Dr do-good”?: Charles Duguid and Aboriginal Politics', 17-20, 37-39.

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He anticipated a more gradual turning of the wider public's opinions concerning Aboriginal affairs. The vehicle he deployed for this second track of publicity was his open-ended 'positive policy', which was interpreted by many, including Dr Cecil Cook, Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, to imply a continuation of eliminationist assimilation.²⁵ Elkin stated the imperative that Aborigines ought to benefit from as full as possible participation in the settler society; but he also urged (*contra* Cook) that racialist considerations should be demoted relative to psychological factors. For the general public, he propagated an attitude to Aboriginal affairs that was compatible with white Australian expectations and also with a trend towards acculturation.

The originality of Elkin's policy contribution in these years is starkly illustrated by the fact that he was the leading or the only advocate of an acculturative policy in each of these sectors of Australian opinion – scientific, general public, or Christian. Elkin, uniquely, sought to transform all three sectors of opinion. What explains his singularity, and who were his allies?

II

We know little about the important part played in Aboriginal affairs by religious traditions or other contexts for religious thinking. The influence of Christianity in general has been negligible, according to most historians of Australian liberalism, British social anthropology, and twentieth century Australian Aboriginal affairs. But Elkin's civic ideals and his attitude towards publicity reflected an amalgam of Catholic Anglican commitment and Idealist moral philosophy, the latter associated with T. H. Green's 'new liberalism'.²⁶ In forming his anthropological ideas, he considered the arguments made by champions of religious faith against secular thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Émile Durkheim, James Frazer, Grafton Elliot Smith and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. And his contribution to Aboriginal affairs was shaped (in ways scarcely noticed since C. D. Rowley's work in the early 1970s) by scholarship centred upon the Melanesian Mission; by precedents set by Christian imperialists, particularly Australia's Lieutenant-Governor of Papua, Hubert Murray; and by Anglicanism's civic-religious ambit, including the Association for the Protection of Native Races.

²⁵ Wise, *Self-Made Anthropologist*, 144.

²⁶ I will capitalise 'Idealism' when referring to the moral philosophy, to differentiate it from 'idealism' as the disposition to pursue unlikely outcomes.

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Elkin pursued first religious, then moral, and then scientific arguments for his proposed reconciliation of traditional Aboriginal and settler Australian ends. He did so in fulfilment of his Christian commitment and Idealist moral philosophy, closely related traditions that we will group together as ‘Christian Idealism’. Elkin attempted to reformulate the core Anglican faith claims – including sanctions meant to preserve the corporate discipline of the church– so that Anglicanism was compatible with non-dogmatic, critical philosophy. He sought an epistemological framework that would support the free play of reason upon a base of religious discipline. John Toews has usefully analysed this kind of framework as the integration of existential, social, and political planes of being, a scheme it is useful to develop for our own purposes.²⁷

Existence, for adherents of this tradition, was paradoxical: both radically free (and so individualistic) and necessarily characterised by submission and mortality. Crucially, *Christian Idealists* resolved the paradox through faith and affirmation, not reason and abstraction. They saw existence as rational, and yet knowable only through the religious attitudes that provided the right spiritual and relational context for social understanding. The word ‘spiritual’ in this thesis refers to the interaction of conscious processes with unknown (as against supernatural) forces, issuing in effective motivation. For Elkin, religious faith adhered – dynamically, admitting profound changes in response to different phases of his scholarship – to ritual and symbolic responses to the problem of mortality.

Christian Idealists saw *society* as a field of obligation. Continuing Green’s Idealist legacy, and convinced by Durkheim’s teachings that a symbolic unifying system was a prerequisite for a society’s persistence, Elkin believed that society had rights over the individuals who comprised it.²⁸ Moreover, with other Anglican Catholics he believed that most people, himself included, needed social guidance, in local communities, on their spiritual way. These beliefs disposed him towards social analysis that was both group-oriented and conservative.

A *political* agenda followed directly from these existential and social purposes. ‘Idealism’, at least the British and Australian variants with which we are most concerned, denoted a commitment to the free forming of opinions concerning the practical ways in which

²⁷ John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805-1841* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 4–14.

²⁸ AP Elkin, ‘The Rights of Man in Primitive Society’, in UNESCO (ed.) *Human Rights: Comments and Interpretations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), 239. For Green’s theory of rights, see Ch. 1; for Durkheim’s sociology see Ch. 3.

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personal liberty and social fellowship could be mutually advanced towards wider and more complex unity. British Idealism was in part an outgrowth of the nineteenth century Incarnationist-Christian embrace of evolutionary theory. In arriving at his mature religious position, Elkin found spiritual inspiration for a universalist civic Idealism by integrating the stimulus and the challenge afforded by Darwin and Durkheim (Ch. 7). These mutually supporting planes of existential faith, social affirmation, and civic ideals comprise our central subject.

Elkin's Christian Idealism shaped his reform of Aboriginal affairs. During a decade of gestation, Elkin derived his reformist policy primarily from his Christian Idealism. Elkin began his study of Aboriginal religion in order to illustrate the unity of human religious experience as a socially mediated approach to the spiritual unity of which he believed all people were part. When events turned his mind to the question of how the very different fields of Aboriginal and settler Australian social obligation could be reconciled, he referred to the common ground of existential religion. The fundamental obligation for Aborigines, as for settlers, was to perpetuate their corporate existence. The only practical, politically viable way forward for Aborigines as a distinct people or as distinct peoples, Elkin believed, was to cultivate the religious sources of individual fulfilment and social unity even as the territorial, economic, and socio-structural bases for their religion underwent radical change.

The same Christian Idealist conviction sustained both his work as a publicist, reforming Australian opinion, and his work as an expert anthropologist, informing policy in Aboriginal affairs. Since the 1980s, historians have charged Elkin with a kind of hypocrisy for expecting more change from Aboriginal peoples than he did from the Europeans who had dispossessed them.²⁹ The reasons for this bias conform to the structure in which Elkin operated: the asymmetry between the two sides that competed for possession of the continent. But the distinctive, as against structurally typical, quality of Elkin's contribution to Australian history stemmed from his faith that both Aborigines and settlers might respect and participate in their different, equally ancient dynamics of change; that is, that both cultures might maintain religious continuity.

III

²⁹ Mulvaney, 'Australasian Anthropology', 216; Gray, 'From Nomadism to Citizenship', *passim*.

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A related commonality that Elkin inferred from his analyses of settler and Aboriginal change was the importance of gradual advances in public opinion. Aborigines had no hope of overthrowing their dispossessors; their best hope lay in mental independence and problem-solving, Elkin learnt from early social psychologists. The only basis for collective empowerment available to Aborigines was the decisions they could make about how best to redirect their shared beliefs towards an accommodation with the society that had engulfed them. Similarly, white Australians could only render their possession of Aborigines' land honourable by squaring it with their own moral code, that is, by modifying their relation to Aborigines in the light of higher principles.

In the crucial years of the early 1930s, Elkin exhorted settlers to 'create a public opinion' conducive to Aboriginal advance; and to expect and assist Aborigines similarly to create new public opinions of their own that would enable this advance.³⁰ In its latter aspect especially, this vision was original. 'A public opinion', implied a judgement about a preferred collective course of action, or a preferred course of action with implications for the whole society. In the face of 'industrial civilization' and its continual change, this kind of opinion admitted little predictability. But Elkin's attitude towards public opinion meant that he felt no need to anticipate an end result: he was advocating a religious kind of opinion formation, which he considered a good in its own right. He believed (recalling our analysis of his Christian Idealism), that this kind of opinion ensured that partners in change would safeguard each other's existential security, social belonging, and political interests.

Public opinion had social 'breadth' as well as historical 'depth', Elkin wrote.³¹ He believed that individuals could make effective and sustainable contributions to movements in public opinion only by aligning their thinking with long (or deep) historical trends. At the same time, he believed that the wider one's conception of the public, the higher one's moral aspiration was likely to be. He attempted to make Australian opinion answerable to the best in international opinion, and modelled his publicity upon that of international religious organisations.³² So while

³⁰ AP Elkin, *A Policy for the Aborigines* (Sydney: Association for the Protection of Native Races, 1934). Address presented to APNR Annual Meeting, 21 April 1932. On Aboriginal opinion, see AP Elkin, *Understanding the Australian Aborigine*: lecture delivered in Sydney at a meeting of the APNR, 23 June 1931, (Morpeth, St. John's College Press, 1931), 21.

³¹ AP Elkin, *Society, the Individual and Change: with Special Reference to War and Other Present-Day Problems* (Sydney: Camden College, 1940).

³² AP Elkin 'The Changing World', *Morpeth Review* III (27), April 1934, 88–91, at 91; on religious models, see Ch. 8.

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attending closely to historical Aboriginal difference from settler Australian norms, he also cast Aborigines and settler Australians together in the gaze of the rest of the world – and presumed that the rest of the world would furnish standards higher than would the nation left to its own logic.

Elkin believed his worldview afforded sufficient universality to comprehend and guide the kinds of cultural changes that Aborigines had to attempt. A survey of some of the literature that has informed my understanding of Elkin’s work, and the significance of the traditions within which he worked, will provide the origins and context for Elkin’s Christian Idealism. The following review of relevant literature will also illumine Elkin’s part in the history of anthropology and the history of both Aboriginal affairs and liberal thought in Australia.

Literature Review

Our argument – that Christian faith and a Christian Idealist intellectual milieu were crucial to Elkin’s contribution to Aboriginal affairs and Australian anthropology – sits within the history of the ideas of Idealism, anthropological structuralism, cultural liberalism, and public opinion. As an undergraduate during World War One, and again in response to the Depression and the rise of totalitarianism, Elkin sought to advance public opinion. He sought to contribute to an increasingly complex, democratic, and representative co-ordination of purposes. Such a process produced a higher social and political unity, encompassing a higher good, he believed. His ideal of a progressive teleology without any necessity for dogmatic religious underpinning, and involving a distinction between ‘spiritual facts’ and ‘spiritual ideals’ was a mode of Hegelian Idealism.³³ Elkin studied Idealism, as revised by T. H. Green, with Francis Anderson, the professor of philosophy under whose supervision Elkin obtained his Honours and Masters degrees. Over three decades later, Elkin was still quoting Green with approval, as we will see in Chapter One.

Charles Taylor’s monograph on Hegel clearly sets out the German’s moral philosophy.³⁴ Hegel rejected the model of freedom that he perceived in the philosophies of Kant and Rousseau, which he believed resulted in the Terror during the French Revolution. Hegel argued that Kantian liberalism could not get beyond an individualised, ultimately fragmentary ideal. Hegel argued,

³³ Chs. 1 and 8 provide examples of Elkin using this language and this way of thinking.

³⁴ Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

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against Kant, that freedom was dialectical, an interplay of the Kantian individual rational will (perceiving absolute goods such as the individual's freedom of conscience and the impulse in an individual to support that freedom in others) with actually existing communal obligation, such as law and custom. Morality reached its completion in a community, not in an altruistic individual conscience, Hegel argued.³⁵ Since the individual was complete only as part of a community, rationality must begin from the individual as tending towards communal fulfilment. From this premise, Hegel developed his doctrine of the rational state.³⁶

John Toews, in his intellectual biography of Hegel and Hegel's philosophical successors, has convincingly argued that Hegel responded to a 'cultural disinheritance'.³⁷ The intellectual as well as political revolution of 1789, given political urgency in Germany because of Napoleon's conquests there, required a new 'cultural ideology' to replace the remnants of feudalistic Christian thinking. Hegel's account of the modern state – a blend of mystical faith in spiritual unity and philosophical faith in rational system – was a radical new beginning, in Toews' account.

Toews has shown how philosophers from Hegel to Marx overcame cultural disinheritance by creating 'cultural ideologies'. These constructs were rationalist alternatives to traditional Christian personal integrity, the basis of which, many intellectuals found, had lost credibility. Christianity had integrated the individual's spiritual origins, communal belonging, and political purpose in God and God's order. That completeness must, in the modern era, be found in rationality alone, the Hegelians believed. Such was the origin of the self-sufficient, 'scientific' ideology of Marxism, for example. Marxism was, for its adherents, a powerful cultural ideology because it integrated a (materialist) personal ontology with a version of communal belonging (classes) and a political project (revolution).

The Australian-British version of Idealism that Elkin inherited had defaulted on Hegel's bolder claims to a total understanding of spirit, and had retained instead an agnostic sympathy with a religious submission to mystery or transcendence. Following Hegel, Elkin believed that an intellectual's role was to reveal and lead others towards a higher moral unity; but in British Idealist mode, Elkin (eventually, and most characteristically) had recourse to faith to discern

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 83–84.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 86–95.

³⁷ Toews, *Hegelianism*, 4–14.

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moral direction; he deployed rationality only secondarily to find the practical means by which that direction could be pursued. Our source key for this context is a biography of the founder of British Idealism, T. H. Green³⁸ (The biography is also an account of the fundamental importance and complex cross-currents of religion in opinion formation in nineteenth century England, to which we will return.)

Toews' useful idea of cultural ideology as a substitute for the structural integrity of religious faith has its less spectacular counterpart in Green's and other British interpretations of Hegel. Perhaps because of the arguments for gradual reform that accompanied both Britain's avoidance of revolution and her loss of the American colonies, as opposed to the Napoleonic upheaval in Europe, Idealism in England became an attempt to find a modern form for a continuous Christian or agnostic cultural inheritance.

Melvin Richter has shown that T. H. Green made only modest claims for his metaphysics and epistemology and emphasized instead his non-dogmatic restatement of Christian ethics.³⁹ Richter showed how Green taught a version of Christian principles and ethics. Green's Idealism required and inspired a political program that has become known as a 'new liberalism': a politics of positive freedom, supposed to ensure that every individual enjoyed the opportunities to be their best self, and participate in a virtuous cycle of spiritual abundance and service.

Toews' account of structuralist ideology as an intellectual base for personal integrity is pertinent in a moderated form to British and Australian Idealists in the early twentieth century. Although the latter attempted to realise continuity with core aspects of their Christian inheritance – such as individualism, voluntarism, personal obligation to serve outsiders and the less fortunate, and local communities of fellowship – intellectual changes necessitated some version of the 'cultural ideology' that characterised continental Hegelianism. Intellectuals who read Darwin, Nietzsche, and Durkheim developed a liberal notion of culture to replace Christian dogma.

³⁸ Melvin Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: TH Green and his Age* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964).

³⁹ Richter's text is still amongst the best expositions of Green's ethical philosophy and its practical political effects, but for Green's importance as an influence upon theories of the state, see Julia Stapleton, 'Political Thought, Elites and the State in Modern Britain', *Historical Journal* 42 (1999), 251–268. I have also benefitted from the following: Peter Nicholson, 'Thomas Hill Green: *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*', in Murray Forsyth and Maurice Keens-Soper (eds.), *The Political Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17–36; Peter Weiler, *The New Liberalism: Liberal Social Theory in Great Britain 1889–1914* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982); John R. Rodman, *The Political Theory of TH Green* (New York: Meredith, 1964). For Green's writings, see RL Nettleship (ed.), *Works of Thomas Hill Green*, 3 vols. (London: Longmans, 1885–1890), especially Green's *Lecture on Political Obligation* (Vol. 1).

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The historian Gregory Melleuish has coined the phrase ‘cultural liberalism’ with other debates in mind, but his term and the tradition he thus labelled fit our concerns nicely.⁴⁰ Melleuish analysed the scholarly milieu that predominated at the University of Sydney, in Elkin’s undergraduate years there. The central figure in the cultural liberal tradition, Francis Anderson, taught a non-dogmatic version of Christian moral philosophy that he glossed as ‘the principle of personality’. Anderson celebrated Green as a salutary ‘modern philosopher’.⁴¹ As mentioned, Anderson supervised Elkin’s Honours and Masters theses. Anderson’s archetypal personality was Jesus, who combined personal freedom (love and will) with principled obligation (law and faithfulness).⁴² One developed personality by finding self-fulfilment in one’s entire heritage, and so transcending petty or sectional interests, Anderson taught.⁴³

Anderson’s world-view provided the three planes of integration that we have identified (following Toews) as typical of Idealists. The individual, properly educated, was spiritually and existentially secure in the universal fatherhood of God. Social belonging, in Anderson’s teaching, was achieved through education into the full heritage of Christendom (including crucial inputs from other religious traditions, notably Buddhism), its associated technologies and economy, and its Australian setting. Anderson’s political plane of integration was an extension of this idea of ongoing historical heritage: Christendom had bequeathed its students a noble and ongoing project, to afford all people the conditions for a full personality. Melleuish has shown that Anderson’s faith in an open universal order that supported humanity’s political efforts (*‘kosmos’*) contrasted with rival strands of liberal political culture in Australia, such as that exemplified by Charles Pearson (below).

Thus Anderson’s principle integrated the three planes that Toews identified as a chief cause of Idealism’s prevalence amongst modern intellectuals. Unlike the continental Hegelians, Anderson based his philosophy upon core Christian principles, which he taught should guide the thinker until someone discovered a higher revelation. And so the Australian variant of Idealism

⁴⁰ Gregory Melleuish, *Cultural Liberalism in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Melleuish studied Elkin in a relevant argument in Gregory Melleuish, ‘Liberal Intellectuals in early Twentieth Century Australia: Restoring the Religious Dimension’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 35 (1), 1989, 1–12, at 11–12.

⁴¹ Francis Anderson, ‘A modern philosopher – Green of Balliol’, *Union Book of 1902* (Sydney: University of Sydney, 1902).

⁴² Francis Anderson, *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity* (Sydney: Australasian Association of Psychology and Philosophy, 1922).

⁴³ Melleuish, *Cultural Liberalism*, 87–101.

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was closer to its British parent, emphasizing a continuous faith, than its German grandparent, which in providing a cultural ideology to make good a cultural disinheritance emphasized rational system.

II

British Idealism and Australian cultural liberalism each looked to education, opinion-formation and piecemeal progressive legislation to move society towards a higher morality while fulfilling present customary obligations. This kind of pragmatic, progressive approach has been propagated by a leading contemporary heir of German Hegelianism, Jürgen Habermas, in his key critical history of ‘the public sphere’.⁴⁴

Habermas argued that structural transformations in public opinion both gave birth to and mis-shaped liberal democracy. The argument warrants our close attention as context for our treatment of Elkin’s universalist aspiration as a publicist, and because it provides both a critique of Idealism, and an unwitting rationale for it. In our treatment of Habermas, we enquire into the relation between opinion, reason, and faith.

Habermas studied public opinion as an exclusively secular phenomenon. He traced the history of the relation between opinion-making communities and political freedoms, beginning with the agonistic ideology of the aristocrats of ancient Athens. They identified public opinion with the competition between citizens to best represent the interests of the community of free men: the polity. Feudalism privatised and personified in the monarch the notion of the public good, reducing freedom to the will of one man. Habermas showed how Enlightenment liberals especially in England reconceived the public good as a universal potentiality, which they claimed to represent on behalf of every citizen.

The liberals’ pretence was, for Habermas, the great hinge of liberal and democratic history, but he failed to account for it satisfactorily. He ascribed the new universal imagination to the ‘intimate performativity’ that characterised the novel-reading bourgeois household, with its mythos of perfect equality among family members under the father’s benevolence.⁴⁵ He ignored religion – a rather more obvious and likely source of the ‘illusion of the universal’ upon which his argument turned. This omission is all the more striking given the scope and excellence of

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

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Habermas's analysis of the rise (1770s to 1830s) and decline (1830s to 1950s) of democratic publicists' universalist aspiration.

Habermas argued firstly that the ideal of a universally relevant and productive politics of opinion was the key to liberal democracy, and secondly that the correction of a liberal elite's self-interested presumption to represent the universal ideal unilaterally, as it were, was the free path to a socially just democracy. In Habermas' account, liberal publicists won freedoms from the state in the name of all citizens but these freedoms were commandeered by profit-making corporations. As capitalists entrenched their power, they achieved a refeudalisation of public opinion, whereby 'publicity' came to designate what corporations wanted people to know. Liberal publicists' illusion of the universal had never been realised. Habermas concluded by suggesting that his readers should pursue a society-wide praxis of 'communicative activity' that would lead, in his view, to participatory democracy based on real increases in mutual understanding, to replace unwarranted assumptions about common or universal interests.

By overlaying Habermas' narrative with Richter's account of the religious origins of nineteenth century movements in British liberalism, we can reinterpret Habermas's argument. The religious revision of his argument would hold that the universal ideal was necessarily illusory, and only sustainable as an object of faith. The crux of the matter is the perennial question of the relation between reason – here in the guise of a rational, universalist political agenda – and faith.

The reform movement of the 1830s is the best point from which to survey this parting of analytical ways. Habermas lamented the reduction from the 1830s of the project of winning freedom from the state (cherished by the late eighteenth century enlightenment liberals) to the initiative-sapping passivity through which the mass of voters achieved basic advances by means of representative electoral politics. But even if the English masses were politically passive in the nineteenth century (and acknowledging only in passing E. P. Thomson's refutation of that idea), Christian and other universalist publicists continued to propagate and carry universalist projects. For as the franchise extended, the Methodist revival moralised and inspirited entire villages⁴⁶; and Anglicanism reinvented itself as Incarnationists and Tractarians (amongst others) propagated new, spiritual, universalist reasons for faith in gradual progress through a blend of obedience,

⁴⁶ Richter, *Politics of Conscience*, 15–25.

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civility, and faith in higher ideals. As the politics of opinion massified, a parliamentary labour party developed and flourished, slaves were freed around the globe, and the militaristic British Empire began gradually to reinvent itself as a liberal commonwealth. Richter and before him Halevy (and many others to be sure) have mapped some of the connections between resurgent religious commitment and partial, compromised but significant advances in liberal politics.

These events – to each of which Elkin referred recurrently – were the historical precursors of Elkin’s practical achievements. This thesis is an attempt to show the effects of Elkin’s spiritual commitment to the universalist Christian tradition and its expression in reformist publicity. For it was precisely through faith in a religious conception of the universal that Elkin integrated his spiritual aspiration with social and political commitments to a widening common good. That is, Elkin’s attempts at opinion formation became effective only once they aligned with and became a product of his religious faith and religious modes of civic association. Our enquiry is a case study of how faith in religious symbols and practices has provided an historically proven route to the universalist mode of understanding of which Habermas has been the foremost proponent in recent decades.

Habermas, in rejecting culturally specific symbols arranged around a non-rational solution to the problem of mortality – along with the poetic and symbolic modes in general⁴⁷ – may have thrown the baby out with the bathwater, if you will forgive the idiom. Religiously articulated publicity and scholarship – compromised and agnostic in its association with the life and death events of a diverse community of faith, including the unreflective and the taciturn – has borne fruit more palatable than attempts to reorient society according to any wholly rational system.⁴⁸ In case Habermas’ faith in stand-alone reason should be misplaced, we might want to remember how Christian Idealists sustained a mode of scholarship in harmony with a liberal-universalist religious tradition.

III

⁴⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 1992), 185–210.

⁴⁸ Thus my argument is a religiously inflected version of Karl Popper’s ‘open society’ thesis in *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 1962).

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Habermas's critique of liberal ideology has a counterpart in Australian intellectual history in the early work of Tim Rowse.⁴⁹ Rowse argued that Australian liberals sustained their faith in consensus by overlooking the unjust conflict of interests inherent in relations between capital and labour. Liberalism, as an overarching rationale for capitalism, equated labour and profit as social goods – an inhumane position, Rowse argued. Like Habermas, Rowse focussed on the illusion of consensus. Even though the illusion had real effects, these historians conceded, including mass advances in material well-being and access to education, the structural reality of oppression persisted.

Australian liberal reformers were aware of this fundamental problem, but did not respond to it adequately, Rowse argued. Liberal reformers experienced a kind of bad faith because their self-image was continually being undermined.⁵⁰ They wanted to see themselves as universalists and altruists, but the structure of capitalism ensured that their efforts kept disproportionately benefiting the owners of capital and their assistants, the middle class. Rowse included Elkin, whom he grouped with the Idealists and 'social reconstructionists', in this class of liberal reformers.

Rowse assumed that these liberals lacked a viable rationale for their own entrapment in capitalism. But the religious outlook of Elkin and other Christian Idealists invalidates this assumption. Their Christian learning and practice contained central, unavoidable elements of fatalism: the mythology of the fall and Jesus' crucifixion, for instance. Green made 'complacency' the central vice against which Idealists should guard (Ch. 1). Elkin urged his parishioners to strive 'to attain the unachievable' (Ch. 7). Christians, we can generalise, were primed to expect history to produce a stream of disappointing results, and to keep striving for a different outcome without hope of achieving much change beyond their own community. The fruit of this combination of fatalism and faith was, in many cases including Elkin's, not naivete or insincerity so much as commitment, persistence, and a constructive attitude towards social relations from local community to nation-state, and beyond.

Like Habermas, Rowse has made a lasting and valuable contribution by illustrating that a praxis born of the illusion of consensus has served to loosen and mitigate but not undo structural inequalities in a particular time and place. But again like Habermas, Rowse did not account for

⁴⁹ Tim Rowse, *Australian Liberalism and National Character* (Melbourne: Kibble Books, 1978).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1–25.

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the resilience of reformers who knew the Sisyphean nature of their task. This contribution that Christian Idealists made to intellectual life in Australia in the early twentieth century has been unwittingly indicated by Michael Roe. In reviewing Roe's history, we introduce the importance of the religious emphasis, combining rational and non-rational aspects, upon local fellowship and group identity.

Michael Roe has written linked biographies of nine Australian reformers, not including Elkin, whose influence peaked when Elkin was an undergraduate. Roe showed how progressivism, an American reform movement that fused vitalism and modernism, linked the public careers of his nine Australians in the first decades of the twentieth century.⁵¹ He claimed that the progressive 'trinity' of Henri Bergson, Friedrich Nietzsche, and William James stood behind the thinking of those Australian moderns who were 'original'. The trinity were 'more than romantic in celebrating the non-rational aspect of man. Most new thinkers believed that from the subjective, the intuitive, the emotional, the psychic, the inexpressible yearning-for-life, came man's most potent drives'.⁵²

Roe's argument concerning vitalism in Australia would have been more easily sustained with reference to Elkin's (or Anderson's or Burgmann's) exploration of religious tradition than it was with reference to Roe's protagonists' occasional and disjointed spiritual musings. Roe's Australians made few if any references to any of his central three thinkers. Instead, Roe has supposed that the new thought pervaded their thinking, while they in fact referred to Idealist ethics and their complex but generally distant relation with Christian faith.⁵³ If progressivism's 'ultimate tension was to claim the virtues of rationality, but at heart to be emotive and mystical,' then Elkin was more clearly a progressive than any of Roe's thinkers.⁵⁴ We will see that Elkin was certainly a vitalist religious thinker (Chs. 3, 7).

Roe failed to see that organised Christianity provided some moderns, including Elkin, with a community as well as an ideology to support attempts to think through the implications of

⁵¹ Michael Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives: Vitalism in Bourgeois Social Thought 1890–1960* (St Lucia, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1984).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵³ After several opening pages on the transatlantic trinity, Roe acknowledged that the preeminent influence upon the Australian progressive milieu was British theory and practice, chiefly TH Green, *ibid.*, 7. For passages that demonstrate the predominance of Christian and Idealist approaches to the non-rational see Roe on: James William Barrett, 57–58; Richard Arthur, 185–186; Robert Francis Irvine 241–246; Edmund Miller, 290–291; and especially AB Piddington (father of Elkin's critic, Ralph, see Ch. 9), 215, 231, 238.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 13

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new ideas. By selecting Australian figures whose spiritual trajectories were solitary, Roe hamstrung his declared aim of enquiring into the non-rational drives that he claimed fascinated the generation. Elkin, in contrast to Roe's nine Australians, sustained an intellectual enquiry into, and disciplined cultivation of, non-rational drives, with the support of his fellow churchmen. He tested his vitalism against their experiences and his own, and explicated it with reference to a sophisticated body of doctrine and a subtle practice of worship, prayer, confession, communion and other communal, non-rational rites and practices (Chs. 3, 7). Roe was right to highlight the importance of attempts to make sense of and exploit non-rational social forces in early twentieth-century Australia. But his focus upon vitalism as something that happened outside of conventional religion obscured the relation between Australian vitalism and the spiritual continuity that Melleuish has shown characterised the 'cultural liberal' tradition. Our study of Elkin connects these two highways of Australian cultural and political history.

Other arguments concerning Australian liberalism similarly illustrate by omission the importance of religion to the intellectual culture of Australia between Federation and 1939. At Federation and in the decade thereafter, Charles Pearson (1830-1894) was Australia's most famous intellectual, and his protégé Alfred Deakin (1859-1919) was one of the new nation's leading politicians, and second Prime Minister. Elkin cited them both in his account of Australian nationalism.⁵⁵ Thus Stuart Macintyre's history of the linked biographies of Melbourne-based intellectuals that included Pearson as the hinge and ended with the rise of Deakin should provide useful context for Elkin's sense of Australian publicity.⁵⁶

But Macintyre was unable or unwilling to credit the Christianity from which (by his own account) the intellectual lineage that was his subject emerged. George Higginbotham (1826-1892), the founding figure in Macintyre's narrative was a liberal and staunch Anglican. When Macintyre began his history with Higginbotham's socialist niece reflecting upon her uncle's commemoration in 1937 that 'the whole affair makes me wonder if there isn't some essential lack in us, something missing that keeps our life from having meaning and depth – interest in our past, reverence for those who have shown outstanding qualities of mind or spirit' – one might expect

⁵⁵ AP Elkin, *Nation and National Consciousness: Australian National Consciousness*, University of Sydney: Honours Thesis, 1915, Fisher Rare Books Library, Elkin 003.

⁵⁶ Stuart Macintyre, *A Colonial Liberalism: The Lost World of Three Victorian Visionaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

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that religion would receive considered treatment.⁵⁷ Instead, Macintyre has dismissed Christianity's teleology as 'arbitrary', described the founding Christian Socialist F. D. Maurice as an intellectual influence *as against* a spiritual influence upon Pearson, and has lauded Higginbotham as 'surely unique in his sublime conviction of the divine element in all humanity' – a distinction that Higginbotham himself would have found blasphemous.⁵⁸ Macintyre's history does little to recover the 'lost world' that was at least nominally his subject.

A more profitable line of analysis of the intellectual milieu in which Elkin matured has emerged from John Tregenza's biography of Charles Pearson.⁵⁹ Tregenza has shown the origins in Pearson's evangelical upbringing (both like and unlike T. H. Green's) that led him to write to a Melbourne clergyman in 1888 that 'the doctrine of the Incarnation provides the only way of understanding the mystery of the Universe. A God who should be law without sympathy and will, would be to me an impossible and immoral conception.'⁶⁰ But that road to understanding had closed to Pearson: 'the old forms are dying out, and in place of some new thought we are treated to ingenious compromises or medieval revivals.'⁶¹ This sense of forced isolation from corporate religious continuity surely contributed to Pearson's bleak vision of the future of liberalism: of town, church and family declining in importance; of each life's meaning reducing to an individualistic material prosperity and bureaucratically regulated physical security.⁶² The religious frame of reference is indispensable for an understanding of Pearson's outlook; in particular, his disconnect with spiritual tradition was central to his most influential work.

A similar spiritual journey from a strict Evangelical childhood to a juridical vision of the individual socialised with reference predominantly to the nation-state rather than intermediary communities is evident in Paul Hasluck's autobiography.⁶³ Hasluck has told of his own upbringing in a strongly evangelical (Salvation Army) household. Tim Rowse and Judith Brett

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2. Macintyre cites Nettie Palmer responding in 1937 to the unveiling of George Higginbotham's statue, in Nettie Palmer, *Fourteen Years: Extracts from a Private Journal 1925–1939*, (Melbourne: Meanjin Press, 1948), 239–241.

⁵⁸ Macintyre, *A Colonial Liberalism*, 127, 117, 188. Concerning Pearson, the argument that Maurice's influence was *eventually* or ultimately more intellectual than spiritual is credible, but to reduce the dynamic by which spiritual teaching came to have merely intellectual effect is to beg a central question in Pearson's intellectual formation.

⁵⁹ John Tregenza, *Professor of Democracy: The Life of Charles Henry Pearson, 1830–1894, Oxford Don and Australian Radical* (Melbourne: MUP, 1968).

⁶⁰ Pearson to Canon Robert Potter, 15 June 1888, in Stebbing, *Memorials*, 236; cited in Tregenza, *Professor of Democracy*, 214.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² See Melleuish, *Cultural Liberalism*, 37.

⁶³ Paul Hasluck, *Mucking About* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1994 (1977)).

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have each argued that this spiritually isolated liberalism was the generative principle behind Hasluck's secular doctrine of enculturative assimilation.⁶⁴ In contrast, Elkin's Anglo-Catholic faith and parish experience attuned him to the formation of identity through the intimate and pre-rational action of the social group.

The local religious group and its part in the individual's socialisation is the crucial link in all this. Robert van Krieken has suggested, in an argument that contrasted Elkin's acculturative policy with Hasluck's enculturative one, that intermediate social orders, including churches, play an important role in attempts to prevent culturally genocidal effects that have issued from overly juridical forms of liberal governance.⁶⁵ Tregenza's biography of Pearson points us to the twin sources of Elkin's parish-based practice of religious continuity: the 'ingenious compromise' of non-dogmatic Christian Idealism, and the 'medieval revivals' of Tractarianism and Anglo-Catholicism. Elkin, unlike Pearson, found these paths of religious continuity viable – but not without a long struggle, and some awkward compromises.

Elkin's concern with group religious identity was a fundamental aspect of his intellectual formation. According to Stephen Alomes, excessive individualism was the characteristic failing of Australian publicists in the 1930s.⁶⁶ Alomes argued that on the whole these publicists were 'reasonable men' who advocated reform in the light of the massive injustices suffered during the Depression. Alomes found that they were generally ineffective for one of two reasons. Some neglected to enlist their socio-economic peers in their exhortations and plans for change for the sake of the least powerful; others were content to work within the consensus that governments should redress injustice only to the extent compatible with the primacy of individual freedom and initiative. Alomes concluded that 1930s reformers 'recognised few social categories between the nation and the individual.'⁶⁷ He noted that Elkin's sociological perspective was an exception to this rule, and that Elkin was exceptional in being the one effective publicist of the 1930s.

⁶⁴ Judith Brett, 'Limited Politics', in Tom Stannage, Kay Saunders and Richard Nile (eds.), *Paul Hasluck in Australian History* (St Lucia, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1993), 183–195.

⁶⁵ Robert van Krieken, 'Rethinking Cultural Genocide: Aboriginal Child Removal and Settler-Colonial State-Formation', *Oceania* 74 (2), December 2004, 125–151; and *idem*, 'Assimilation and Liberal Government', in Rowse, *Contesting Assimilation*, 39–47. For Hasluck's retrospective self-analysis on this point, and in these terms, see Paul Hasluck, *Shades of Darkness: Aboriginal Affairs 1925–1965* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988), 128–135.

⁶⁶ Stephen Alomes, 'Reasonable Men: Middle Class Reformism in Australia, 1928–1939' Phd Thesis, Australian National University, 1979.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 299.

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According to Alomes, Elkin succeeded in effecting lasting change while in general his peers did not. In 1974, Alomes asked Elkin to explain this phenomenon. Elkin replied that most reformers did not know in practical terms what they wanted.

While he had a plan of action and concrete proposals [Alomes paraphrased] which he advanced through the press and put to governments, with some success, they remained content with forums and thoughts. The problem stemmed from an unwillingness to grapple with fundamental questions and follow them through to a conclusion.⁶⁸

The fundamental question that Elkin pursued throughout the 1920s and most explicitly during his most productive years as a publicist, the early 1930s, concerned the relation between religion, obligation, faith, and freedom. In the five years following 1928 this question became: what must Australians do to stand in a morally and spiritually acceptable relation to the country and its Indigenous inhabitants? He believed there was an incontrovertible answer: that settler Australians ought to include Aborigines in the benefits that flowed from intensive settlement, industrial technology, and dynamic intercourse with the wider world.

In seeking the best means by which to pursue this aim, Elkin applied his sociological insight that the crucial variable was 'group life'. Elkin's interest in group life linked his religious enquiry with his social-psychological and anthropological enquiry. Elkin, along with other pioneer sociologists, believed that Aborigines had an instinctive psychological need to persist as a people (not just as families or individuals), but settlement and dispossession caused a morbid psychology and a self-willed demise. Only religion could support this existential malaise, Elkin came to believe. On the settler side, 'group life', at a national and international level, cohered in large part around racial lines of inclusion and exclusion. Similarly, only religion, articulated with civic Idealism, could overcome this group prejudice.

Thus Elkin found tentative hope in the fact that each side in this seemingly hopeless combination of group dynamics also contained a religious dynamic. The religious practices and beliefs of Indigenes and settlers alike centred on local groups of fellowship and socialisation. But these practices and beliefs also opened out to a way of relating that sought and could achieve in regular ritual experiences communion rationalised with reference to a transcendent way of being that was also a source of moral authority. That is, religion provided, in the local experience of

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 193. From Alomes interview with Elkin, 19/5/74.

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communion, the outlook and loyalty that could form the basis of an attempt to interpret group norms in terms of universal moral ideals. The interaction of religious groups provided the means by which social change could occur both widely and thoroughly, and so on an enduring basis.

IV

Christian traditions and communities shaped Elkin's publicity and his anthropology. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australian religious context has not been much studied in recent times.⁶⁹ In this context we return to English religious histories and especially Melvin Richter's study of T. H. Green: a finely-grained account of the inter-relation in the latter nineteenth century of some of the religious traditions and Idealist scholarship that influenced Elkin, directly and through leading Anglo-Catholic and Australian followers of Green.

Elkin's religiosity has been similarly ignored. Elkin's biographer, Tigger Wise, noted that Elkin named each of his sons after founders of Christian Socialism, but she did not enquire into the influence of the Christian Socialists' thinking or their example upon Elkin's work in Aboriginal affairs.⁷⁰ No other published work has considered the influence of Christian Socialism upon Elkin, although this movement shaped his Idealism and his Anglo-Catholicism.

Accounts of Christian Socialism from the perspective of its founders show that the movement was a largely successful attempt by Anglican priests sympathetic to workers to keep revolutionary labour within the bounds of the law and the teachings of the Church.⁷¹ That is, the Christian Socialists attempted to divert the revolutionary labour movement of the 1840s into consensual channels of opinion-formation, consistent with Christian corporatism and English

⁶⁹ For an example of the somewhat insular frame of reference that has characterised recent Australian Anglican religious history, see Bruce Kaye (ed.), *Anglicanism in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002). For a more wide-ranging but very brief treatment of religion in Australia, see Roger C. Thompson, *Religion in Australia: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002 [1994]). For a presentation of the problem of myopic or absent religious history, see Melleuish, 'Liberal Intellectuals'. Melleuish himself rectified this to a significant extent with his *Cultural Liberalism*. Another exception of direct relevance to our study is John A. Moses' work on Elkin's seminal teacher, George Arnold Wood; see John Anthony Moses, *Prussian-German militarism, 1914-18 in Australian perspective: the thought of George Arnold Wood* (New York: Bern, 1991), and more generally *idem* 'Australian Anglican leaders and the Great War, 1914-1918: The "Prussian Menace", Conscriptio, and National Solidarity', *Journal of Religious History* 25 (3), October 2001, 310-23. Wood's religious and Idealist antecedents have also been treated well in RM Crawford, *A Bit of a Rebel* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1970).

⁷⁰ Wise, *Self-Made Anthropologist*, 43.

⁷¹ Brenda Colloms, *Victorian Visionaries* (London: Constable, 1982); Charles E. Raven, *Christian Socialism 1848-1854* (London: Macmillan, 1920).

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reformism. To achieve this, the movement's leaders, most notably the theologian F. D. Maurice, revived and disseminated more broadly the Incarnationist Anglican tradition.

Maurice taught that the Trinity of God pervaded Creation, that God's work of salvation went forward in 'this' world (as against the idea that salvation referred only to an after-life), and that God's work was not constrained to his Church. As literary critics, intellectual biographers, and historians of Christian mission have shown, Anglican Incarnationists from the 1840s held that God revealed himself through evolution, and that for humans similarly gradual reform was the natural and right way of things.⁷² The Christian Socialists, and Elkin after them (Ch. 1), preached to workers and capitalists alike that concerning social justice, God was on labour's side, but concerning the means to that end, labour should look to their priests, who were looking towards parliament.

Similarly, Green's achievement, Richter has established, was to perpetuate by secular opinion-oriented means the transcendent sense of justification that Christians, especially Evangelical Christians, experienced as grace, or the assurance of salvation. Green's most influential followers responded to him as a rational and self-critical religious prophet. Richter has argued that Green found succour for his religious doubts in the Christian rationalisation for good deeds in this world provided by his maternal uncle who was a Christian Socialist (and whose strong influence upon Green followed in part from the death of Green's mother in his infancy). Richter has shown, further, how Green similarly educated and broadened the Evangelical spirituality of undergraduates he taught at Balliol College, Oxford – a generation characterised by a crisis of faith. Green perpetuated the dynamic introspection of the Evangelical tradition but directed it towards broader social ends. He transferred the qualities of spiritual aspiration and commitment into a secular and philosophical version of the Christian Socialist tradition.

To complement Richter's account of the religious origins, context, and effects of Idealism, as well as histories of the Christian Socialist movement, I have referred also to the history of the Tractarian strand in Anglican Catholicism.⁷³ Richter has shown that, as a Fellow at

⁷² 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; Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985); Donald E. Hall (ed.), *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994).

⁷³ James Bentley, *Ritualism and Politics in Victorian Britain: The Attempt to Legislate for Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); John A. Moses (ed.), *From Oxford to the Bush* (Adelaide: Broughton Press, 1997).

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Balliol College in Oxford, Green and especially his most influential students were disciplined by the religious vision of the Tractarians and other High Anglicans whom the Tractarians inspired and revitalised, often called Ritualists.⁷⁴ The Tractarians had in the 1840s-1850s given new authority to the old doctrine that right reason proceeded within the constraints of obedience to Church hierarchy. By poetic, mystical, rhetorical, and sacramental means, they elaborated the idea that the Church of England was ancient, continuous and Catholic.⁷⁵

A shorthand for the two traditions just sketched is that the Incarnationists derived a doctrine of political and secular obligation from the trans-historical, pseudo-scientific view of a divine evolution; the Ritualists derived a doctrine of spiritual obligation from the long-historical view of corporate, traditional religion. Both were corporatist ideologies that thrived in opposition to *laissez-faire*, industrialism, the spiritual individualism of Evangelical Christianity, and the atomisation of citizenship that became an increasing concern through the nineteenth century as the franchise widened. Each based itself in a Christian spiritual practice – Church attendance, prayer, repentance, communion – and pursued fundamental goals articulated with an idea of the freedom of the individual soul; but one looked back to a primitive Christian ideal, and the other looked forward to heaven on earth.

Elkin inherited the Anglo-Catholic reconciliation of these traditions led by Green's followers Charles Gore and F. Scott Holland. Elkin studied their writings as a young priest and in turn Ernest Burgmann and he used them as study texts when they trained ordinands. Gore's writings remain a key brief account of this blend of Incarnationism and Ritualism that by the latter nineteenth century had developed from the Tractarians' lead.⁷⁶ The salience of the Anglo-Catholic project in Australia in Elkin's day is evident in a collection of documents from the 1930s together with recent historical essays.⁷⁷

V

Elkin's modern religious milieu is also an important aspect of the history of anthropology. Omissions in the historiography of anthropology especially indicate areas of advance we may expect to make in the following chapters. Anthropology, in particular the study of Aboriginal

⁷⁴ Richter, *The Politics of Conscience*, 26–27.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 269–342.

⁷⁶ Charles Gore, *The Anglo-Catholic Movement Today* (London: A. R. Mowbray and Co., 1925), 15–17.

⁷⁷ Moses, *From Oxford to the Bush*.

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religion, enters Tigger Wise's biography of Elkin like a *deus ex machina*, resolving the protagonist's disabling doubt, and establishing a direction that he followed for the rest of his career.⁷⁸ Certainly, Elkin's enquiry into Aboriginal religion was the central event of his adulthood, but Wise did not consider the way in which that enquiry replicated a general scholarly turn towards primitive religious experience as a source of light upon the nature and legitimacy of modern Christianity.

Anthropology in general began with the hermeneutics required to make sense of the new testament in relation to the old, Kenelm Burridge has argued.⁷⁹ Modern anthropology was an amplified version of this hermeneutic. Anthropologists provided a new view of humanity, compatible with the long-historical perspectives of geological time and biological evolution, as George Stocking has shown in his study of the beginnings of anthropology in the nineteenth century.⁸⁰

Stocking's account of the development of modern anthropology suggests that Elkin's attempt to reconcile developments in social science with religious continuity was a general feature of modern anthropological thinking. But, as Stocking is another historian who omits religious themes from his treatment of the twentieth century, we have to supplement his context with extensive use of the primary sources, to see how religious themes from the nineteenth century persisted in the twentieth. Stocking's histories of anthropology provide our key context for understanding the anthropologists who shaped Elkin's thinking, and the relation of the various schools of anthropology to one another.

Stocking contrasted the nineteenth century search for clues to the nature of man and the meaning of his culture with the twentieth century search for scientific laws and principles behind the same. Stocking used E. B. Tylor as the hinge between two great eras of anthropology. The continuity Stocking signalled with reference to Tylor was that twentieth century anthropology

⁷⁸ Wise, *Self-Made Anthropologist*, 21–41. Wise made extensive use of the voluminous Elkin Papers at the University of Sydney archives, including his sermons and religious essays. Her insights into Elkin's religious enquiry was an inspiration for this thesis; I have enquired into the sources of the religious interests about which she speculated and I have attempted a more systematic analysis of them.

⁷⁹ Kenelm Burridge, *Encountering Aborigines: Anthropology and the Australian Aboriginal, A Case Study* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1973). Russell McGregor has shown the importance to Elkin of the relation between the testaments as a model of the changes in understanding anthropologists should seek to encourage in Aborigines: 'From Old Testament to New': A.P. Elkin on Christian Conversion and Cultural Assimilation', *Journal of Religious History*, 25 (1), 2001, 39-55.

⁸⁰ George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987). See also AN Wilson, *God's Funeral* (London: John Murray, 1999), 175–202.

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retained the universalist premises of the earlier era, which in Tylor's case at least, Stocking linked with monotheistic religious belief. This universalist purview remained characteristic of anthropology despite important culturally relativist tendencies, issuing especially from the work of Durkheim. Durkheim posited that reason issued from the dynamics through which societies formed. If Durkheim's thesis were true, then reason did not necessarily inhere more generally in the natural world, and so human cultures were not based in rational nature.⁸¹

In turning his pen to twentieth century anthropology, Stocking discontinued his study of religious enquiry.⁸² Stocking called his study of twentieth century anthropology *After Tylor*. In his history of nineteenth century anthropology, Stocking stressed that Tylor was a Quaker looking for new grounds for a universalist faith in the human spirit. But Stocking portrayed none of his twentieth century protagonists as having religious or spiritual motivation behind their scientific work. Stocking is the clear leader amongst historians of twentieth century anthropology, and I have been unable to discover any contribution to the *generalist* anthropological historiography that has made good this omission.

Robert Ackermann's biography of James Frazer's work reveals the way religion remained a central motivator of anthropology into the twentieth century. Increasingly, anthropologists propagated their discipline not as a replacement for religion but as its nemesis. In Ackermann's account, Frazer's campaign against religion and the importance of his relationship with the Christian William Robertson Smith – initially his mentor but eventually his antagonist – has emerged clearly.⁸³

Elkin, after his teacher Francis Anderson, was the most influential Australian proponent of an international debate about the meaning of culture as it pertained to contemporary religious and especially anti-religious concerns. Early sociologists and anthropologists, like the Idealists, sought new intellectual explanations for religious practices and ethics. In particular, anthropologists sought a history of culture that would defuse Nietzsche and others' critiques of Christian morality as unmitigated alienation.

⁸¹ Following a slightly different interpretation of Durkheim, Ernest Gellner has argued that sociologists need to read Durkheim together with Max Weber to obtain a satisfactory, universalist conception of reason: see Ernest Gellner, *Reason and Culture: The Historic Role of Rationality and Rationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 30–54.

⁸² George W. Stocking, *After Tylor* (London: Athlone, 1995).

⁸³ Robert Ackerman, *James George Frazer: His Life and Work* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987). For some intellectual and disciplinary context, see Stocking, *After Tylor*, 124–51.

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Returning to Charles Taylor's account of Hegel's philosophy, we find that a fundamental trope of modern philosophy and critical theory has followed from Hegel's idea of alienation. Hegel supposed that inadequate philosophies (that is, all prior to his own) had misconceived the higher morality as mere dissatisfaction with the moral standards they observed in their own societies; hence the religious notion of an otherworld that would one day supplant this world.⁸⁴ Nietzsche's development of this theme was the most radical instance of what Toews called cultural disinheritance. Nietzsche saturated the idea of alienation with value and emotion.⁸⁵ Priests were haters of power. Their story of an otherworldly reckoning was their mendacious revenge upon their overlords, whose superiority in the arts of living they resented. As we will see, much of Elkin's anthropological context was shaped by Nietzsche's powerful reinterpretation of the meaning and value of religion.

Nietzsche's influence upon Elkin came indirectly, through the Christian restatement that his critique prompted. Pragmatist psychologists and anthropologists led by William James, most notably R. R. Marett, replied that the serenity and loving kindness characteristic of many religious people, and the potency of conviction and vision it produced in others, equally put paid to Nietzsche's thesis (Ch. 3). Religions were cultivators of the soul that supported the achievement of a higher morality through effective psychological technique. By observing the *negative* influence of Nietzsche upon the development of social anthropology we will be able to see how Elkin's guide to the new discipline combined philosophical Idealism with psychological pragmatism to provide new arguments for religious, including Christian, experience.

Elkin's involvement in this anthropological engagement with Nietzsche illustrates that Elkin's religious enquiry was conducted with reference to some of the most challenging ideas of the day, within an intellectual community of faith that believed in open argument and critique. This context helps explain why Elkin's independence of mind, evident in his rejection of the fundamental politics of race and of racialised nationality, even while he engaged in detailed consideration of the likely consequences of racial differences, to which we turn below.

It is important in this regard to note the difference between apologetics and philosophy. Elkin did not have a philosopher's grasp of Nietzsche's ideas, and his guide in these matters, R.

⁸⁴ Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 83, 100.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* [and] *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing, (New York: Doubleday, 1956).

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R. Marett, showed only a superficial grasp of them.⁸⁶ But one did not have to be a philosopher to sense the profundity of the challenge to Christian continuity posed by the new intellectual turn led by Nietzsche. Elkin probably did not read Nietzsche but was profoundly influenced by Marett. Marett (like other Incarnationists, as above) embraced Darwin's theory of evolution; negotiated carefully with Durkheim's sociological innovations and associated moral problems; and attempted to provide direct responses to Nietzsche's most famous challenges to Christian faith. Both the leading historians of anthropology, George Stocking and Henrika Kuklick, overlooked this sophisticated, three-fold religious apologetic that drove Marett's innovations in the theoretical basis of British social anthropological, and which Elkin followed.⁸⁷

Stocking and Kuklick are, however, excellent guides to the lines of development internal to the institutions and key players in British anthropology. Their histories show that Elkin was following the British anthropological mainstream by moving from his studies of Marett to study with the diffusionists, Grafton Elliot Smith, W. J. Perry, and to absorb the posthumous influence of their close associate, W. H. R. Rivers. The diffusionists argued that significant cultural developments such as the belief in an afterlife were exceptional, and much more likely to be diffused through historical contacts than to have arisen simultaneously in different parts of the world through some kind of 'psychic unity'. But again, we have to return to the primary sources to see the ongoing importance of religious and anti-religious debates in the diffusionist school.⁸⁸

Elliot Smith and Perry, whose influence upon Elkin was most direct, developed the Nietzschean idea that the priesthood was an instituted and sustained subversion of the intellect. In this era of his life, Elkin quietly performed some agile intellectual footwork to marry the diffusionist narrative with his own view of the priesthood. This aspect of the intellectual history has not been studied previously. Stocking and Kuklick each assumed that the religious debate was no longer central to the development of anthropology, and Stocking disregarded Elliot Smith

⁸⁶ This is not to downplay Marett's perspicuity and certainly not his importance in this thesis – he is a central figure. I have found no adequate treatment of Marett's work. Stocking, in *After Tylor*, comes closest. See the primary sources: RR Marett, *The Threshold of Religion*, 4th ed. (1909 enlarged 1914, London: Methuen, 1929); *Psychology and Folk-lore* (London: Methuen and Co., 1920); and *Anthropology* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1911).

⁸⁷ Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁸⁸ These are cited in Chapters Four, Five and Six, major works being G. Elliot Smith, *The Evolution of the Dragon* (Manchester: Longmans, Green & Co., 1919); WJ Perry, *The Origin of Magic and Religion* (London: Methuen, 1923); WHR Rivers, *Social Organisation* (London: Kegan Paul, 1924 [ed. WJ Perry]).

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and Perry as extremists, rather than asking why the diffusionist narrative was successful, in the academy and amongst the general public, for over a decade.

Henrika Kuklick has offered an explanation for diffusionism's wide appeal.⁸⁹ It offered a broad explanation of culture, developed common sense premises, and benefited from the authority of its leading scholars – Elliot Smith and Rivers were both generalists whose expertise spanned the sciences and the humanities.⁹⁰ We will see in following chapters how these two leaders of diffusionism – whose differences have not been seriously explored until now – enabled Elkin to blend expertise, moral energy, and religious authority.

Particularly important for the history of Aboriginal affairs was Rivers' belief that colonial governors in Melanesia should study the findings of social anthropology and the experience of scholarly missionaries (Ch. 6). A new account of Rivers' importance to Australian and other southern colonial administrations is possible thanks to the work of the scholars of mission in Melanesia, David Hilliard and Rebecca Sohmer.⁹¹ When we leave the metropolitan focus of Stocking and Kuklick and, with Hilliard and Sohmer, attend closely to the southern periphery, we see how Rivers made his anthropological breakthroughs in concert with the Melanesian Mission.

Here we return once again to the importance in Elkin's milieu of religious debates. On the one hand, traditionalists (Tractarians and Ritualists), emphasised submission and obedience, as the conditions for religious reason; on the other hand, Incarnationists saw God's work in the application of reason to humanitarian ends anywhere. At the foundation of the Melanesian Mission in the late nineteenth century, far from the political complications of theological debate in England, Bishop Patteson and Christian anthropologist Robert Codrington reconciled the strengths of these opposed positions.⁹² As a result, they retained their faith in the continuity and expansion of the Christian church, while also crediting as genuinely religious the spiritual discoveries and beliefs of the Melanesians they sought to instruct.

Rivers, influenced by these missionaries, promoted a combination of humility and sympathy to the 'native point of view' as basic tenets of social anthropology. Rivers argued that the missionaries' methods provided a model that colonial governors ought to follow: begin from

⁸⁹ Kuklick, *Savage Within*, 122–79.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ David Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission, 1849–1942* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1978); Sohmer, *The Intellectual Background of the Melanesian Mission*.

⁹² Robert Codrington, *The Melanesians: Studies in their Anthropology and Folk-lore* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891).

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an understanding and respect for the thinking of those one intends to instruct or govern. On each count, Elkin followed Rivers, whose terminology he adopted in his essays in ‘practical anthropology’. Elkin found that, through Rivers’ work in applied anthropology, his Anglo-Catholicism and his diffusionist anthropology were able to marry, despite the anti-religious arguments of the other diffusionists. This new view of Rivers has become possible by reading the historians of Melanesia together with Stocking’s work, and then returning to Rivers’ essays in applied anthropology (ch. 6).⁹³

Stocking and Kuklick agree that the third phase of twentieth century anthropology (after the early rise of sociology at the hands of Marett, Rivers and Durkheim, and the diffusionist turn to history) was functionalism, led by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski. Echoing his treatment of Durkheim, Stocking observed the influence of Nietzsche upon British social anthropology only in its positive aspect. Stocking showed that Malinowski was directly influenced by Nietzsche in building his influential version of functionalism on the idea that a ‘natural’ morality was vitalist and affirmative, in implicit contrast with (a Nietzschean conception of) religious morality. Elkin (in his less imaginative way) benefited from and exploited Malinowski’s lead in bringing a novelistic eye to the primitive’s point of view. But as we have seen, Nietzsche was more significant to Elkin as an (indirect) antagonist.

VI

Thus religious themes shaped Elkin’s thinking at a fundamental level, even while he responded to practical Australian political concerns by intensifying the study of racial science he began as a doctoral candidate in Elliot Smith’s Department of Anatomy. We have a thorough guide to Elkin’s involvement in Australian racialism in Russell McGregor’s history of scientific and other prognoses, made between 1880 and 1939, that Aborigines would disappear as a distinct race.⁹⁴ Our study of religion and opinion-formation affords a new perspective upon McGregor’s

⁹³ WHR Rivers, ‘The Government of Subject Peoples’, in AC Seward (ed.), *Science and the Nation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1917), 302–27; WHR Rivers, ‘The Psychological Factor’, in *idem* (ed.), *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia* (Cambridge: CUP, 1922), 84–113. See also Richard Slobodin, *WHR Rivers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

⁹⁴ Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*.

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findings, by explaining how Elkin resisted and overcame the many Australian scientists who sought to ‘cultivate whiteness’.⁹⁵

McGregor concluded that on balance Elkin ‘demoted, rather than denied’ racialism. (Racialism was the ascription of external reality to aspects of race that existed only in the minds of beholders; this contrasts with racism, which was a set of negative connotations that in many cases accrued around racialist concepts.) McGregor’s story began with the Scottish enlightenment model of universal progress as propounded in Australia. In this view, civilization developed according to stages in economic organisation. Savages hunt, barbarians herd and the civilized farm and trade. To late eighteenth century observers, Aborigines were savages, but they were also men and women who had solved in their particular way the universal problem of happiness. The theory of stadial development may have afforded a benign view at the point of first contact between colonisers and the colonised, but it failed as a syllabus for colonial tutelage. When attempts to hurry Aborigines along the supposed stages of civilization failed, the colonisers doubted the worth and prospects of the Aboriginal race, not the appropriateness of their linear theory of development.

McGregor is one of two leading scholars on Elkin’s thinking who have centred their accounts of Elkin between the wars upon the stadial language he used. According to Geoffrey Gray, ‘Elkin’s discourse on citizenship was premised on a social evolutionary model of society, and Aboriginal people had to move or be moved along the scale of civilization.’⁹⁶ Gray has argued that Elkin’s campaign for citizenship for the Aborigines was an empty shell; Elkin’s alleged belief that Aborigines ought to live like British Australians was the substance. Gray argues that the normative force of stadial theory in Elkin’s thinking led him to pursue a policy where ‘they’ become like ‘us’.⁹⁷

McGregor’s treatment of the issue was more nuanced. Unlike Gray, McGregor demonstrated how Elkin gradually distanced himself from the assumption that racial inferiority set the parameters for Aborigines’ adaptation to the settlers. Indeed, McGregor’s exposition of Elkin’s thinking after the 1939–45 war disproves Gray’s inflated version of McGregor’s own

⁹⁵ Warwick Anderson, *Cultivating Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).

⁹⁶ Gray, ‘From Nomadism to Citizenship’, 58.

⁹⁷ On this, Gray cited Mulvaney, see DJ Mulvaney, ‘Australasian Anthropology and ANZAAS’, 216.

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argument about the place of social evolutionism in Elkin's thinking.⁹⁸ Yet concerning our period, the inter-war years, McGregor argues that 'the evolutionist or progressivist view provided the basic framework' for Elkin's practical work on behalf of Aborigines. McGregor has used Elkin's thought up to 1939 as evidence for an argument that only Aborigines' own spokespeople escaped the racial thinking that constrained their prospects.

In fact, Elkin used terms from a hybrid of stadial and evolutionary theory, but after about 1925 he never invoked their social evolutionist connotation. Nineteenth-century prejudice, and its residue in the anthropology of that time, undoubtedly caused Elkin's choice of the phrase, 'rise in the scale of civilization.' But the question of Aboriginal opportunity to participate in social, economic and civic life was an unavoidable one. He never entertained the idea that Aborigines had to learn to farm before they could learn to trade. He insisted that nomadism was an economic and not a biological practice. As early as 1926, he promoted the achievements of an Aboriginal mechanic, a mathematician, and a clergyman. Elkin used the terms of stadial theory but his mature and influential arguments undermined it.

For all that, Elkin's exposure to racial neuroscience and an associated, purely biological fatalism did influence his thinking. Elkin took on the mixed messages of Eliot Smith about the relative importance for cultural attainment of a people's biology and their environment (Chs. 4 and 5). Until the early 1930s, he remained troubled by neuroscientists and psychologists who argued that Aborigines were not only less intelligent on average than the settlers, but the intelligence gap was crucial to civilised living. Such findings were one factor behind his expectation that Aborigines 'might not come up to our level.' In the latter 1920s, he attempted to build a policy upon this racial science, but by the time he became influential he had already publicly refuted racialism.

If we are to understand the disposition and purposes that drove effective publicity in the 1930s, then a central question posed by the present state of the historiography of Aboriginal affairs and Australian anthropology becomes: how and why did Elkin begin to dismantle racialist thinking? Accordingly, the central turning point of the narrative told in coming chapters comes

⁹⁸ See Russell McGregor: 'Assimilation as Acculturation'; 'Governance, Not Genocide: Aboriginal Assimilation in the Postwar Era' in Moses, *Genocide and Settler Society*, 290–311; 'Assimilationists Contest Assimilation: TGH Strehlow and AP Elkin on Aboriginal Policy', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 75, 2002, 43-50; ' "From Old Testament to New": AP Elkin on Christian Conversion and Cultural Assimilation', *Journal of Religious History*, 25 (1), February 2001, 39–55.

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when Elkin decided in 1931 that moral, spiritual, and political arguments must over-ride scientific evidence in the determination of Aborigines' capacity to benefit from and contribute to the settler economy and society (Ch. 8).

VII

From the early 1930s, Elkin's Anglican milieu delimited his science. Especially from 1921 to 1934, Elkin collaborated with the Reverend Ernest Burgmann (1885-1967) – a seminal interaction that was literary, pastoral, and pedagogical. Elkin's participation in the 'Morpeth mind', the intellectual efflorescence centred on St John's College in Morpeth, (near Newcastle in New South Wales), and led by Burgmann, is a central strand in his intellectual history.

Burgmann was both mentor and antagonist to Elkin. Burgmann wrote that 'Man is drawn by love and driven by fear of suffering'; but, one might add, rarely in equal measure.⁹⁹ The antithesis aptly distinguishes Burgmann's hopeful message from Elkin's comparatively morbid preoccupations. Burgmann was the enthusiast for the personality of Christ, and seer of what the Church could become. Elkin remained zealous in promoting the need for religious practice in the face of mortality and, in his perception of Aborigines' predicament, the threat of extinction. In the early 1930s, their different agendas caused a schism at St John's College.¹⁰⁰ But at the same time, Burgmann's influence, and the intellectual opportunities he afforded Elkin, elicited from the latter a more radical and visionary project. Burgmann helped the priest ascend the path to prophecy; in so doing, he reminded Elkin of a view of religion that was broader than science – the vista they each experienced in Francis Anderson's philosophy class. The impact their association had on Aboriginal affairs, and Australian anthropology, is here disclosed for the first time.¹⁰¹

Another influential Anglican associate, the Reverend William Morley, inspired Elkin to see his social anthropology as fundamentally an instrument for moral progress. An historian has dissected Elkin's formal relations with junior anthropologists¹⁰²; another has studied his rivalry

⁹⁹ Ernest Burgmann, *The Education of an Australian* (Canberra: St Mark's National Theological Centre, 1991 [1944]), 124.

¹⁰⁰ Hempenstall, *Meddlesome Priest*, 127.

¹⁰¹ But I am developing hints provided by Burgmann's biographer, Peter J. Hempenstall, *The Meddlesome Priest: A Life of Ernest Burgmann* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin), 47, 52, 127.

¹⁰² Geoffrey Gray, 'Dislocating the self, anthropological field work in the Kimberley, Western Australia, 1934–36', *Aboriginal History* 26, 2002, 23–50; *idem*, 'Piddington's Indiscretion: Ralph Piddington, the Australian National

with Donald Thomson¹⁰³; but concerning his close collaboration with his fellow Anglican priest and co-publicist, Morley, the secondary sources are silent or cursory.¹⁰⁴ In documentary and narrative histories, Morley's Association for the Protection of Native Races (APNR) has entered the record only from 1934, when Elkin became its president. Yet, Elkin stood on Morley's policy platform, only adjusting its emphasis and adding expertise.

VIII

Elkin's contribution to Aboriginal affairs can deepen our understanding of the ongoing problems of land rights, the self-determination of remote communities, and the question of genocide. Our study of the central themes in Elkin's intellectual history – faith, Idealism, realism – will, one trusts, enable a future historian of Aboriginal affairs to illumine these issues that seem so intractable today. Perhaps our study also offers precedents for reformers' work in the present. However, in this thesis we merely lay the groundwork that will equip future historians to draw conclusions about Elkin's influence beyond 1939

Others have been less cautious. Historian of anthropology, Patrick Wolfe, drew a long bow when he linked four learned articles Radcliffe-Brown published in 1930 with the problems that, since the 1970s, have beset Native Title claimants in Australia.¹⁰⁵ In one sense Wolfe's arrow hit its mark: '*homo superorganicus*' – a caricature of Aborigines as existing, to an extraordinary degree, in the spiritual and social dimension as distinct from economic and territorial interests – was indeed propagated in the early 1930s, and has haunted Aboriginal politics since.¹⁰⁶

But historians of anthropology should not follow Wolfe in looking primarily to Radcliffe-Brown when tracing connections between formative accounts of traditional Aboriginal life and recent legal and political repercussions. Radcliffe-Brown's model had only indirect significance beyond 1930. He left Australia in 1931, never to return and he contributed nothing specific to his

Research Council and academic freedom', *Oceania* 64 (3), March 1994, reprinted via Gale Group, University of Sydney Library, July 7, 1–31.

¹⁰³ Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 103–104.

¹⁰⁴ An exception is Russell McGregor, who in *Imagined Destinies* at 191–93 provides the outline of Elkin's career in these years, including his involvement in the association; another is Cora Thomas, who in 'White Australians', at 22, refers briefly to Morley's influence upon Elkin in these years.

¹⁰⁵ Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Cassell, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

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colleagues' understanding of Aborigines thereafter. We ought to look instead at Radcliffe-Brown's successor as Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, the Reverend Elkin.

In addition to championing culture over race as a paradigm for understanding Aborigines' interaction with settler society, Elkin also recommended culture and not territory as the primary focus for reformers' and Aborigines' efforts. Elkin proposed that Aborigines should pursue rights in land primarily to shore up their lines of religious continuity, and not in an attempt to maintain the traditional socio-economic structures associated with subsistence living (Chs. 6, 9). In thus emphasising spiritual priorities over political goals, Elkin perpetuated a long-standing reform tradition, Christian Socialism; and developed a central theme of social anthropologists since William Robertson Smith (Chs. 3, 9).

Elkin deliberately contained Australian social anthropology within parameters set by the spiritual dimension to Aboriginal life. His re-invention of '*homo superorganicus*' outlasted the demise of Radcliffe-Brown's structuralism; and did much to define the general public's understanding of traditional Aboriginal life. Elkin propagated a consistent, precise, and systematic account of Aborigines, carrying the authority of science. But he built this account upon a moral imperative, inspired by a religious vision; and only thence a political strategy. Heather Goodall has illustrated the injustice and failures in land policy with which Elkin was associated. She has shown how Elkin's views of particular Indigenous people's claims to land arose from his preoccupation with issues of culture and psychology, rather than the practical sense of justice that might not have tolerated the repeated acts of dispossession that occurred in northern New South Wales.¹⁰⁷ We will provide the intellectual context that explains some of the origins of Elkin's ambivalent attitude towards Aborigines' relations with territory (Chs 1, 3, 6, and 9).

In accepting but seeking to ameliorate dispossession, Elkin believed himself to be pursuing a realistic Idealist project. He agreed with Robertson Smith's theory that the communal property regime typical of pre-literate societies was conducive to a 'natural religion' (Ch. 3); but he also believed that an individualised property regime supported basic human rights, especially

¹⁰⁷ Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin in association with Black Books, 1996).

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for women ((Ch. 6); and that Aborigines' societies would need to have the option of treating land as capital, rather than being bound into an inalienable relation to territory (Ch. 9).

Elkin is also associated with the problem of child removal in the administration of Aboriginal communities. Following the *Bringing Them Home* report in 1997, child removal has attracted the attention of genocide scholars.¹⁰⁸ They have found that genocidal policy gave way quite suddenly after 1939 to, arguably, specifically anti-genocidal policies. No figure is more important than Elkin in that transition. As we will see, it was Elkin's acculturative agenda that first broke the stranglehold of eliminationist ideas in settler Australia. As others have shown, Elkin's ongoing advocacy of acculturative assimilation provided academic authority for Aborigines' struggle to unwind an enculturative national assimilation program.¹⁰⁹

A. Dirk Moses has written that settler Australians have had 'incommensurable responses' to genocidal elements in their history and ongoing national project.¹¹⁰ 'Humanitarians' have recognised and sought to mitigate Aborigines' dispossession and devastation; 'triumphalists' trumpeted the liberal ideals that they believed justified settlement.

Advocates of assimilation attempted to reconcile these two perspectives. The dominant figures in each of the main streams of assimilation – Hasluck and Elkin – were clearly humanitarian, but each also had one foot firmly in the triumphalist camp. Hasluck saw as inevitable the attenuation of Aboriginal culture to something merely private. He wrote that Aborigines were fortunate that the British settled their land and he expressly aimed to assist Aboriginal individuals and families to abandon Aboriginal ways of life to the extent that those ways of life marked off Aborigines as groups apart from mainstream Australia.¹¹¹ As van Krieken has argued, Hasluck expressed an 'ethnocidal' tendency in individualistic liberal governance.

Elkin's attempt to balance humanitarianism with nationalism was more ambivalent. Elkin believed that the individual freedoms and the global intercourse that settler Australian society

¹⁰⁸ The central volume is Moses (ed.), *Genocide and Settler Society*. See in particular the editor's introduction, 'Genocide and Settler Society in Australian History'; and Russell McGregor, 'Governance, Not Genocide, 290–311'; Robert Manne, 'Aboriginal Child Removal and the Question of Genocide, 1900–1940', 217–43; Anna Haebich, '“Clearing the Wheat Belt”: Erasing the Indigenous Presence in the Southwest of Western Australia', 267–89.

¹⁰⁹ McGregor, 'Governance, Not Genocide', 290–311.

¹¹⁰ A. Dirk Moses, 'Genocide and Settler Society in Australian History', in Moses, *Genocide and Settler Society*, 4–6.

¹¹¹ Hasluck, *Shades of Darkness*, 23–25, 138; but see also 120–121 and 137.

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afforded Aborigines *might* justify the invasion of the continent – but only if Aboriginal group life was supported such that Indigenous peoples were able collectively and publicly, as well as individually and privately, to reconcile with settler Australia. Elkin’s achievement was to see beyond a broadly ethnocidal situation (in which settler-colonial imperatives shaped science, religion and governance) and champion a countervailing set of universalist and culturally liberal (pluralist or at least anti-homogeneous) beliefs, practices, and institutional norms. The following chapters study Elkin’s religious journey, and the practical questions about Aboriginal affairs into which it led him. What we will find might suggest that future historians of genocide, anthropology, Aboriginal affairs, and Australian liberalism would do well to consider the relation between faith and reason – especially where incommensurable values might seem to doom opposing sides in a political conflict to permanent enmity.¹¹² Elkin, who in leading a reform movement tolerated political ambivalence, perceived himself to be working in support of both Aborigines’ cultural persistence and the Australian nation.

Looking ahead

As stated, the *primary* focus of this thesis is not the consequences of Elkin’s work. Rather our focus and original contribution will follow from our attempt to answer the question, how did he come to pursue his ambitious goal at all? What influences and principles enabled him to transcend his own involvement in the settler Australian arrogance and fatalism regarding Aborigines, and his structurally typical oscillation in the 1920s between culturally preservationist segregation and culturally eliminationist modes of assimilation? The first seven of the nine following chapters provide an answer to this question. Only in the final two chapters do we turn to the ways in which Elkin led Australian opinion to an assimilationist consensus. Thus our ultimate question becomes: how did Elkin come to lead settler Australian society towards a policy of assimilation of Aborigines, and how did he attempt to impregnate this assimilationist consensus with his preferred but in 1930 ‘seemingly utopian’ acculturative project?¹¹³

Our study proceeds in three parts. In Part One, we study Elkin’s spiritual and intellectual formation in Christian Idealism in order to understand the sources and the originality of his

¹¹² Richard B. Miller has called for something of this kind in ‘On Making A Cultural Turn in Religious Ethics’, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 33 (3), September 2005, 409-443, at 411.

¹¹³ AP Elkin, ‘The Secret Life of the Aborigines’, *Oceania*, III, (2) Dec 1932, 119–138, at 137-38.

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policy position. In Part Two, we see how religious and Idealist concerns imbricated with his scientific training and early involvement in questions of policy. In Part Three, we observe how these concerns found clearer form from 1930, and shaped Elkin's rise to eminence as a publicist and a scientist.

The three parts are organised thematically; themes also develop through linkages that span the narrative. The Idealist publicity explored in Chapter One has strong echoes in our account in Chapter Eight of Elkin's famous and seminal publicity in the early to mid-1930s. Less familiar are the chapters on Elkin's religious quest and its effect on his scholarship and reformism: Chapter Seven studies the resolution of the personal spiritual problems studied in Chapters Two and Three; and Chapter Six sets out some institutional and scholarly avenues through which Elkin satisfied the public dimension of these problems. Chapters Seven and Nine contain parallel accounts of the arguments by which Elkin consolidated his preference for a diffusionist *historical* functionalism over a structuralist functionalism: the former from a personal and pastoral point of view, the latter through a study of key articles in *Oceania*, the journal of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney.

That said, the main organising principle in this thesis is that each chapter works as a self-contained essay, in which we study interacting influences upon Elkin. I have given each of these thematic explorations structural precedence, rather than sacrificing complexity to the demands of a linear narrative. This means that some material recurs in different contexts. The first three chapters, which set out the formative inter-relation in Elkin's thinking of scholarly Idealism, religious commitment, and the emergence of social anthropology from social psychology, focus respectively on 1912–1915, then c. 1900–1921; then 1916 to 1921, developing different perspectives upon overlapping subject matter.

Similarly, each of Chapters Four to Six explores a theme (realism, Idealism, and Christian mission, respectively) in the lead-up to Elkin's impasse of 1929, and so each offers a different perspective upon his thinking in that year. W. H. R. Rivers' arguments about the 'psychological factor' are an important part of Elkin's experience of diffusionism (Ch. 4); they recur in connection with Elkin's attitude to Anglican mission and its centrality for broader, secular lines of his policy development (Ch. 6). Rivers' arguments provided Elkin with the conceptual frame for his series of five articles he published in Burgmann's *Morpeth Review* in 1929–1930, 'The Practical Value of Anthropology'.

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Our contextualisation and analysis of the ‘Practical Value of Anthropology’ series is the wide centre of this thesis, set out in Chapter Four and elaborated in Chapters Five and Six. The importance of the series consists in the fact that Elkin wrote it as a problem poser; in all his 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 – he considered relevant to culture contact in Australia; afterwards, 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 himself thought, as against what he decided he and others ought to think.

The series is also central because it reveals the conflict between racial science on the one hand and a combination of Idealism, psychology, and religious commitment on the other. In 1929, Elkin wrote as a realist publicist compromised, even paralysed, by an Idealist position he had not yet integrated with his desire to advance as a professional scientist. We have to understand the impasse of 1929 before we can appreciate the way he broke through it in 1931.

As mentioned earlier, our account of Elkin’s seminal influence upon practical affairs begins in Chapter Eight, in which the year 1931 is presented as a baseline for Elkin’s national (as against Church-based) acculturative agenda. The southern Autumn of 1931, with which Chapter Eight begins, serves as our climax: then, Elkin rejected the option of biological absorption, determined upon a morally engaged and politically strategic mode of anthropology, and began to propagate his duty-oriented publicity. Chapter Eight goes on to show how the Christian Idealism influenced Elkin’s most influential years as a reformer-publicist; Chapter Nine, how religious, moral and political concerns, interacting with an increasing knowledge of contact situations, shaped Elkin’s (and the dominant Australian) school of social anthropology.

Elkin’s story does not provide any new conclusions that are of immediate usefulness to contemporary Aboriginal affairs. It may illustrate the continued pertinence of some old insights, and illumine some complex ongoing problems. Most of all, I trust that our study will disclose the questions, interests, and commitments that enabled and drove forward arguably the most significant Australian advance towards a practicable agenda for the interaction of settler Australian and Indigenous cultures. In particular, the following chapters show how the Christian Idealist milieu – spanning a range of agnostic and liberal responses to Christian traditions, and in

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competition with medical, administrative and more strictly academic knowledge groups – produced a morally integrated policy framework for Aboriginal affairs.