Query at 11:35.3, page 3

Also 54:45.1, page 13.

**Robert Manne**

Okay, we have to finish at 6.30. It’s been, for those of you who have been here all day, a long day, but a wonderful day for me, and I hope for you.

We’re having the last session today for tomorrow on universities, obviously. I’ll very, very briefly introduce our three panellists on the University. Firstly, there’s one time in which I thought that we weren’t going to be able to make new appointments in politics and that the program that I’ve been part of for four hundred years would die, gradually. In fact, we’ve had wonderful new appointments, not least the very, very talented political theorist, Myriam Bankovsky, who I'm delighted is going to be continuing a really fine intellectual tradition within politics. To her left is our new Vice-Chancellor, John Dewar. I just want to say one thing. My dealings with John over becoming Vice-Chancellor here have been a delight and I'm really pleased to be able to continue at the university, and I thank John very much for that chance. I also want to say that I’ve been now to three or four things at the university in the humanities, that you’ve launched, and I’ve been astonished by the panache and also the accuracy and the encouragement to all of those people, including myself this morning, so I’d like to thank you, very sincerely for that, because as you know, this is an important part of our tradition. How can I introduce my friend, just some of you won’t know, Rai is my oldest friend. He’s a very distinguished philosopher, he’s a distinguished author. He knows holds a Professorial Fellowship I think is the name, at the University of Melbourne, Emeritus Professor from Kings in London. And he and I have been thinking about the university in a way that I think as the younger generation of academics will find even strange to some extent, and so I'm very interested in today’s panel, where three people whose lives are made within the university, but who will have I think, quite different perspectives, so that ... I’ll shut up and we’ll have, if we have time for questions, we’ll have a short question time, but we must stop at 6.30. So, Rai first.

**Raimond Gaita**

Well, I sent to John and to Myriam, 4,000 words, hoping I would cut it down, but I haven’t, so I'm going to speak pretty much off the cuff. But I’ll to cover the points more or less that I sent them, so they’re not wrong-footed should they want to comment on any of it.

I ought to say that I am, like Rob, I have been like Rob, very privileged in my university life, and I’ve not had in fact ever to suffer the terrible frustrations that academics now face, ever, in part because I was half the year here and half the year in London, and so I had no administrative duties whatsoever, except perhaps ironically, since I had so often written about the degradation of the concept of vocation to that of a career, I was appointed Careers Officer in London, enormously unsuccessfully, because I couldn’t convince philosophy students there to be interested at all in their careers. But that’s how it happened.

Russell spoke, said at one point when he spoke, no doubt that some of the really big changes to universities over the last fifty years or so were inevitable, and I'm sure there’s a lot to be said about the role that social, economic and political forces played in those changes. But there’s also something to be said about what went on within the universities, and as Russell himself pointed out, academics themselves have been enormously compliant in all those changes. I personally have felt ever since these things really mattered to me, that academics should often simply say no, and had they said no, all sorts of things wouldn’t have happened. Nobody can really tell, but that would be part of my point, if anybody says this was inevitable, I would say, I don’t know what would have happened had academics said no.

I’ll just give a couple of examples, in fact, that relate to what’s just been going on, let’s say in relation to publishing. In Britain, until recently, the research assessments were such that each ... every department and each member of the department, had to submit what they took to be their four best publications over I’ve forgotten how many years. And it was official policy and I suspect it was followed, that the panel assessing this had to read whatever was submitted. It didn’t matter if it was published in the *Sun* newspaper. They had to read it and assess it for its quality. I know for a fact, and this is not a matter of trying to boast or anything, I know for a fact that I had just at the time published a book called *The Common Humanity*. It was eventually published, well, not so eventually, but published by Routledge but I didn’t have a copy from Routledge to send to the committee, so I sent the copy that had been published here by a trade publisher, Text Publishing. So, and I know that that had a considerable effect on the department’s favourable, I should say, on the department’s ranking. Now, that’s changed. I know it’s an expensive thing, but still, academics in the end have to ask themselves the question, do they take the idea of quality seriously, in which case they read whatever’s submitted, and it doesn’t matter if it comes from a trade publisher as opposed to Oxford University Press, or for a five star refereed journal. This is something within our control. At least we can argue about it, to people who are now called our managers. It’s the same with undergraduate teaching. Rob was rightly praised for his undergraduate teaching and his first year teaching. It’s an enormous abdication of what was regarded as anything like the traditional concept of the university, that undergraduate teaching has been for the most part, handed over to post-graduates, in certainly any relatively distinguished university for the sake of the prestige, as part of post-graduate studies. Again this is something academics could simply fight on. And also, I imagine, unless I’ve got things wrong, that Gwenda, who has spent so much time organising this conference, will get almost no academic credit for it, and if she edits a book with papers from it, if she gets any credit, it will be only her own. If she publishes her own. But this kind of stuff is lunacy, really, and it’s true that academics feel they don’t know what to do about it, though it is lunacy, but we can’t ... I shouldn’t say they, we, can’t pretend that we had no voice in any of this. We did. And we refused to raise it.

Now this was partly prompted by the fact that Rob and Glyn Davis and I had a discussion at the Wheeler Centre three or four months ago, which was prompted by something I’d written in *Meanjin* and in that piece in *Meanjin* I had occasion to say and Glyn commented on it, that say ten or fifteen years ago, it was a conceptual truth, a truism, that a university that didn’t have a philosophy department for example, or a classics department, or a physics department, couldn’t rightly call itself a university, and now, and Glyn said, well in that case, only about ten universities in the country, and he raised the stakes a little bit by saying, if there’s no reason why a university need have a humanities department, challenging me then to say, well, it’s not a real university. Well, of course Glyn knew that what was at issue wasn’t a matter of looking around the country to see what university had what. It wasn’t an empirical question, it was a conceptual point, a point about the application of a concept, and he was I think, inviting us to be more creative in our understanding of the concepts, the application of the concept of the university, and there’s no doubt it’s true that the concept historically has never in just about one form of the university, there was talk about *the* concept of the university, but just as people talked about the concept of love and never thought that there was one form of love, so people who talked about *the* idea or the concept of university, never thought there was just one idea of that. But I would say, whatever the theory of the matter as it were, the fact is now, I'm pretty sure, that no institution that calls itself a university thinks about what it does under the concept of a university. I think no institution that managers, or heads of departments, when they’re thinking about whether they can have this course or that course, thinks, is this or that consistent with any serious conception of the university, any conception of the university that can engage historically with thought about the university. So in a way, in that sense I think the concept is defunct, or perhaps defunct is not the right word. Perhaps it’s better to say it no longer has a creative role in our life with language, in our thinking about what we do in these institutions. And then someone might say, well, in that case does it matter? It’s just a word. Can’t we just think about a place like La Trobe, for example, and say, what do we want in it? How can we get it? The trouble with that thought of course, if you start thinking what you want from an institution like La Trobe, you soon get into the controversy that takes you through to the history of the concept. You’ll start wondering, do we need a humanities department? And when you start talking about that, you either be educated in this kind of talk, or you’ll show your ignorance. Ramona (???) made the remark of Goethe’s remark, if you don’t think against three thousand years, you’re not well educated. Well, in the case of thinking about the university, very soon, I mean, let’s put it this way, you’re not thinking about *the* university, you’re thinking about what do we want for this institution? You’re going to engage historically, with discussions about what the humanities mean, what philosophy is supposed to be for, etc. What kind of system of governments is appropriate to it? And willy nilly, you’ll be engaged historically in talk that had been about the university, and then you won’t go back three thousand years only, you’ll go back five and a half thousand years, to Socrates. And I want to say just a little bit about Socrates here. Oh, sorry, I want to say one other thing about this. You start off thinking about what you want, and certainly you start thinking about things that transform your wants. You suddenly discover a new desire, some of which you never dreamed of. And indeed, sometimes, instead of discovering new desires, you discover new necessities, things you feel you are obliged to do or must do, if you are to be true, let’s say, to a vocation. If you start thinking about universities, you start thinking about whether the idea of a career is the right way to think. And then you think, maybe it’s the concept of perfection and then you might think, well, we used to talk about vocations and then you’ll think about the governing modalities of those concepts, the kinds of the obligations that are intrinsic to them.

I just want to make now one simple point actually, and that is to say, whatever controversy there is about the institutions that are called universities, there’s pretty much universal agreement that if they lose sight altogether of what we call the intrinsic value of academic study, then something fundamental will have been lost. The trouble with that thought, even though there’s a lot of agreement about it, is that there are very banal and trivial ideas of intrinsic value. John Stuart Mill expressed one when he tried to work out how he would decide whether it was better to deliver a life of Socrates dissatisfied, or the life of a pig, satisfied. And he said, the former, the Socratic life dissatisfied, was nonetheless a higher pleasure. The idea of a higher pleasure is a pretty banal idea I think. But I think it is also a fact that ever since I’ve been thinking about the universities, which has certainly been since I’ve been an undergraduate in them, mostly when academics defend the intrinsic value of what they do and test against its instrumentalisation, they don’t say anything much better than it’s a higher pleasure, and so it’s not surprising that very, very quickly, they offer various kinds of instrumental value of what they do. So in philosophy, it makes people think, so you have a better democracy, or something of that kind, for example.

Well, this is a very old problem and there’s a wonderful and we can see what it’s like, if ... can I take two minutes? There’s a wonderful passage in one of Plato’s diaries, called Dialogues, and the dialogue is called Gorgias, and there’s a speech, I think it’s the finest speech in the Dialogues, given to a character called Callicles, who says to Socrates, look, I like you, I admire you, you’re a brave soldier and I like philosophy, I admire philosophy he says. And he goes on to say, in fact, if young people don’t do philosophy, they won’t in later life have any of the magnanimity and liberality of imagination that’s necessary to do grand and noble deeds, but he says, when I see an older man doing philosophy, I think the fellow needs a whipping, because then he’ll be instead of being in the market place where men win renown, he’ll be whispering in some dark corner with three or four boys.

Now, what I find interesting about that, is that Callicles obviously thought that if the teaching of philosophy to young people to have the value it had, they had to enjoy its intrinsic value, otherwise they wouldn’t have developed that magnanimity and liberality of mind. That’s, I’ve always thought, is what Matthew Arnold thought and John Henry Newman thought actually. They never offered an account of the university which went better than Callicles’. Contempt for a lifelong devotion to it. So you can have two ideas, let’s put it this way, of intrinsic value, you can have ... well, you can have three. You can have the entirely trivial idea that it’s just a higher pleasure. You can have a deeper idea, that is Callicles’ idea, that it’s a kind of cultural adornment that fits you for life, and you do better things. Or you can think of it as something that could make the lifelong devotion to an academic study something worthy of a human being, something that a human being without degrading him or herself as a human being, could give his life to and I think we need to recover that sense of intrinsic value, because I can’t see how one could possibly argue to a government that the intrinsic ... that the higher pleasure of doing philosophy or reading the classics, or doing history, is worth one cent from the public health service. One can’t argue that. It’s indecent. I’ll leave it at that.

[applause]

**Myriam Bankovsky**

Just as we have a number of Aboriginal people here, both from La Trobe and also guests speaking for us today, I thought we’d begin by acknowledging that we’re meeting on the lands of the Wurundjeri people, of the Kulin Nation, and pay our respects to their elders, past and present, following on from the beautiful welcome to country that we got this morning from Joy, yeah, it was lovely.

So, I’d like today to respond to Rai’s contribution on how to think about the university, the concept of the university and so on. It was suggested to us that the panel should respond if you like, to Rai, and use Rai’s work as a sounding board for our own thoughts and reflections about the university. So what I'm going to do is, I'm going to ask for your patience first, and just kind of spell out exactly what I understand Rai to be saying. I’ll also say what I think Robert Manne understands by the university now. We’ve heard from Russell Marks today that he might have a bit more of a sober realist view than Rai, in Rai’s obvious defence for the intrinsic value of thinking for oneself, although we’ll see that Robert Manne too, wants to have a place for thinking for oneself in the university, in spite of the need for universities to become trainers of people in professions and technical vocations, and I’ll then briefly mention the contribution to this debate that took place from the perspective of Glyn Davis, who contributed to this similar question in the Wheeler Centre discussions, and this will allow me then to say why I think that the answers provided by Rai, albeit beautiful and motivating, and the more sober realist view of Robert Manne, perhaps only help us in a limited way to understand what’s happened at La Trobe. I use La Trobe because La Trobe, what has happened with the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, is indicative of a more general pattern of how universities are responding to a number of factors and I’ll try to nut out those number of factors, and say that there really isn’t one way in which universities need to negotiate these factors. However, there is a tendency more and more for these factors to be negotiated in more or less the same way as if one imports a template from other universities to our own. And I’ll return to Dennis Altman’s account of the need for a public sphere within the university, so that us as academics, teachers, researchers, ourselves, and students as well, have more of a voice in what we think should be the guiding parameters given our history and tradition, a history and tradition that’s quite particular to the universities in question and will be quite different for La Trobe as opposed to Melbourne, Monash, Deakin and the like.

This will be a slightly different view to Robert Manne’s view and to Rai Gaita’s view. So to the first part of the talk. Rai Gaita. We’ve seen that he’s trying to develop the idea of the university, or gets us to recall the idea of the university as a community of scholars, engaged in using their reason or reason’s own sake, as an intrinsic good. He wants to inspire us once again to the original notion of what it means to think for ourselves, the theme of the conference. He would like us to be able to impart to our students, allow other new generations to see beauty in our world, as he puts it, and it’s not essentially vocational, this thinking for ourself. For Rai Gaita, we can use our reason as an instrument, in the pursuit of a particular vocation, managing a bank or developing nuclear weaponry, but there’s nothing to say that this vocation is necessarily good, and it’s only the task of thinking for ourselves, using our reason, that helps us work out what sorts of use of reason would be intrinsically good.

That’s what I understand Rai Gaita to be meaning here. And this is why he thinks that a university, if it is to retain its core as a university, as a community of scholars engaged in using reason for reason’s own sake, it has a public duty at least in its non-vocational core, to teach what is beautiful, he says, in other places. To teach so as to sustain faith in our common humanity, because we’re all in doubt with reason and can think for ourselves in this way.

Russell Marks, I think, his analysis of the changes in the universities in the last fifty years, was very helpful in this regard, and he also noted at the end of his talk, how Robert Manne has become more reconciled to the idea that a university needs to take on other tasks, training the professional and technical, training for the professional and technical vocation, so that we can fulfil needs and employment, the workforce and so on. And of course it’s the government who pays for this, so we need as universities too to be subject to these demands of employment, skills and so on, as well as a whole host of other factors that I’ll discuss in a moment.

So, but while reconciling himself to this need for universities to play a role that they didn’t use to play before, he says, well, we still need to protect a space within the university where the life of the mind still has its role, still, where students who are interested in thinking can actually find a space for this. And in many respects, we see that this is what Robert Manne has done, in his own teaching and I’ve had the privilege of being able to teach with him in a couple of courses, in the last few years. The deep appreciation within our student body for this aspect of Robert Manne’s work, no longer here as a public intellectual, but as a dedicated teacher, this can’t be overestimated in my view. And staff who might have flicked through that alternative handbook that we find on campus, you might recall him being described aptly as a god. For many of us students in Politics, having a course with Robert Manne really is something that marks them for their lives to come.

So, in spite of this need, as Robert Manne sees it, of needing to be a sober realist when it comes to the different roles universities have to play, he still wants to have a particular place in the universities dedicated to the life of the mind, non-vocational. Now Glyn Davis also contributed to this forum at the Wheeler Centre, a forum on a similar topic, oh well, identical topic, and it’s interesting to consider what he has to say here because I hazard a guess and we can talk later about this, that a number of aspects of our own Vice-Chancellor’s viewpoints will coincide with Glyn Davis’. Now unlike Rai Gaita and Robert Manne, Glyn Davis thinks that a university must ... need not devote part of itself to the non-vocational pursuits. It need not keep protect this space away from the demands of the world, just to think for oneself and develop one’s own self and reason. He thinks it is possible to construct a university that encourages knowledge, imparts wisdom through technical and professional training, and that still manages to retain this idea of doing something for a common humanity, which is the theme that Rai Gaita wants to see. He also thinks that we don’t need this sort of core of the university’s function, the non-vocational pursuit, to build skills of critical thinking in undergraduates. As we know, he thinks that we don’t need philosophy, humanities, the natural sciences, the non-vocational pursuits, to actually say that this is a university. We rather need to understand the task of the university as an effort, he says, to create meaningful contact across both vocational and non-vocational domains, a plea for inter-disciplinarity.

Let me state quickly my own view on this question. I think I have a slightly different understanding of reason here to both Rai Gaita and probably Robert Manne, definitely Robert Manne. Where Rai Gaita would probably say reasoning for oneself or thinking for oneself is the main way of thinking about the core task of the university, and I know this is getting into abstract language here, and I won’t stay there for very long, I would say that thinking for oneself in the face of, how would you put it? In the face of the existence of a plurality of other reasoners, and it’s through ... and I was discussing this with Carol D’Cruz this afternoon, who thought that we could inject a bit of Levinasian ethics into the university here, so that the use of reason is not just our sole pursuit, something that we do for ourselves, but we do it as an encounter with other people who have other forms of thinking and who we need to listen to in order to learn to develop our own reason. And so here we have an idea that does coincide with Glyn Davis, in my view, surprisingly. We don’t need to have philosophy departments, just for the life of the mind, because we can reason in relation to other people, listening and learning off other people, a plurality of other reasoners, which naturally becomes inter-personal and inter-disciplinary. So inter-disciplinarity can very well coincide with a different concept of reasoning and thinking for oneself with a plurality of different reasoners. That’s as abstract as I’ll go in this talk. I just want to suggest that conceptually, if conceptually ... if the concept of the university is important to Rai Gaita, there are conceptual reasons why inter-disciplinarity rather than the discipline of philosophy or classics or physics is what enables us to think for ourselves, although I would say it’s empirically desirable to have the continuation of these disciplines, these core disciplines within the university because it becomes very hard for universities to retain their orientation towards a common humanity and the existence of these disciplines within the university can serve as a continual reminder of the university’s task, often forgotten when it becomes purely vocational.

The next question that the three thinkers have also dealt with, is how should teaching and research proceed and how should universities be managed. In terms of managed, the issue for Rai is that management-speak should be qualified, qualified by talk that doesn’t make academics depreciate the work that they do. Quite an abstract account of what management should do. Robert Manne as we know is more realistic. He thinks that we cannot avoid, we cannot avoid the idea that universities must collaborate with government to develop employment, graduate skills and demands and so on. My own view on this, and this is where I want to finish, is that it’s helpful to remind us that these kind of debates miss an essential aspect about how a university should be managed. We do have obligations to provide vocational training, professional technical training, however we also have ... the factors involved that universities must negotiate are complex and they include things like a desire to increase research rankings in areas able to gain external funding, a federal system of research funding favouring the applied sciences and the applied social sciences, a federal based funding model that provides a fixed amount per student type that’s nowhere near enough to cover the real cost of a student’s education, a new deregulated federal system with caps to student numbers, etc, etc, the need to collaborate with government with respect to employment and graduate skills demands. Now it’s not clear that universities have to negotiate all these factors in the same way. It’s not clear that what La Trobe chooses to do and what Melbourne chooses to do, and Monash and the like, needs to be the same, and there’s a risk here of just kind of taking one template and putting it onto another. And here I want to turn to Dennis Altman’s reference to the need for a public sphere within the university itself. Here, in my view, what is required in this university is and I think Robert Manne has some doubts over this, is for academics, teachers, researchers and students to be involved in trying to work out what is historically and traditionally important to that university, to that institution, what makes it specific, what makes it different to Deakin? To Monash? We have world-ready, future-ready, we’ve got world in Deakin’s motto, we’ve got so many things that are all shared, that are kind of just taken from one university and placed in another. This is also encouraged by the Universities Australia who has a particular viewpoint on what needs to be done. So my defence here is for a public sphere where we can again be involved in the determination of what ... how our universities should negotiate these factors.

I’ve taken too long. Thank you.

[applause]

**John Dewar**

Thank you Myriam. Having spent the afternoon in a corporate governance audited risk committee, I can tell you what a great pleasure it is to be here and what a great privilege Robert to be able to participate in this wonderful event.

In the last twenty-four hours in the university, we’ve had fires, we’ve had floods and we’ve had fights, term has well and truly started. I agree with much of what both speakers have said, and I’ll be as brief as I can in responding. I agree particularly with what Rai has said about the importance of keeping a conversation going about what we mean about the term university, why that term is distinctive, and what we want universities to be or to do. I also like the idea of vocation as a way of giving expression to a part of that distinctiveness, although as it may become clear, I differ slightly from Rai in how I would describe the role it plays in doing that.

I’d also agree that while there are many universities that don’t have philosophy departments, or indeed faculties of humanities, I find it hard to imagine how any university could operate without at least some tacit commitment to teaching its students the rules by which knowledge is created, evaluated and sustained. Or that there are different ways of knowing and interpreting the world around us, and I’ll come back to that in a moment.

Where perhaps I differ from Rai though, is in his starting premise that the purpose or conception of universities is not being actively discussed, because I think it is, particularly in the week in which Universities Australia released its *A Smarter Australia* document, 70 pages long, containing numerous recommendations to government about what it should do with, or for, universities. I also differ from what I took to be the claim in his written paper, although not in the words he spoke, that yielding to what he called the utilitarian temptation betrays the proper purpose of a university. I think the purpose of universities is widely discussed but mainly and increasingly in utilitarian terms. Universities are expected to justify their existence instrumentally. We are seen more and more as being useful for something. Societies and governments expect a return on the investment they make in us.

The question I think is whether it’s possible to preserve any sense of moral purpose for universities in this environment. My own view is that it’s both possible and essential because if I didn’t believe that I wouldn’t be doing this job. But it’s striking how quickly things change in the ways universities are talked about or thought about, and I’d the disadvantage of not having been through, sat through the sessions earlier today, because I suspect I'm about to rehearse territory that’s already been traversed. But when I began my own academic career in the early ‘80s, questions about the extrinsic purposes or benefits of universities were very rarely asked. There was an acceptance that university education was a good thing in and of itself, perhaps not as well articulated in the way that Rai would urge us to articulate, but it was seen as a self-evident good that wasn’t really there to be questioned. And universities were largely left to get on with doing whatever it was that they did. And they would rarely, universities as a whole, would rarely have argued their case for public support in the way that the Universities Australia *A Smarter Document* does, as essential to future national prosperity and innovation.

At the same time, there was little talk in those days of curriculum, of learning objectives, of graduate outcomes. Students were rarely if ever asked for feedback on their teachers, and academic staff were left largely unsupervised in their performance. Quality assurance was something that happened in factories, not in universities. And until the mid 1990s, the only form of performance review that I experienced was when a senior colleague attended one of my lectures to see whether my appointment should be confirmed at the end of my probation period. It was, and I was never asked to account for myself at that institution again, in the five years that I was there. And email and internet had not found their way into the mainstream.

Of course things have changed. None of the above conditions apply any longer. Our lives are infused with technology. We’re held accountable and performance-measured by ourselves, external agencies, international rankings and social media, we’re funded on our outcomes and our performance, competition between universities for students, staff and research funding is fierce, and universities are seen to serve important extrinsic economic and social purposes, although what they are is often the subject of intense debate. But there’s a much stronger sense now that we have to justify ourselves to government, our students and the wider community.

I'll leave aside for a moment whether that picture paints a brighter picture than the one that was there when I started. We might come back to that topic if we get time. But does all of this mean that universities have lost their way? Does the creep of instrumentalism and accountability inevitably strip away all moral purpose from these institutions with centuries of history behind them? Well, I don’t think so. In fact given the forces bearing down on universities now, I think it’s essential that we articulate a moral purpose that sits comfortably with a more extrinsic conception of what they’re for and what they’re good for. To ensure, in other words, that this is not a zero sum game between the forces of good and evil, between the intrinsic and the extrinsic.

Now I will freely confess I'm a great fan of modern universities, particularly in their extrinsic effects. I think they do good. For example, the transformative effect of the education we provide on the life chances and wellbeing of our students, and for the profound impact of the knowledge we produce through our research. I celebrate the fact that our universities are now educating more students than ever before, that greater numbers of students than ever are the first in their family to come to university, including from our indigenous communities, that the majority of our students are now women, that universities are often the economic and cultural lifeblood of the communities they inhabit, and that university research has led to saving lives and improving the quality of life for millions of people. These are all extrinsic goods and form a big part for me of the answer to the question, what are universities good for? But, the account can’t stop there, because all of these things would be consistent with many other kinds of educational or research institutions that do not bear the title of university.

What marks a university out, universities out as special, I think, is their role in questioning the nature and basis of knowledge, as I mentioned earlier, but also the fact that universities have a crucial role in helping our students to grasp their own sense of vocation in its broadest sense and their place in the larger scheme of things, and I want to come back to that in a moment, very briefly.

As I said earlier, I find it hard to imagine how any university could operate without at least some tacit commitment to teaching its students the rules by which knowledge is created, evaluated, or sustained. Whether this goes under the formal name of philosophy or is embodied formally in a philosophy department I think is less important than the fact that the activity itself takes place. Universities should question the foundations and construction of knowledge and train their students to do the same, and encourage them to appreciate the power that knowledge confers and how power in turn shapes what counts as knowledge. This produces scepticism and critique, a richer appreciation of our cultural heritage and the contingency of context, as well as the great leaps forward in science, medicine and technology that I've already mentioned. This is what distinguishes universities from places of applied learning such as TAFE and what sometimes places universities and those who work in them, quite rightly, at odds with the rest of the world.

So far as our students are concerned, the idea that we have a role in helping them to develop a broader sense of the purpose of their lives, or of their vocation, most broadly expressed, might seem naive or quixotic in an environment in which students are competed for in a demand-driven system in which they increasingly see themselves as consumers of a product, and often, although not always, as willing human capital to feed the economic machine.

But I think that we have a higher purpose than simply to meet the immediate needs that students bring to us. And here I'm taken by the work, I'm quite old now I realise, of the educational philosopher John Dewey, who put it that our task is to help students learn from life itself, and to give them the ability to see a large and human significance in their life and work. In doing so we help them to develop their own sense of vocation, of their life’s meaning and purpose, as expressed not exclusively, but largely, in the realm of work and careers. I think this is a different conception of a vocation espoused by Rai, but for me it helps to maintain a sense of a higher purpose of a university experience in an increasingly instrumental world.

So, although I think accounts of what universities are good for are becoming increasingly extrinsic or instrumental, I don’t see this as spelling the end of universities as we know them, and certainly not as the end of any defensible moral purpose for them. I think there are lots of hopeful signs around the sector of institutions successfully juggling extrinsic conceptions of universities while retaining that sense of higher purpose, of universities providing life-changing opportunities through education for an ever more diverse group of young people, creating space in their curricula for students to spend time addressing the big issues that might otherwise be lost or overlooked, researchers working across traditional boundaries to solve some of the world’s most pressing problems and universities playing a leading role in the economic and cultural regeneration of the communities around them. These are certainly things we care about at La Trobe.

But of course there are always risks that we’ll get the balance wrong and that we lose sight of the larger significance of what we do in the welter of accountability measurement and instrumentalism. And that’s why events such as this and prompts such as Rai’s to keep the bastards honest are so important. Thank you.

[applause]

**Robert Manne**

I'm very interested in a way that counterpoint between the three talks. I don’t think we should think that in ten minutes we are going to solve these problems. I'm going to suggest not that we take questions, because we have to end at 6.30 and those of us who have been at the conference all day have heard a lot of really fine words. What I might suggest as we’ve had a very limited time, is if the three speakers who’ve given such succinct and such different versions of this problem would like to say a few things to each other. And we don’t need to go till 6.30, we have to stop at 6.30, but if there is ... we’re not going to resolve what are three quite different ways of looking at this question, but maybe if there are things that the panellists would like to say to each other.

**John Dewar**

Well, can I raise to the challenge that Myriam raised about governance. I think this is a really interesting question for universities because I think over the years ... there are two forms of governance that work in universities simultaneously it seems to me. One is the more collegial form that finds expression through bodies such like academic board and where you have the academy speaking as a collective, and then a more managerial approach, where you have a team of executives, deans and others, pushing the university in a particular direction and what’s sometimes called a more top-down way. I don’t think any university has successfully resolved that tension, but it is a tension in modern universities. When Dennis wrote to me to say what he was going to say in his session, and I'm sorry I missed most of it, but I think I caught the relevant bit, my response was that we had tried in this university at any rate, to be as inclusive and consultative as we could be, but that is trying to make good what is essentially a managerial process and it’s not the sort of thing that you’re describing. My feeling would be that given the environments in which universities operate and the need to make decisions and act on them quickly, that the kind of compromises which are very often muddled, but which we’ve sought to arrive at here and many other universities try and do the same, is in the circumstances, the best kind of model compromise that we can arrive it, but I'm always, as I said to Dennis, always interested in ideas for how we can do this differently, there is no virtue for any university leader to force things through that don’t have a degree of support, because they won’t work. So, universities more than anywhere else. So I think getting that balance right between the managerial and the collegiate is one of the great tricks of university leadership and I'm always happy to be told we can do it better.

**Myriam Bankovsky**

I think the question of the humanities is hot on the agenda, particularly with Rai’s conviction that we need humanities in universities for a university to properly qualify as a university, although we still have our humanities and social sciences department at La Trobe, we know that it has been recently depleted and we know that part of the reason for this is something that happens across the sector, in all universities, cross subsidisation of the more expensive parts of the university, the sciences and applied sciences and applied social sciences, in order to negotiate those factors that I mentioned before – the need for research outcomes, the need to respond to government demands for employment and training, and a whole host of other exigencies. My point is that it’s not clear that we need to determine the way in which we cross subsidise, or what we cross subsidise in a particular manner, the manner that we have chosen to do, let’s say and that universities in Australia are tending to choose to support a reduction of the non-vocational disciplines in support of those ones that have better outcomes in terms of research outcomes, ERA measures, ARC funding grants, federal funding of university students and the like. So my point is that it’s around that issue that we also need to have a discussion in this place, and in universities more generally, a public sphere to decide these issues, for ourselves, based on our history and our tradition, at La Trobe, strong in humanities and social sciences. Other universities might decide to go along different lines, but that is the discussion we can have.

**Raimond Gaita**

I want to resist being cast as the idealist in this discussion. In fact the way in which I've been trying to press the point about having a serious concept of intrinsic value has been a point about realism and what I say, don’t expect anybody to be impressed by complaints about instrumentalism, when all you can put up as a conception of intrinsic value is something like a higher pleasure. Then you’re going to get people saying, as the British Minister of Education quite rightly said in that context, that he doesn’t mind people enjoying the pleasures of the classics but why should the state pay for it? And I agree with this. This is not philistine. Especially having lived in Britain and seen the wreck that the national health system has been. I don’t think higher pleasure should be paid for by the state. I really don’t. And I think that’s a point about realism. I've never ... Glyn made a very interesting ... I mean he made a number of interesting lines but at that discussion he said that when Rob and I were at universities which was supposed to be a golden age and all the rest of it, roughly one third of the students were interested in the sort of things we thought mattered and two thirds didn’t. He said the proportion hasn’t much changed. That’s not a fact that surprised me. I've never thought that universities shouldn’t have vocational studies in them. I've only resisted the way in which the vocational vocabulary has displaced any way of talking about the intrinsic value of those subjects where the intrinsic value really matters. I've never wanted to say, get out of here. I just want to say, don’t dominate the conversation with this language. And not just dominate, undermining other possible ways of speaking. So, that doesn’t seem to me to be a particularly idealistic point. The point that might seem idealistic, and Glyn painted it a little bit like this, a nice piece of poetry, and I think it connects a bit with what John was saying. I take it as a point about the need now for what we call quality assurance, which I absolutely agree with. You can’t have so many students in universities without the universities becoming accountable in the way they had never been in the past. I don’t for one minute want to doubt that. I just think that as a matter of fact, the practices of accountability we have put in place have often degraded the subjects, the disciplines, and I think the ways in which ... this is my point about research, the ways we assess research now lead to, in my judgment, a kind of homogenising conformity. And of course you have to make a judgment. It’s very easy, it’s not only easy, it’s cheaper to tick off boxes instead of sending people articles you wrote for the *Sun* newspaper to assess their quality. I don’t deny that. But that’s a choice that we have made. But the thing that I press that sounds perhaps most airy fairy to people, is that I want to say we have to try very hard to see if we can make at at least some of the institutions we call universities, places where undergraduates can dream, where they can learn to care for things they have never ever dreamed were important. And I call that a public duty of the universities because it’s the condition under which ... if it’s only because they can be protected ... this is (???) point, if only they could for a while be protected from the pressures of the world, can they enter the world with a full love of it and not just be children of their times. I think that’s a practical point about the conditions under which people can become reflective.

**Robert Manne**

6.30. Can I just say ...

**Myriam Bankovsky**

Would I be able to ask you quickly what you thought of the notion of collegiality because you said before that you don’t think that really collegiality is the way to manage universities any more. No one should be serious in thinking that’s possible.

**Robert Manne**

I'll just say very quickly. I don’t think that the sort of big decisions about the relationship of the universities and government can be done in a collegiate way. I think collegiality can be concerned with, at the level of departments or faculties, making decisions about what they teach, how they teach and so on. But I think the management of universities, the collegial model, is now outdated because I think that the interface between universities and government and the plethora of rules which funding comes through and so on, makes a model of collegiality at that level, probably impossible. Sorry, I sort of agree with John that there’s a managerial part of, which is inevitable, and a collegial part, which I would like to see fostered, and I think it’s a really important discussion if La Trobe can have it, and I loved your idea that each university should try as much as it can to be distinctive ...

**Myriam Bankovsky**

Because otherwise we’ll resemble each other, in the way that’s determined.

**Robert Manne**

But also, what I'd like to say at the end of this is how pleased I am for an ongoing discussion of the university and how pleased I am that our Vice-Chancellor is participating in that discussion, and I think it will just go on.

But anyhow could I ask you all to thank the three speakers.

[applause]