



**The Fox and the Hedgehog:
John Monash and Daniel Mannix,
Parallel Lives**

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Parallel Lives.**



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A Note on the Newman Lecture

The Newman Lecture, the annual public lecture given at Mannix College, is named after Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890), Catholic theologian and educationalist.

The Newman Lecture series began in 1981. Newman Lecturers have included Sir Edward Dunlop, Robyn Williams, Senator Michael Tate, Professor Max Charlesworth, Dr Veronica Brady and also Bishop Eric D'Arcy, who delivered the inaugural Lecture.

The Newman Lecture in 2006 took the form of a one man play performed by Terence Donovan based on the life of Dr Daniel Mannix, Archbishop of Melbourne.

It was decided in 2007 to continue with the Daniel Mannix theme in connection with the life of a contemporary of his, General Sir John Monash. It was also decided that the Newman Lecture should be delivered on Anzac Day.

The seed for the 2007 Newman Lecture was sown by the Vice-Chancellor of Monash University, Professor Richard Larkins, who, during a College dinner in 2006 at which he was a distinguished guest, commented on the fact that the two historical figures after whom the adjacent and affiliated institutions of Monash University and Mannix College were named were alive at the same time.

The Fox and the Hedgehog: John Monash and Daniel Mannix, Parallel Lives.

Few famous individuals in Australian history present a greater contrast in background, personality and temperament than Monash and Mannix, who were born within a year or so of one another in the mid 1860s.

Monash and Mannix became national and international figures during the First World War, though there could scarcely have been more of a difference in the role that each man played in the conflict.

The physical difference alone is striking: Monash was a heavily built man with moustache who at times in his life struggled with obesity. Mannix was taller, rail thin and clean-shaven. Purely in terms of their appearance they had about as much in common as Laurel and Hardy.

Of course what really matters about them runs much deeper. There are profound differences and also points of similarity, not least their shared belief in the paramount importance of education.

Considering Monash and Mannix as having led parallel lives is instructive not only because it serves to illuminate an important period in Australian history but also because it suggests something significant about the role of personality in history.

The concept of parallel lives originates in the work of the Roman historian Plutarch. His *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* mostly consists of a series of biographies arranged in pairs which he explains was intended to “rather to epitomize the most celebrated parts of their story than to insist at large on every particular circumstance of it.”

This approach, or something like it, has been used by well-known historians. Alan Bullock employed the idea to great effect in a book on Hitler and Stalin. Simon Schama, in one episode of his television history of Britain, used the parallel lives framework to examine the lives of Winston Churchill and George Orwell, two figures of immense importance to their era (and ours) but who never met and whose character and achievements are of a certain order of magnitude but otherwise unlike. Needless to say, of the two pairs of historical figures just mentioned, Churchill and Orwell immediately suggest themselves as nearer to our parallel than does the Hitler-Stalin pairing.

The idea of parallel lives is obviously not the basis for expressing a preference for one person over the other. On the contrary, parallel lives may actually assist in the pursuit of historical objectivity. Another way of putting this might be to quote the personal motto of Cardinal Newman himself, which translated is this: “From shadows and types to the reality”.

The main title of this lecture is “The fox and the hedgehog”. Like the concept of parallel lives, the idea originates in the ancient world. There is a saying attributed to the Greek poet

Archilochus: “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing”.

This notion has been used more than once to illustrate a contrast in personality or intellectual practice between two people or even within a single person. I’m sure in our everyday lives we know people who could be characterised as more fox than hedgehog (or echidna) and vice versa.

The idea was taken up during the Middle Ages by Erasmus in one of his adages. More recent is the well-known essay by Isaiah Berlin that applies the dichotomy to literature by offering Shakespeare as an example of a fox and Dante a hedgehog. Aristotle and James Joyce may be considered foxes, Berlin suggests, while Plato and Marcel Proust are hedgehogs. Berlin argued that the artistic personality of the great Russian novelist Tolstoy was in tension, since he was a fox who wanted to be a hedgehog.

As neat as these classifications may seem, Berlin cautions that they can become, if pressed, artificial, scholastic, and ultimately absurd. But if it is not an aid to serious criticism, neither should it be rejected as being merely superficial or frivolous; like all distinctions which embody any degree of truth, it offers a point of view from which to look and compare, a starting-point for genuine investigation.

Even more recently than Berlin, the American paleontologist and popular science writer Stephen Jay Gould applied the concept of the fox and the hedgehog to ways of thinking in the humanities and sciences that I think has a resonance in the present discussion of Monash and Mannix.

Here is Gould:

Foxes owe their survival to easy flexibility and skill at reinvention, to an uncanny knack for recognising (early on, while the going remains good) that a chosen path will not bear fruit, and that either a different route must be quickly found, or a new game entered altogether. Hedgehogs, on the other hand, survive by knowing exactly what they want, and by staying the chosen course with unswerving persistence, through all calumny and trouble, until the less committed opponents eventually drop away, leaving only the righteous path unencumbered for a walk to victory.

So much for the intellectual background to this lecture.

Our heroes are two of the most famous Melburnians. Monash, our fox, is remembered as Australia's greatest military leader, while Mannix, the hedgehog of the piece, is revered as this country's most influential, and controversial, churchman.

There is a large and impressive statue of each man situated in central Melbourne. Monash has, among other things, a municipality, a high school, a freeway and an IVF clinic named after him, as well as a university. In a certain part of town especially, nearly everything seems to be named after Monash.

What Mannix may lack in local infrastructure by comparison with Monash, he makes up for in the depth of feeling his memory still stirs among many Catholics almost half a century after his death and also, more tangibly, in the sheer number of biographies that have been written. He has also

had a play written about him by Barry Oakley, and another literary connection exists in a memoir by the poet Vincent Buckley, who remembered as a child attending some of the many meetings at which Mannix spoke:

“His framed, coloured, portrait hung on the parlour wall, next to those of my grandparents. We had no need of a Pope”.

Cardinal George Pell some years ago noted that there have been more biographies of Mannix than any other figure in Australian history, except for one.

Who is it that has inspired the most biographies of any Australian historical figure? Here is a clue: like Daniel Mannix, he is an Irish-Australian who wore a distinctive piece of headgear.

I suspect there might be rivals of Mannix for the position of second highest number of biographies: Don Bradman perhaps, Shane Warne, maybe Phar Lap? For the record, Daniel Mannix has around ten biographies, the first of which was published in Melbourne in 1916, barely three years after he settled in this city. Monash has a respectable handful.

As noted above, Monash and Mannix each made his name during the First World War. Monash landed at Gallipoli on April 25th, 1915. On the home front, meanwhile, Mannix was successful in opposing the two attempts made by wartime Labor Prime Minister Billy Hughes to introduce conscription in Australia, which ranks as one of the bitterest chapters in Australian political history.

The conscription plebiscites were held in 1916 and 1917 and on each occasion Australians narrowly voted “No”. The only other country in the British Empire not to impose conscription on its citizens during World War One was South Africa. The Yes campaign in Australia was broadly supported by the nation’s leaders, including the upper echelons of the Catholic Church. The voters, including the diggers themselves, were more or less evenly divided.

In important respects, Monash and Mannix were not part of the Australian mainstream of their time — one was a Jew of German descent and the other an outspoken Irish Catholic priest. Despite or rather because of this, each in his own way had a profound impact on the development of modern Australia. We owe much of our present day pluralism and independence as a nation to the likes of Monash and Mannix.

Monash was a brilliant military tactician and polymath. A civil engineer by profession with degrees in arts and law as well as engineering, a gifted musician and lover of literature, Monash before the war helped to pioneer the use in Australia of reinforced concrete in major construction projects.

Monash was a part-time soldier bearing the rank of Colonel in the militia when he volunteered to fight with the AIF. After some initial failures at Gallipoli, he rose rapidly through the ranks. As a Lieutenant-General in 1918, Monash was given command of the entire Australian force in Europe. He was also granted the rare honour of being knighted in the field.

The British Prime Minister Lloyd George described Monash as the only soldier of World War One with the necessary qualities of leadership. According to the military historian Peter Pedersen, the Australians comprised only 8% of what was called the British forces on the Western Front but by the end of the war were achieving 22% of the successful captures.

In his history of Victoria, Geoffrey Blainey writes that “Monash emerged as one of the few gifted generals on the Allied side” and was thus considered a hero. But, Blainey adds, “in this war the devastation was so great, the losses so heavy, and the warfare so mechanical that a hero seemed almost out of place”.

Drawing on his civilian experience in business and engineering, and unimpressed by established military doctrine, Monash introduced many innovations into the conduct of his battles. These included improving aspects of warfare such as communications and surveillance and they represent an organizational approach that is strikingly modern.

Famous for timing his battles in advance down to the last minute — the battle of Hamel was won in 93 minutes, a mere 3 minutes longer than the plan had allowed for — Monash also developed techniques such as “peaceful penetration” which were designed to protect rather than expend the lives of his soldiers. This was in an era when, as we know, wholesale slaughter on the battlefield was usual and staggeringly high casualty rates were considered acceptable by military leaders.

Monash's tactic of supporting his troops with massive firepower has become the norm, and it is the same principle that underpins the "shock and awe" approach used in the American-led invasion of Iraq. Another modern term, "friendly fire", may also be applied to one unfortunate miscalculation made by Monash which resulted in Australian troops being shelled by their own artillery. With the best will in the world, and Monash was of course using the "creeping barrage" technique to protect his troops as they advanced, war is never quite an exact science.

In addition to his tactical ingenuity, Monash was the first Australian commander to fight alongside American forces. The US Army had sent a relatively small contingent of troops to the Western Front in 1917. Its commander, General Pershing, made a last-minute attempt to withdraw them from the Hamel attack. Monash intervened personally to prevent this withdrawal and thus inaugurated nearly a century of military co-operation between Australia and the United States that continues to this day in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Where Monash excelled at tactics, Mannix had a gift for strategy. Mannix stood throughout his long life for what he regarded as universal principles of equity and freedom of speech. His unyielding stance on certain issues has been neatly described as "inflexible liberalism".

Arriving in Australia in 1913 at the age of 49, Mannix quickly entered the public arena, a space he was to occupy for half a century. Mannix's insistence that conscription should not be introduced in Australia at a time when so many soldiers had volunteered to fight overseas was founded on nationalistic

principles that could nowadays be considered mainstream but at the time were regarded by many as dangerously radical, even revolutionary.

His rhetoric was based on simple economics — Australia was at risk of destroying its human capital in order to defend territory and interests located on the other side of the world. Conscription, Mannix argued, was the problem rather than the solution. As he said in one speech:

The present war could never have assumed such disastrous proportions, it could never have been stained with such horrors, if conscription had not prevailed in Europe. I have been under the impression, and I still retain the conviction, that Australia has done her fair share — I am inclined to say more than her fair share — in this war.

Monash, who on the Western Front grappled with a manpower crisis, supported conscription, as did the other commanders, but was apparently dismayed by Hughes's handling of the issue, which involved vilifying his opponents.

On one occasion, Monash quietly disobeyed orders designed to influence the soldiers' vote in favour of conscription. After the Armistice was signed in 1918, Monash oversaw the repatriation of 160,000 Australian troops within a matter of months. Later, Monash became one of the leading organizers of Anzac Day and supervised the planning of Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance. He also served as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne.

At the time of the conscription debates, Mannix was attacked by the supporters of conscription as disloyal, even treacherous. Hughes deliberately singled out Mannix as an enemy of the war effort and thus bestowed on him prominence and publicity he would not otherwise have had. Against false accusations that Catholics were not pulling their weight, Mannix retorted: “Apparently not enough nuns are joining”.

While Mannix was denounced loudly and publicly, there were whispers about Monash. He was appointed to the rank of Brigadier-General in 1915 at the same time as rumours were circulating in several countries that he had been shot as a German spy. Among his chief detractors were two powerful civilian participants in the Australian war effort: newspaper proprietor Keith Murdoch and the official war historian Charles Bean.

The attempts by Murdoch and Bean to persuade Billy Hughes to block the appointment of Monash as commander of the Anzacs were not supported by Monash’s colleagues. Revealingly, Bean wrote in a letter: “We do not want Australia represented by men mainly because of their ability, natural and inborn in Jews, to push themselves”.

Monash himself was in no doubt as to where his allegiance lay, as he expressed in a letter to a cousin of his in America whose sympathies lay with Germany:

It may cause you and your people surprise that
I should myself take up arms in this quarrel,

but then, you must not fail to remember that I am Australian born, as is my wife and daughter, that my whole interests and sympathies are British, and that every man who can, and is able to do so, must do the best for his country.

In those days it was widely accepted that to be Australian was to be also British, though within a couple of generations that assumption would fade.

Monash himself worked to ensure that the Australian soldiers would only be led by their own officers. It seems to me that this determination is what gives Anzac Day its true meaning.

The attitude towards the Empire expressed by Monash was one that Mannix challenged, declaring on one occasion that he “did not speak as a priest or as an archbishop, but simply as an honest, straight and loyal citizen of Australia”. There is no doubt that his view of Australia was heavily influenced by his Irish republicanism, and indeed his passion for the cause of Irish independence only grew after he moved to Australia. It is not unheard of for absence from Ireland to make an Irish heart grow fonder.

Mannix was appointed Catholic Chaplain General of the AIF, though he refused to wear a military uniform. The military hat he was given is on display upstairs in the Senior Common Room, as are some of the letters he posted with the stamps, which in those days depicted the head of the British monarch, turned on their side.

One of the more incisive assessments of Mannix as a public figure was made by one of his fiercest critics. Adrian Leeper, a Protestant Irishman who was Warden of Trinity College, Melbourne, wrote a profile for the London-based magazine the Spectator shortly after the second conscription referendum was defeated by a wider margin than the first one.

Dr Mannix occupies a singular position in the Commonwealth. He is the idol of the Irish Roman Catholics of Australia. But he has also gathered round him large numbers of Socialists and Trade Unionists of various religious denominations. He has a very forceful personality, and handles with exceptional skill the huge audience attracted by his eloquence and boldness. Many who reprobate his violent diatribes against English 'tyranny' and 'bigotry' still cannot refuse to admire his courage and candour.

Leeper acknowledged that "To Dr Mannix more than any other person is due the defeat of conscription".

In 1918, the annual St Patrick's Day Parade in Melbourne took more than an hour to pass by Mannix and the vast crowd that stood with him. In 1920, Mannix led the St Patrick's Day parade in Melbourne with a guard of honour being provided by Irish Catholic winners of the Victoria Cross. In the same year, he embarked on a world tour but was prevented by the British government from reaching the shores of Ireland. Two warships were sent by Lloyd George to ensure that the vessel carrying him could not enter port. Mannix was thus denied the chance to visit his dying mother.

According to Monash's major biographer, Geoffrey Serle, such was the demand for Monash's time and attention, that he developed a taste for apocryphal storytelling and what Serle calls "a sustained leg-pull". Serle writes that Monash, "Irritated by worshipping men and women who would ask: "What was the greatest moment of your life, Sir John?", [...] would reply, "The day Ned Kelly asked me to hold his horse in Jerilderee".

Whether he said this with a straight face or maybe twinkle in his eye is apparently not recorded, but Monash did indeed spend part of his childhood in Jerilderee, scene of the Kelly gang's famous raid in 1879 and where the Jerilderee Letter was written. Serle doubts the truth of the story but other commentators are less dismissive. According to the legend, as recounted in *The Ned Kelly Encyclopedia*, Ned asked the 13 year old Monash to deliver a letter to the local school giving the pupils the day off. "Kelly is also reported to have given him a shilling and told him to be a good boy and attend to his studies". For his part, writes Serle, Monash was no fan of the Kelly Gang but felt that bushrangers might have made great soldiers.

After the war, Monash became head of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria, and began the expansion of the electricity grid to cover the entire state. As Geoffrey Blainey notes, "with the aid of technology from that Germany which he had helped to defeat, [Monash] developed the open cut at Yallourn and built the neat township and the first power house." Within two decades the SEC had established itself as Victoria's main electricity supplier.

Apart from the First World War, the only other event in which Mannix and Monash are in clear parallel is the police strike of 1923. When hundreds of Victoria Police suddenly went on strike on the night of Wednesday 31 October, Monash was called in to lead the force of “special constables” that was put together to restore order. Within a few days, a force of 5000 ex-servicemen was enlisted, equipped, rationed and accommodated. The Melbourne Town Hall became Monash’s headquarters.

On the Friday and Saturday, meanwhile, there were riots in Melbourne’s Central Business District centred on Swanston and Elizabeth Streets resulting in three deaths, looting from stores, smashing of shop windows and trams being overturned. Such was the frenzy of the mob that over 150 people were admitted to the Melbourne Hospital with cuts to the face and head.

It was possibly the most serious outbreak of civil disorder that the city of Melbourne has experienced but to put it in some kind of perspective, the same day as the rioting was taking place, 60,000 people attended Derby Day at Flemington Racecourse and the Melbourne Cup the following Tuesday still attracted a crowd of 120,000.

Monash agreed to chair the Royal Commission into the Police Strike, which in its report laid a significant amount of blame for the strike at the feet of the Chief Commissioner and the Victorian government and recommended important reforms. Eventually, the grievances of the police were addressed, though the 700 or so constables who took part in the strike,

approximately one third of the total force at the time, were never again allowed to serve as Victoria Police.

While Monash's intervention in the Police Strike was of a practical nature, Mannix, as he had done during World War One, focused on a broader moral question. How, he asked in a speech he gave at the opening of a Church bazaar at Camberwell a few days after the Police Strike, had it come to this. Mannix was sympathetic towards the striking police, but also aware of the consequences of their actions and the nature of such action.

An oath, of course, is a serious thing, a thing not to be regarded lightly; it is a sacred thing, whether it be taken by a Republican in Ireland for the service of his country, or by a policeman in Australia for the service of his King. But, if those who had forgotten their oath were not without blame, so those in authority were not without blame, who by their indifference and broken promises prepared the ground for the strike and its tragic consequences.

Indeed, the whole community [is] at fault. Public opinion [is] now alive to the fact that the police had substantial and long-standing grievances. But it took the police strike and the riots to awaken that public opinion. If the community in the past had backed up any reasonable demands made by the police, and if the politicians who were now so much interested had in the past had shown the same measure of sympathy, the police would have got redress long ago.

To Mannix the police strike showed the danger of indifference and here again he shows his independence of mind, finding fault on all sides. I can imagine that Mannix infuriated his loyalist critics by equating an oath to the Irish republic with that to the British head of state.

According to writer Colin McInnis, Monash's presence and prestige as a public figure after the War "made anti-Semitism, as a 'respectable' attitude, impossible in Australia".

Monash died in 1931 and his state funeral in Melbourne attracted a crowd estimated at 250,000. Mannix, meanwhile, lived on to see the Second World War and the Cold War.

When conscription was re-introduced in 1943 under Labor Prime Minister John Curtin for service within certain geographical limits, Mannix raised no public objection and indeed there was little protest of any kind due to the perception that Australia was under threat of actual invasion.

During Mannix's tenure as Archbishop of Melbourne, the number of Catholic schools within his jurisdiction nearly doubled. Mannix's lifelong insistence that Catholics be able to share equally in education, society and politics — what he once referred to as "the good things in private and public life" — led to his involvement in the political turmoil that climaxed in the Labor Party split of 1955.

The establishment of the Democratic Labor Party (or DLP) was openly supported by Mannix, and it followed more than a decade of action by the Movement, a secret political organization he supported. Though he saw communism as

a grave danger, Mannix apparently voted against the 1951 referendum proposal to ban the Communist Party of Australia that was put forward by Liberal Prime Minister Robert Menzies. Though opposed to Communism, Mannix evidently concluded that such a ban would be counter-productive.

Mannix was accused of meddling in politics, but apparently saw no conflict with his role as a churchman. As he observed to his protégé and eventual biographer B.A. Santamaria: “Politicians never really object to Bishops intervening in politics. What they object to is when Bishops intervene on the other side”.

In contrast to Monash’s extraordinary attention to detail, Santamaria noted that Mannix was only interested in the bigger picture: “He appointed men to handle details and would never demand that they reported [back].”

The main subject of the first official speech Mannix gave in Australia in 1913 was Catholic disadvantage in education. It took nearly half a century for Mannix’s specific goal of obtaining state aid for church schools to be achieved. More than one Catholic prime minister of Australia came and went in that time but no action was taken. Eventually it was the government led by Menzies (a Protestant) that promised to grant funds shortly before Mannix’s death in 1963 at the age of 99. In accordance with Mannix’s wishes, there was no funeral procession, though it was estimated that 200,000 people filed passed his body, which lay in state at St Patrick’s Cathedral.

The parallel lives of Monash and Mannix — there is no evidence that I could find that the two men ever met — remind us that all nations produce foxes and hedgehogs and that each in their own way may have a significant impact.

Their attitude to posterity, if nothing else, underlines the difference in their personalities. Monash not only published a memoir of his experience on the Western Front but left the nation a vast collection of documents and personal items recording his life in often minute detail. The University holds part of that collection, which includes items such as a telescope and a ceremonial sword as well as portraits and documents, some of which pertain to Monash's long-time mistress, Lizzie Bentwich.

Mannix, on the other hand, gave speeches which were diligently recorded and widely quoted at the time he gave them but wrote very little himself and ordered that his papers be destroyed so that, as he put it, posterity would not analyse his soul.

According to B.A. Santamaria, what was uppermost in Mannix's mind at the time he died was the establishment of the College that now bears his name and personal motto.

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ANZAC DAY 2007
Mannix College Presents
The Newman Public Lecture

THE FOX AND THE HEDGEHOG:

JOHN MONASH
&
DANIEL MANNIX,
PARALLEL LIVES



LECTURER

Dr. Simon Caterson,
Mannix College Librarian
and Senior Tutor

VENUE

Mannix College
Corner Wellington Road
and Parker Street, Clayton

DATE

25 April 2007
8.00 pm

FREE ADMISSION

Light refreshments will be
served after the lecture.

Bookings Essential - To book please call Dot or Ana on (03) 9544 8895 or e-mail: enquiries.mannix@general.monash.edu.au

Newman Lecture poster, Anzac Day 2007

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