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‘Paul Kelly: An analysis of his political thought and his role as a public intellectual.’
Paul Kemp
MPhil.
School of History and Politics, University of Adelaide.

ABSTRACT
For nearly four decades Paul Kelly has been widely regarded as one of Australia’s most distinguished political journalists and historians. This paper considers Kelly’s extensive publications outside of his newspaper journalism. In addition to his most well-known accounts of contemporary political history, Kelly has produced many articles, essays, speeches and chapters in edited collections.

The paper draws on that extensive body of Kelly’s work to identify key strengths and weaknesses of his methods, analyses and prescriptions. It also explores the relationship of this body of work to the disciplines of Australian political science and Australian history, including analysing some of the critiques which academics have made of his work. For example, Sean Scalmer and Jackie Dickenson suggest his insider status is inimical to his being a genuine critic of power. Robert Manne concurs with this view and also argues Kelly misunderstands the nature of neo-liberalism and its effect on Australian public policy. Geoffrey Stokes and Judith Brett, among others, contest Kelly’s highly influential model of the Australian settlement.

Nonetheless, the quantity and quality of Kelly’s contribution to Australian political writing suggests that he should be regarded as one of Australia’s most significant public intellectuals. As such, his career presents a useful case study about the meaning and value of this role in the Australian context, as well as the relationship between political journalism and academic writing.
Paul Kelly: A critical analysis of his political thought of and his role as a public intellectual

By its nature, journalism is a calling for reluctant, timid souls – people who watch others doing things of note and then write about it in the isolated safety of their press-gallery cubicles. If they were strong, gutsy personalities they would be politicians themselves... - people who are doers in life, not voyeurs.¹

It is widely asserted that Paul Kelly has been the most influential and important political journalist in Australia over the last the three decades. In 1996 he was described as ‘possibly the most influential political journalist of his generation’.² In 2002, the Australian Financial Review listed him among the 10 most culturally powerful Australians.³ As recently as 2009 Robert Manne claimed that Kelly was ‘the country’s most important political commentator’ who ‘has become a player of real significance in national politics’ and that no political journalist ‘commands even remotely equivalent respect among the political elite’.⁴ In his review of Kelly’s most recent book, John Howard wrote that Kelly and the late Alan Reid are the only journalists who ‘have been serious chroniclers of their times’ and ‘the only ones to attempt to tell a sustained story of Australian politics’.⁵

Kelly’s significant independent scholarship means he should, arguably, be considered as a major public intellectual, by a number of definitions of that somewhat contentious term. Grayling, for example, defines public intellectuals as ‘individuals who are acquainted with both history and the history of ideas, who can take from them insights of relevance to the present, and who can effectively communicate new ideas and insights as a result.’⁶ While Posner more simply defines public intellectuals as ‘intellectuals who opine to an educated public on questions of or inflected by a political or ideological concern’⁷ Kelly, as has been said of the twentieth century doyen of American political columnists Walter Lippmann, has led ‘two lives: One of books and one of newspapers’ where ‘each helps the other’.⁸

Unlike Lippmann, Kelly’s evolution from journalist to public intellectual, was not a rapid one

In the first twenty years of his career ‘the professor’ (as he is nicknamed) wrote two books on Australian federal politics. The following twenty years saw a dramatic jump in the number and nature of Kelly’s publications, including five more books, a television series, chapters in edited collections, Lowy Institute papers and various lectures. Such prolific output – amounting to over 3000 pages - in combination with his journalism represents a significant contribution to shaping the dominant interpretations of historical and political debate in Australia from the 1970s onwards. As Lowe says, ‘Journalists often shape public mood which in turn provides historians with the key issues warranting more attention.’ This means that historians often ‘have to follow the contours of what they [journalists] define as important and that in Australia this is particularly true of our military and political history’.

But what is the nature of the contribution Kelly’s works have made to contemporary political debate and, in particular how useful and enduring are his contemporary political histories? How influential are the historical narratives and his other analyses on the disciplines of Australian political science and political history?

Certainly Kelly’s books have generally met with acclaim from a wide range of politicians, journalists and academics. Yet in recent times dissenting voices have emerged. Dickenson and Scalmer, for example, argue that his ‘fatal flaws – his pomposity, intoxication with the powerful, lack of detachment and undisguised self-regard – have become models of journalistic and historical practice.’ They also suggest that he supported Howard and criticised the ALP after 1996 because he is: ‘Awed by power and’ needed ‘to retain access to it’ and that this insider status ‘subordinates intellectual freedom to power.’ Manne has also described Kelly as ‘the ultimate insider’ who ‘knows that should he become an outsider (a systematic and forthright critic of an Australian government)’ he would forfeit his access to power which is his most valuable asset. Dickenson also suggests his work is an

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10Ibid.


13 Ibid., pp. 22-23 and p. 25.

14 Manne, *The Insider*, p. 27.
example of the effects of celebrity culture on political writing as it is dominated by
the personalities of journalists and politicians. While Davis, refers to Kelly as one of
those generation of ‘established political pundits’ who ‘have completely run out of
ideas’ while ‘flaunting faded social-democrat credentials even as they have
embraced and often campaigned hard for neo-liberal economics or punitive social
policies.’ But with the exception of Manne none of these have addressed Kelly’s
historical interpretation and policy analyses in real depth.

What follows is a necessarily brief assessment of each of his books and some of his
shorter publications and their impact on political debate as conducted by media,
political and academic elites.

THE UNMAKING OF GOUGH and THE HAWKE ASCENDANCY

Kelly’s first book, The Unmaking of Gough was one of several published immediately
in the aftermath of the Whitlam government’s dismissal. At the age of 29 and with
six years’ experience as a journalist Kelly’s debut built on the template established
by veteran journalist Alan Reid. It features many elements of what Dickenson
classifies as a ‘quickie,’ - a work of contemporary political history ‘written around a
specific event...using inside knowledge gained by the journalist in the course of their
duties’ featuring ‘a focus on personalities and conflict at the expense of impersonal
forces, a restricted context, a lack of interest in formulating and testing causation,
and limited research’ involving a ‘rehash’ of ‘material that already exists in the
public domain.’ But it was exceptional in its length (over 200,000 words), and the
period it covers - from the start of Whitlam’s second term in May 1974 to just after
Whitlam’s re-election by caucus as ALP leader in early 1976 – also indicates it has
some of features of ‘the longer history.’ It is also a highly detailed account of the key
events, of Australian federal politics from mid-1974, leading to the constitutional
crisis and the five months following it. A major omission is that there is no mention
of Indonesia and East Timor; Kelly would later come to write extensively about
Australia’s relationship with these countries.

The book highlights some of the strengths and weaknesses of Kelly’s mode and
style. In following the template laid down by Reid and others, The Unmaking of
Gough can be critiqued as a ‘recognisably generic’ story of ‘the self-destruction of the

15 Jackie Dickenson, ‘Journalists writing Australian political history’ in Australian Journal of Politics and History, V. 56,
no.1, 2010, p. 118
16 Mark Davis, ‘Great White Noise’, in David Carter (ed.), The Ideas Market: An alternative take on Australia’s
newly powerful’ which privileges ‘personalities as the drivers of history.’ As part of this process the text is composed as a narrative which emphasises personal interaction over analysis.

But to say it is only ‘political history as a chronicle of great, flawed individuals and the world they make’ is an oversimplification. The Unmaking of Gough was one of several books produced in the aftermath of the fall of the Whitlam government and was regarded by Blewett as ‘a more substantial and ambitious work than the others, and in many ways is a model of lucid instant history.’ Blewett, however, pointed out that all these books, Kelly’s included, were ‘lacking in economic perspective’ and needed ‘a thorough explanation and assessment of the links between the international context, domestic malaise and government response.’ This was a flaw that Kelly would only address fourteen years later in his third book. McQueen, in his review of the contemporary texts dealing with the dismissal, went further to assert that ‘the absence of the international dimension’ in all of these books revealed ‘the bankruptcy of political journalism’ at that time. But McQueen still ultimately judged The Unmaking of Gough as ‘Essential for detail’ and the ‘Best buy as permanent record.’ Indeed, The Unmaking of Gough, remains one of the most detailed chronological accounts of the period.

Another key feature of the genre, exemplified by The Unmaking of Gough is its reliance on the interview as the primary source of evidence and the minimal use of secondary sources. In the first edition there was, in fact, no bibliography or endnotes. It was not until the third edition that Kelly included the latter and these do reveal that the source material consisted largely of extensive author interviews with the key players.

Kelly’s second book, The Hawke Ascendancy: A Definitive Account of its Origins and Climax 1975-1983 is an account of Australian federal politics from the fall of Whitlam to the election of Bob Hawke. Like its predecessor it had the features typical of contemporary political journalistic history written up until that time. It was, like its
predecessor, ‘newspaper-friendly, personality-focused, dramatically-rendered and insider-oriented’.25

THE END OF CERTAINTY

With these two books Kelly had established himself as Alan Reid’s heir apparent. In The End of Certainty: The Story of the 1980s, however, he surpassed the master and set a new standard for journalists writing contemporary histories of Australian politics. Its publication followed his appointment as editor-in-chief of the Australian and arguably marks his development into a public intellectual. With this book Kelly was as interested in how political power was used to achieve change as well as how it was won and lost. The book was well received although the initial reviews did not always suggest that this would be Kelly’s most significant book – one that Manne would come to regard as ‘perhaps the most influential Australian political book written since Donald Horne’s Lucky Country.’26

McEachern, for example, said it was characterised by ‘a fairly restricted conception of …politics’ and was ‘replete with a simplifying narrative structure, goodies and baddies’ and ‘a desire to side with the victors of history.’27 Henderson went further saying that the problem of using reconstructed conversation (and Kelly’s failure to ‘discuss the evidentiary problems raised by his methodology’) meant ‘The End of Certainty is not history. Rather is it (sic) a high class interpretative and opinionated journalism.’28 Henderson went on to identify several minor errors of fact in how his relationship with Howard and the Liberal Party was characterised. Other academic reviews were less critical but certainly not effusive. Roberts, for example, said its ‘strengths…are also it weaknesses’, it was ‘an old-fashioned cabinet history’ that showed ‘a small elite, driven by ideology and egotism, deciding the future of the nation in the comfortable isolation of Canberra’.29 While Coghlan merely concluded that Kelly had ‘made a valuable contribution to the subject of deregulation induced by Social Democracy’30

Much of the impact of the book stems from the introduction where Kelly adumbrates a description of post-federation Australian history he calls the ‘Australian Settlement’. Drawing on the work of number of historians and

25 Scalmer and Dickenson, p. 19.
28 Gerard Henderson, ‘Paul Kelly’s Tome – A Great Read; But is it History?’, Media Watch, Sydney Institute, No. 24, October-December 1992, p. 3.
economists including, W. K. Hancock, Frederick Eggleston, Edward Shann and Leon Glezner. Kelly condensed and shaped this source material for what he considered to be the key developments of Australia’s post-federation history into a cogent model which has had remarkable resonance. It consisted of the laws and institutions which could be categorised as ‘White Australia, Industry Protection, Wage Arbitration, State Paternalism and Imperial Benevolence.’ According to Kelly this framework created a ‘Fortress Australia’ which was endorsed by both major parties and had wide support that cut across class and religious divisions.

Kelly uses this historical interpretation to highlight the significance of the policy changes introduced throughout the 1980s which started the process of dismantling the settlement which was ‘introspective, defensive, dependent’ to replace it with a new settlement of ‘sustained economic progress’ that ‘was more outward looking.’ As a result of this, Kelly argues, the fundamental division in post-1983 politics is no longer between the ALP and the Liberal coalition, even though partisan ‘differences were real and bitter.’ The division cuts across party lines to be ‘between the international rationalists and the sentimental traditionalists.’ The former ‘know the Australian Settlement is unsustainable’, the latter ‘fight to retain it.’

This concept has, as will be seen, led to the emergence of significant literature that employs and/or critiques the term in different ways. The introduction of the book is also widely used in teaching Australian political science.

The 34 chapters of the text alternate between commentary on the key policy initiatives of the period and the traditional generic accounts of political power struggles. The specific dismantling of each pillar of the Australian Settlement does not actually constitute the bulk of the text. Conflict between and within the parties is still paramount, although it is often mediated by the struggle between the defenders of the Australian Settlement and their opponents.

Kelly acknowledges that these ‘economic rationalist’ policies ‘were seen by the community to be devoid of any moral base and to have produced immoral results.’ Yet, ‘the argument of the free market right becomes compelling’ because:

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32 Ibid., p. 2 and p. 15.
33 Ibid., p. 2.
34 Ibid., p. 2.
‘Its proposition is simple—the faster Australia hastens its reforms and becomes more productive, the sooner it can return to the path of sustained growth and employment creation.’38 This, in turn, has created a ‘crisis of ideology’ for the ALP where the ‘the only real choice’ is to ‘try to strike a reconciliation between market efficiencies and government intervention.’39 These were to be the dominant themes of much of his subsequent writing.

Kelly was aware of the problems: ‘free markets have the potential to destroy the social status quo. They can uproot communities...and demolish long-established social ties and employment habits.’40 Kelly claimed that despite the recession ‘no alternative policy paradigm was produced to reverse the direction of the 1990s’ and ‘This was testimony to the continued power of free market ideas.’41 Kelly also predicted ‘that Australia would experience a sustained low-inflation recovery for several years assisted by the structural changes of the 1980s, deepening integration with the Asia-Pacific and a more diversified and efficient economy.’42 And it does seem that much of this, with the – albeit significant exception of diversification - has largely happened. The Australian economy has not had a recession since 1991 (after experiencing five in the previous 20 years).43 By several other measures the Australian economy has experienced ‘the longest boom in its history.’44 As Conley has said, ‘Globalisation, liberalisation and engagement with Asia have increased prosperity.’45

Another aspect of The End of Certainty is that Kelly’s advocacy of economic rationalism was closely linked to his portrayal of globalisation. Kelly uses the term largely in its economic and political aspects, rather than as a contested idea involving ‘a multidimensional set of social processes that resists being confined to any single framework.’46 For Kelly, ‘globalisation of markets’ is ‘ongoing and irresistible.’47

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40 Ibid., p. 418.
41 Ibid., p. xxii.
42 Ibid., p. xxviii.
44 Ibid., p. vii.
In addition, Kelly understood that ‘A pure theory of economic efficiency cannot satisfy most democratic electorates where social, human and moral requirements will often outweigh the economic.’ 48 Kelly concluded that: ‘That the challenge for Australian leadership is to internationalise the economy within a framework of social justice and equity thereby retaining the deepest and oldest Australian values.’ 49 This idea of trying to reconcile economic liberalisation with social inclusion became an essential concern of Kelly’s publications. It is also arguably the primary concern of the two major political parties - would the leaders of either party argue against it? - so Kelly’s position is in effect a centrist or moderate stance of ‘the sensible centre.’

From now on his publications would have a strong prescriptive element in which the following key principles are consistent. First, globalisation cannot be resisted and requires an open society and open economy to reap its benefits. Second, this means economic liberalisation - free trade, financial and wage decentralisation, welfare reform that encourages self-reliance and a non-discriminatory migration program. Republicanism and reconciliation are also essential. This was also Paul Keating’s agenda. Hence Manne’s description of the journalist and prime minister ‘as the most influential Irish-Australian double act in the history of the country.’ 50

NOVEMBER 1975

Kelly then revisited the 1975 Constitutional crisis 20 years later in November 1975, a book Manne found to be ‘the most penetrating analysis of the dramas which overtook Australian politics in the spring of 1975.’ 51 Macintyre sees Kelly’s two books on Whitlam as offering ‘the fullest record of the Whitlam government’s demise.’ 52 Yet Kelly claims that 1975 was ‘marked by a dangerous breakdown in constitutional conventions, without which the democratic system cannot survive’ and it ‘clearly altered the pattern of Australian politics and tilted the system towards instability.’ 53 The fact that the opposite– stability in constitutional matters - has occurred also indicates a limitation of the contemporary political history.

Following the 1998 election Kelly’s contributed a long essay entitled The Paradox of Pessimism in Future Tense: Australia beyond Election 1998, a collection of essays by its

48 Kelly, The End of Certainty, p. 419.
49 Ibid., p.686.
journalists from the *Australian* writing in their specialist policy areas. It basically sets out the agenda for ongoing reform depicted in his magnum opus: the 1990s have been dominated by ‘the clash between the economic imperative of globalisation and the community’s demand for security and safety in a mesmerising world.’54 So ‘Government should not try to run businesses in competitive markets.’ Therefore, government needs to reduce the public’s expectation of its role. This in turn means reducing welfare dependency, an redefining the relationship between government and markets.

In order to moderate the rising inequality created by globalisation individuals need to become ‘stakeholders’ in such entities as superannuation and pension funds. And unemployment must be decreased. This involves moving further away from centralised wage fixing. Next, improved infrastructure ‘will require a deeper collaboration between governments and private sector across a range of industry’55 Finally, ‘special programs for Aboriginal advancement are needed’ which ‘means an implicit acknowledgement that a full restoration of past injustice cannot be achieved, and will never be achieved.’56 Kelly concludes by restating his central idea: globalisation needs to be made to work and a ‘market-orientated growth economy’ must be made compatible ‘with a caring, diverse and interdependent society.’57

PARADISE DIVIDED

These ideas are reiterated throughout his next book *Paradise Divided*, a collection of columns miscellaneous speeches and longer articles, as well as some new introductory material. Again the central problem ‘the clash between the economic imperative of globalisation and the community demand for reassurance’58 which requires that ‘Social and economic policy must go together.’59 Therefore governments need to privatise and outsource’ yet also make ‘markets work for the community.’60

Kelly, in public intellectual mode, also argued that western liberalism it has left ‘mankind too devoid of moral purpose’ and liberal tolerance rests on ‘an acceptance

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56 Ibid., p. 31.
57 Ibid., p. 35.
58 Paul Kelly, *Paradise Divided: The changes, the challenges the choices for Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, p. viii.
59 Paul Kelly, ‘Australia in the Global Economy’ in ibid, p. 5.
60 Ibid., p. 10.
that truth is relative.’61 In addition representative democracy may eventually be replaced by direct democracy. The process will be exacerbated by ‘three of the great trends: the decline of State power; the rise of the corporation; and the scientific method of winning elections.’62 Kelly looks at the possible scenarios including the paradox that scientific methods give politicians a greater insight than ever into voter behaviour so they can ‘regurgitate what the people say’ but ‘the people’s contempt for their leaders only grows.’63

Kelly also thought these trends offered a persuasive analysis of the initial electoral impact of Pauline Hanson’s ‘manipulation of grievance and exploitation of rural resentments, funny money quackery and racism.’64 First, globalisation undermined the State’s problem solving ability which, in turn fuelled voter resentment which Hanson could then exploit. Second, the ‘convergence between the media, entertainment and political industries’ means ‘the media treats politics as a product to lift its ratings and win revenue-witness the Pauline Hanson phenomenon.’65 and, finally, ‘the scientific approach to politics’ identifies the electoral cynicism and encourages politicians to pursue a negative campaign line and also may have prevented a more effective response to Hanson as parties are influenced by market research.66

Kelly concludes the book with a column written in February 2000 entitled ‘National Disgrace’ which is probably his most scathing critique of Australian political leadership. How does this square with this particular analysis. He begins by saying, ‘John Howard and Kim Beazley have failed themselves, their parties and the country.’67 He goes on to describe Howard as the most knee-jerk, poll reactive, populist prime minister in the past 50 years’ while Labor’s campaign under Beazley against the GST – ‘a tax it intends to keep’ was ‘political fraud on a grand scale.’68 It is, as will be seen, one of many examples demonstrating Kelly’s role as a critic of power.

The book remains both a useful guide to the expanding range of Kelly’s concerns and a primer on many of the key political issues of the 1990s. In his review Economou described the book as ‘the cosmopolitan view in which economic reform

61 Paul Kelly, ‘Liberty and Equality’, in Paradise Divided: The changes, the challenges the choices for Australia, p. 56.
62 Paul Kelly, ‘Can Democracy Survive’ in ibid., p. 133.
63 Ibid., p. 134.
64 Paul Kelly, ‘Hanson, A Sympton of a Deeper Problem’, in ibid., p. 142.
65 Ibid., p. 152
66 Ibid., p. 153.
68 Ibid., p. 276.
is seen as critically important, in which engagement with Asia is advocated, in which multiculturalism is venerated and where immigration is viewed as an important economic policy issue.\(^\text{69}\)

100 Years: The Australian Story

Kelly’s next book, *100 Years: The Australian Story* was an attempt at popular history. It was written to accompany an ABC television series presented by Kelly to commemorate the 100\(^{\text{th}}\) anniversary of federation. Again Kelly’s key ideas emerge through his analysis of post-federation Australian history. Large-scale immigration program as essential for economic growth, government must make ‘the open economy work’ by ‘giving the community a stakeholding in its benefits.’\(^\text{70}\) Greater indigenous representation is needed, ‘Aboriginal people...must abandon, eventually, their victim mentality’\(^\text{71}\) and John Howard must apologise. With foreign policy Australia must ‘be engaged in Asia but deeply linked with Europe and North America.’\(^\text{72}\) Kelly also argued that Australia’s reliance on Britain and the USA was necessary given Australia’s location and population but Australia manipulated ‘the great and powerful as much as they manipulated Australia.’\(^\text{73}\)

HARD HEADS, SOFT HEARTS

Kelly then co-edited *Hard Heads, Soft Hearts: A New Reform Agenda for Australia*, the outcome of a 2002 conference organised by *The Australian* and the Melbourne Institute for Applied Economic and Social research. A decade after *The End of Certainty*, Kelly’s central concerns remained: ‘How can market forces be translated into widespread benefits across the whole of society?’\(^\text{74}\) This required ‘a hard-headed and soft-hearted approach’ where ‘economic advance and social equity can march in harmony.’\(^\text{75}\) The ‘national debate...is still a battle between economic reformers and sentimental traditionalists’ and ongoing change is needed for ‘a prosperous economy’ where ‘democracy, inclusion and egalitarianism is upheld.’\(^\text{76}\)

As part of this process Australia should therefore raise its level of overseas aid and increase its humanitarian and refugee intake as well as promote forms of trade

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\(^{71}\) Ibid., p. 193.

\(^{72}\) Ibid., p. 241.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., p. 241.


\(^{76}\) Ibid., p. 199.
‘liberalisation that can help the world’s poor in the most immediate way.’

Population growth should also continue as should a foreign policy that needs to balance deeper integration in Asia while maintaining the U.S. alliance.

The conference from whence the book came was attended by federal and state ministers (and opposition shadow ministers), prominent academics, business and union leaders, community group leaders and public service heads. It indicates Kelly’s willingness to use his status to play a role in attempting to influence policymakers to ‘put genuine problem solving back onto the political stage.’ Here Kelly’s functioning as a public intellectual is seen in his facilitation of evidence-based solutions to contemporary social and economic problems.

THE MARCH OF PATRIOTS

The March of Patriots was Paul Kelly’s sixth wholly-authored book and the sequel to The End of Certainty. Subtitled The Struggle for Modern Australia the historical period covered begins with Keating’s accession to the prime ministership in December 1991 and ends with Howard’s re-election for a third term in 2001. One of Kelly’s central claims is that the most significant divisions in politics are generational rather than ideological so, as members of the same generation, Keating and Howard had much in common which belied their fierce political rivalry. Thus, the similarities in their policies outweighed the differences. These included most of those assessed in The End of Certainty and subsequently advocated by Kelly: deregulating the exchange rate and the financial system, tariff reduction, establishing an independent central bank targeting inflation, enterprise bargaining and labour market deregulation and privatisation. The proof of its success was Australia’s sustained economic growth in the face of massive global economic shocks, particularly the 1997-98 Asian crisis and the 2008 global financial crisis. From The End of Certainty on much of Kelly’s work makes a compelling case for the effectiveness of what some consider neo-liberal reform in an Australian context. Kelly’s critics, however, tend to take a reductionist view of his books by focusing on the two histories and their championing of economic liberalism. This tends to ignore the other contributions he has made to the public debate.

THE SHORTER WORKS

78 Ibid., p. 3.
His 2005, Cunningham Lecture *Rethinking Australian Governance – The Howard Legacy* is one such contribution. Here Kelly analysed the growth of executive power under Howard’s prime ministership and how, by appealing to public sentiment and Australian values, Howard ‘invokes public approval to legitimise any changes to governance that might diminish accountability.’\(^{79}\) These included stronger security laws (which enabled Howard to act ‘as national security chief’\(^{80}\)) and restrictions on the public service. Howard has strengthened ministerial power over the public service to such an extent that ‘it is too protective of its political masters and too responsive for good governance.’\(^{81}\)

Kelly infers that the Howard government’s style has contributed to ‘an emerging crisis of ideas’ and that as Howard completes the economic reforms began under Hawke ‘there is no apparent source of intellectual renewal.’\(^{82}\) Kelly’s suggested reforms include a code of conduct for ministerial advisers and reform of government advertising laws. The lecture, in analysing the greater centralisation of power in the office of Prime Minister, has been frequently cited in contemporary Australian political science literature on federal government power. It was another indication that Kelly’s insider status did not necessarily compromise his role as a forthright critic of political power. As Weller points out, Kelly is among the small group of writers who ‘give the greatest insight’ into how the politics of executive power works and ‘the mechanics and processes by which policy is made there’.\(^{83}\)

Kelly’s foreign policy realism then had its fullest expression in a 2006 Lowy Institute paper *Howard’s Decade: An Australian Foreign Policy Reappraisal*, a largely favourable analysis of the Howard government’s foreign policy from 1996-2005. Kelly outlines how Howard overcame a number of early missteps - of which he is highly critical - such as Howard’s failure to see the foreign policy implications of the emergence of Pauline Hanson. Kelly also characteristically downplays the role of ideology. Rather, the Howard foreign policy was ‘an exercise in practical politics based upon the national interest and Australian values’ which ultimately deepened the relationships with the United States, China and Indonesia.\(^{84}\) Kelly acknowledges that Howard’s strong support of the Bush administration’s policies meant that developments in


\(^{80}\) Ibid., p. 14.

\(^{81}\) Ibid., p. 7.

\(^{82}\) Ibid., p. 10.


\(^{84}\) Paul Kelly, *Howard’s Decade: An Australian Foreign Policy Reappraisal*, p. 3.
Iran and Afghanistan and the incidence of Islamic terrorism will be crucial in any future assessment of Howard’s foreign policy.

In the last ten years Kelly also contributed to public debate through giving interviews and speeches. One of the latter, published in 2004, restated concerns expressed in *Paradise Divided* about the dumbing down of politics and the rise of entertainment culture. He called for the quality press to take ‘a more intellectual approach’, using ‘new voices…from the universities and think tanks, and to become ‘more involved in the big issues-looking at how Australia seizes the opportunities in the globalised age’ — always a central concern. His 2006 Acton lecture suggested that religion and religious values were becoming more significant in twenty-first century Australia was also published. Kelly’s conclusions, as expected, advocated a middle road where religious groups ‘need to be mindful…not to infringe the limits that exist on religious freedom’ while ‘political secularists need to beware of propounding a false or exaggerated doctrine about the separation of church and state in Australia.’

THE JOURNALIST AS PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL

Besides his regular column in the Australian Kelly continues to periodically publish elsewhere and there will, no doubt, be another major contemporary history of Australian federal politics. So what do these publications amount to? Academic citations is one, very imprecise, measure. But the fact that Kelly’s extra-journalistic publications have had over 900 citations (although *The End of Certainty* received over half) suggest his impact on academia has not been insignificant. More qualitative analysis needs to be done in order to determine Kelly’s influence in political science and Australian history. But the attention his works receive from historians and political scientists mean that his arguments are taken seriously. At the very least, as Grayling says: ‘Whether ideas come to be accepted or rejected, everyone gains by having them discussed.’

Kelly’s conception of the Australian settlement has had remarkable durability in that some political scientists and historians employ it as model for their own analyses.

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88 For a recent example see Alan Fenna, ‘Putting the ‘Australian Settlement’ in Perspective’ in *Labor History*, no. 102, May 2012, pp. 99-118.
Others have used it as the starting point for their own version of the Deakinite settlement. Still more have critiqued it in developing or defending more sophisticated conceptions of post-federation Australian history. But as Stokes, a prominent critic of the concept, has said, ‘Kelly has made a distinctive contribution to the study of politics…his brief account of the Australian Settlement sets the criteria of significance by which we ought to assess the recent evolution of Australian politics.’

Kelly’s works also, as even his critics acknowledge, help explain ‘the activity of elites’ and ‘therefore enhances knowledge and potentially strengthens debate.’ The argument that Kelly’s insider status ‘positions the voter as a perennial outsider, sending the message that there is a separate political sphere of which they are not, and never can be a part’ is highly contestable. Rather than ‘make politicians seem more remote, their decisions impossibly complex…far beyond ordinary understanding.’ Kelly’s work, arguably, does the opposite, by demystifying how political power actually operates at the highest level of Australian government.

A continuation of this argument is the claim, by Manne for example, that as an insider Kelly’s role as a genuine critic of power is mitigated by his being too close to political leaders. He has, says Manne ‘internalised at different times, the world views of both Keating and Howard.’ This is also highly contentious. Manne does not say how this process of internalisation occurs or what it involves – is it a conscious act or a case of intellectual ‘slippage’? Moreover, there are too many examples of his criticism of political leaders, which refute this claim. Kelly, for example, argues that Keating’s interpretation of Australian history ‘was insulting. Its attitude to the Australian people was patronising’ while Keating’s reaction to his 1993 election win ‘was shameless, schizoid and idealistic’ and, with regard to foreign policy, ‘his vision was often egocentric’. Howard was criticised for his failure to condemn Pauline Hanson and was responsible ‘for much of the delay, division and

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92 Scalmer and Dickenson, p.24.
93 Ibid., p.22.
94 Manne, *The Insider*, p. 27.
95 Paul Kelly, *The March of Patriots*, p.72
96 Ibid, p. 91.
97 Ibid, p. 176.
demoralisation that marked indigenous policy during his time in power.'

Kelly also condemned Howard, along with Kym Beazley for having ‘failed themselves, their parties and the country.’

Kelly excoriates both parties for both failing to meet the on-going challenges of globalisation. At one point Howard had not articulated a post-GST reform agenda and ‘his populist rhetoric largely confirms the worldview of the talkback jocks that globalisation is an evil’ whilst ‘the ALP runs off an anti-globalisation fear agenda devoid of any policy solutions.’ Such criticisms go some way to contesting the argument that Kelly’s insider status prevents genuine critique of Australian government.

It is Kelly’s overall endorsement of major policy directions particularly ‘the float, financial deregulation…tariff reductions…competition policy and privatisation, enterprise bargaining’ that promoted market solutions to key areas of public policy which have perhaps led his detractors to ignore the evidence of Kelly’s critiques of Australian political leadership. Sawer, for example, says Kelly, ‘presents market reformers as winning the contest through their intellectual force and freedom from sectional interests while opponents of deregulation are trapped in the past or are vested interests such as powerful trade unions, sections of manufacturing industry of ‘new class’ teachers and public-sector professionals.’

But Kelly’s depiction of the period is somewhat more nuanced. Kelly shows how, for a number of reasons, the market reformers, for good or ill, did, implement neo-liberal policies in several key areas while those opposed (a much more diverse group than Sawer’s quote infers) are, if not ‘trapped,’ then may be regarded as defenders of the status quo.

Shanahan has argued that the Hawke government’s most ‘important legacy is ‘a change in thinking’ about how Australia ‘could meet the challenge’ of globalisation in a socially just way.’ Therefore, it can be claimed that as Kelly in his most well-known books ‘both naturalises the market ascendancy and lovingly (even sometimes brilliantly) details every single step required to get there’ is also a key figure in

99 Paul Kelly, Paradise Divided, p. 275
100 ibid., p. 277 and 277-278.
101 Paul Kelly, The March of Patriots, p.266.
103 Martin Shanahan, ‘Economic Policy of the Hawke Years’ in Gerry Bloustein, Barbara Comber and Alison Mackinnon (eds.), The Hawke Legacy, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, South Australia, p. 174..
promoting ‘the view that a failure to respond to international market signals would result in a long-term decline in living standards.’

Kelly has also been criticised for rejecting the idea that Keating or Howard were swayed by ‘some abstract neo-liberal ideology’ and that John Hewson’s 1993 election defeat ‘terminated the neo-liberal political experiment.’ Again these criticisms are contestable. Manne, for example, argues that Kelly is mistaken in believing that ‘neo-liberalism exists only if it is imposed as a universal philosophy.’ He says the key ALP reforms lauded by Kelly – ‘financial deregulation, privatisation, free trade, competition policy – come straight out of the neo-liberal textbook.’ But Manne also admits that ‘the impact of neo-liberalism from the early 1980s was shaped by the character of Australian political culture and by many practical considerations,’ which ‘dissatisfied neo-liberal purists.’ This qualification is getting close to Kelly’s own argument that neither the Keating or Howard government was neo-liberal. Altman concurs with Kelly’s assessment saying that Howard was not ‘in any real sense a genuine neo-liberal.’

Kelly’s evidence includes the key fact that the Howard government was the highest taxing and spending government since Whitlam’s and its reduction of public debt and delivery of surplus budgets was not a neo-liberal tenet but prudent economic management and an electoral tactic with which according to Kelly, Howard ‘destroyed the Labour Party.’ In addition, Howard maintained both medicare and ‘a targeted welfare state’ that saw a redistribution ‘in income terms…from the top 20 per cent to the bottom 60 percent’ according to a range of NATSEM studies. Finally, like Keating, Howard ‘sought to…retain regulatory authority’ and ‘guarantee a strong social safety net’.

Another area of criticism is Kelly’s methodology. The histories have been criticised for their over reliance on confidential interviews, their limited acknowledgement of secondary sources and lack of theory. This highlights the claim that ‘the truly divided knowledge cultures of our times are not the sciences and the humanities but

105 Shanahan, p. 174.
106 Kelly, The March of Patriots, p. 278
107 Kelly, Ibid., p. 75
109 Manne, Ibid., p. 28.
110 Kelly, The March of Patriots, p. 278.
112 Kelly, Ibid., p. 301.
113 D. Altman, View from the top, Australian Literary Review, 7 October, 2009, p. 6.
114 Kelly, The March of Patriots, p. 268.
journalism and academia.’114 Yet in writing what some call ‘the history of the present’ it is arguable that ‘Any reportage worth reading involves rearranging material, highlighting, and, to some extent, turning real people into characters in a drama’ and that ‘the virtues of good journalism and good history are very similar: exhaustive, scrupulous research; a sophisticated, critical approach to the sources; a strong sense of time and place; imaginative sympathy with all sides; logical argument; clear and vivid prose.’115

A possible reason for the impact of Kelly’s major works is the suggestion that academic historians have left the writing of contemporary political history to journalists. On the publication of The End of Certainty Henderson correctly predicted that ‘it is likely that Kelly’s most recent opus magnum will be regarded by many as definitive’ and this possibly ‘reflects the relative failure of Australia’s contemporary academics.’116 More recently Melleuish commented that the unwillingness of academic historians to write on the recent past meant Australia’s ‘contemporary history is being written by journalists from The Australian!’117

**CONCLUSION**

Paul Kelly, in his advocacy of continuous ‘economic reform with championing of the disadvantaged’ tends to emphasise the former.118 Economic policy must be matched by a social policy appropriate for ‘a caring, diverse and interdependent society’ but Kelly’s focus, in his books, has largely been on the economic and political, rather than the social.119 Kelly’s economic liberalism is an ideology which does demonise special interest ‘pleading’ but which Kelly, links to ‘a range of liberal social polices...by forging what appear to be close links with several shibboleths of the educated middle class: multiculturalism, republicanism and reconciliation.’120

Even the most the most vehement critic acknowledges Kelly’s status as a journalist, a historian and a public intellectual or at least some combination of these three. In 1991, in an analysis of the Canberra Press Gallery, Kelly said: ‘There are no

Hemingways, Walter Lippmanns or even Bob Woodwards.'\textsuperscript{121} Yet there are some striking parallels between of the careers and intellectual contributions of Kelly and Lippmann, as is revealed by a cursory examination of some of the analyses published on the latter. A brief comparison with Lippmann, regarded ‘as probably the most powerful and famous American journalist’ of the twentieth century, is instructive.\textsuperscript{122} Lippmann was said to have ‘tackled enduring political and moral controversies in an unaffected idiom, accessible to the general educated reader.’\textsuperscript{123} In addition, Lippmann’s thinking was not parochial, he was open to a diversity of intellectual influences\textsuperscript{124}. Further, he appears to have understood and accepted the idea of globalisation before that term was in widespread use.\textsuperscript{125} Yet the very nature of his chosen profession meant what could be written about was subject to various constraints – the daily political context, the interests of the audience, the limitation of space, the need to keep some information ‘off the record’ in order to maintain access to wide range of sources. All of this could, arguably, only be achieved with ‘some loss of intellectual freedom’.\textsuperscript{126} Finally, ‘Lippmann repeatedly displayed a strong attraction to officeholders who wielded power.’\textsuperscript{127} Kelly’s publications demonstrate that these descriptions of Lippmann’s methods and thought are equally applicable to the Australian who began his career in the year the American wrote his final article.

Kelly remains, as Walter says, ‘an observer just as gifted as (Francis) Fukuyama in capturing the ideological moment.’\textsuperscript{128} His extensive body of work on Australian federal politics is not without flaws but it, nonetheless, represents a substantial contribution to Australian political and historical debate which, surely, along with the corpus of his journalism, his various editorial roles, including editor-in-chief of Murdoch’s \textit{Australian} warrants more comprehensive study.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., p. 11. 
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p. 12. 
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p. 178. 
\textsuperscript{128} James Walter with Tod Moore, \textit{What Were They Thinking?: The Political Ideas of Australia} (University of New South Wales Press Ltd., 2010, p. 299.
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