

Your Recent Analysis of the Salamanca Declaration: An Open-Letter Response

Dear Dr Bonham,

I found a link to your voluminous blog on the *Tasmanian Mail* web page: Having read your recent postings under the thread headed, [Liberty, Abortion and the "Salamanca Declaration"](#), I take the liberty of offering some reflections on the analysis of recent events and related issues you offer there.

You set in opposition to one another “getting emotional over ‘unborn babies’” and certain philosophical propositions – propositions which you insist trump such emotional instincts. It is customary for certain freethinkers to declare emotion the eternal enemy of calm, calculating, Reason. Surely, such a polemic against emotion is too simplistic:

I understand your *Weltanschauung* is essentially materialist and atheist: Let us forget “tender feelings” towards unborn infants for a moment... What is your understanding of the role and validity of the affectionate emotions people have when they see little babies and small children? Is human emotion merely another unreliable data source for our decision-making processes – a “gut feeling” - neural synapses at war with Reason, that Queen of philosophers' hearts?

Reason is extolled as the ultimate trump card in a philosophical game of ethics. What account, then, does a reductionist, mechanistic view of human nature give us for the validity of the reasoning processes of the human mind? Is Reason, perchance, yet another ever-mutating product of the evolution of human neurophysiology? Is that invisible light of insight that bursts into our minds every so often merely another mirage in an essentially meaningless universe?

Do not emotional instinct and personal volition play very real roles in philosophical discourse? How is it practicable or sane to entirely divorce Reason from the emotions? In your work as a scientist, I am sure the exercise of your reason and five senses in pursuit of new discoveries is a matter which entails significant positive emotion, both in the joy, the mystery of the research process itself, and the thrill of discovery.

Your cynical analysis of the complex interplay between party politics and the practice of allowing MPs a conscience vote on certain issues carries a certain tragic validity: With the exception of the Australian Greens, the major political entities of Australian politics, the ALP and the Liberal-National Party coalition, are houses divided against themselves: The ALP is manifestly riddled with ideologically mediated factionalism: Certain of its members appear to have set about cannibalising their own party. The Coalition Liberal and National Parties are also a tenuous amalgam of liberals, who stand in the secular philosophical traditions of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, and conservatives, whose core ethical values derive largely from the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

While my personal *Weltanschauung* is radically different at many points to the Australian

Greens, I do admire their general consistency with their underpinning atheistic/pantheistic, Utilitarian philosophical foundations. Their obvious zeal for their chosen causes is also enviable. Such philosophical coherence can no longer be found in the Greens' older, larger political foes, the ALP and the Liberal-National coalition.

Analysis of Speaker Polley's crossing the floor as more a vote for his church than an expression of the genuine sentiment of his personal conscience strikes me as somewhat unreasonable: Your own atheist *Weltanschauung*, I am sure, informs your personal conscience on all issues. May we not therefore allow Mr Polley the possibility that he maintains his adherence to the faith of Rome as a matter of personal, reasoned conviction and his own free volition? This being the case, his faith is bound to inform his conscience with regard to all matters of life and death.

Your standpoint with regards to the Salamanca Declaration issued by Tasmania's Christian leaders reflects a particular understanding of human liberty: Is not Rousseau's claim that man is "born free, but everywhere in chains" a claim you would heartily endorse?

At the end of his autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, Friedrich Nietzsche derides Messiah Jesus as "the crucified". Nietzsche declares himself a follower of the Bacchic ideals of Dionysus. If "God is dead, and we have killed Him", is not the resultant freedom a pyrrhic ascent of mankind by way of ethical free-fall into a world where we have erased all horizons, landmarks and boundaries?

You may have guessed: Nietzsche is my favourite "anti-Christian"! His blazing rhetoric and *hubris* are fortified by a dazzling, suicidal commitment to gallop his ideas full-tilt over that abyss of meaninglessness between *Mensch* and *Übermensch*. A Devil's Advocate *par excellence*, Nietzsche also offers a trenchant, at times, painfully insightful critique of established Christendom, which all true Christians would be well-served to read and reflect upon.

Contrary to Rousseau's classic thesis, the Judaeo-Christian view of liberty has Man born a slave - prisoner to his own appetites - possessed of a fallen "heart of darkness". According to the Biblical teachings, both individually, and collectively as a human family, we need an Exodus experience of the soul, if we are ever to taste true liberty. The authors of the Salamanca Declaration look to the Messiah, the Redeemer - the Divine Liberator for freedom. Ultimately, they find their freedom in willingly serving Him and in serving those for whom He died and rose again. This essentially theocentric understanding of liberty is bound to collide with a secular, anthropocentric notion of freedom, where man alone is the measure of all things.

In the context of the current public debate surrounding the politics of untimely death, I close with one of my favourite passages from the meteoric intellect of Friedrich Nietzsche – a passage which, for me, encapsulates the essence of the "progressive" case with amazing prescience for a late 19th-century document:

What is good? — Everything that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad? — Everything that stems from weakness. What is happiness? — The feeling

that power is *increasing* — that a resistance is overcome. *Not* contentment, but more power; not peace at all, but war; not virtue but proficiency (virtue in the Renaissance style, *virtu*, moraline-free virtue).

The weak and the misfits shall perish: first tenet of *our* love of man. And we should even help them to do so. What is more harmful than any vice? Active sympathy for all the misfits and the weak —Christianity...

F. W. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist: A Curse Upon Christianity*, Ch. 2, trans. Thomas Wayne. Online at: <http://philosophy.thecastsite.com/readings/nietzsche4.pdf>

In a political climate where “diversity” and “empowerment” are the buzz-words of the day, let us not be coy about a certain “will to power” - a certain rampant, progressive “revaluation of all values” inherent in the political processes of today's Tasmania,

Yours sincerely,

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