

From the Editor

Chris Berg

Mariah Carey never said this:

When I watch TV and see those poor starving kids all over the world, I can't help but cry. I mean, I'd love to be skinny like that, but not with all those flies and death and stuff.

It was lifted from a satirical Web publication called Cupcake in 1996, was erroneously placed in the music and culture magazine *VOX*, from there into the British newspaper *The Independent*, eventually getting indelibly stamped into the mid-nineties pop diva's reputation. Perhaps it points to a deeper truth—that she's an idiot—but the fact remains that it entered our culture as a fabrication and took up a life of its own. It is not rare to see it still quoted as an example of celebrity stupidity and callousness.

Myths like these are relatively harmless, unless, of course, you are concerned about Mariah's feelings. But when myths enter the political realm and become part of ideological dogma—in other words, taken as gospel—they can be extremely harmful.

In this issue of the *IPA Review*, Tim Wilson looks carefully at the 'fair trade' phenomenon. Centred, at least for the moment, around the international coffee industry, the fair trade movement argues that free trade is not sufficient to ensure development and growth in the Third World. Instead, we need consumers to make socially conscious purchasing decisions which ensure that producers get what they deserve.

This is a superficially appealing message, and certainly consumers are free to consume whatever goods they prefer. But fair trade is fraught with problems. As Wilson argues, fair trade coffee has devolved into a bureaucratic, unresponsive and, ultimately, burdensome process. Rather than the social good that its supporters claim it is, fair trade provides no incentives for producers to innovate and increase productivity—the real keys to increasing prosperity.

Fair trade is a myth, propelled along by the apparent appeal of its message, just like Mariah Carey's insensitive comments. Like her insensitivity, it needs to be investigated further before being universally accepted as true.

A similar myth, and one which is heard just as often, is the myth of a Scandinavian utopia. Peddled by social democrats across the world, this myth claims that high taxing and spending welfare states can remain as vibrant and dynamic as the liberal democracies of the Anglosphere. But, upon further investigation, this turns out not to be the case. 'Scandinavian Idol' investigates the case for and against Swedish exceptionalism, and argues that, despite its



apparent prosperity, the Swedish model has little to offer Australian policy-makers.

Also in this issue, Michael Evans looks at Australia's strategic culture and argues for a rethink of our priorities as an island continent. Peter De Luca sheds light on xenotourism, the practice by which Australians travel overseas for a vital medical procedure not yet approved in Australia, namely, the transplantation of animal tissue or organs into humans.

Jennifer Marohasy takes us up to speed with the survivability of polar bears and how they could be affected by global warming. Richard Allsop urges renewed debate over public transport to recognise the reality of how people actually use the service, and how best to proceed.

Rohan D'Souza looks at what is really at stake in bias in academia, and Alan Moran asks one of the most important questions of our time—what can we learn from *Mad Max*?

Scott Hargreaves clears up a thing or two about the legendary management consultant Peter Drucker, Tony Cutcliffe wonders where the real unemployment figures for indigenous populations went, and Julie Novak looks at the new 'parental socialism'.

And finally, in a special feature for this issue, we present a list of what we consider the top 20 free-market books—essential reading for liberals and conservatives in Australia.

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REVIEW

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From the Executive Director

Putting Plato into practice

John Roskam

There's a big difference between governments giving people what people actually want, and governments giving people what governments believe people want. Similarly, there's a big difference between writing books about how people really behave, compared to writing books about how people should behave.

In simple terms, the first alternatives are the attitude of the liberal and conservative tradition. The second alternatives are the attitude of the socialist and Marxian tradition.

The twenty books 'You must read before you die' featured in this edition of the *IPA Review* are works that sit firmly in the liberal and conservative tradition. They are books that take individuals as they are—they don't strive for the regeneration of the human race. In this sense, many of the books are quite modest in their ambition. *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is a speculation about what could happen when such a regeneration is attempted. *Animal Farm* is a simple story about farmyard animals. *The Road to Serfdom* is a warning, not so much about the effort of human regeneration, but about the consequences of allowing those who wish to undertake such an exercise to accrue as much as is necessary to achieve their objective.

Other books such as Milton and Rose Friedman's *Free to Choose* and David Friedman's (the son of Milton and Rose) *The Machinery of Freedom* appear radical only because government has already imposed so many limitations on our liberties.

The criterion for the ranking of books from one to twenty was the degree to which the works deserve to be influential, whether according to the strength of argument, or according to the fact that they should be better known than they are.

Plato was one of the first to remove himself from the grubby reality of everyday existence. He presented a vision of how a society could operate if only everyone acted in a way that Plato thought best. For him it was more important to ponder the nature of utopia than to consider the problems of the present—and people were secondary to his overall objective of achieving that utopia. Plato, as Karl Popper argued in

The Open Society and its Enemies was the first in a long line of philosophers, writers, and hacks each of whom had their own version of heaven on earth. And as Popper also identified, when those philosophers, writers and hacks attempt to impose their own views on the rest of society, the problems begin.

The British author Michael Burleigh, in his recent book *Earthly Powers: Religion and Politics in Europe from the French Revolution to the Great War*, documents the consequences of putting Plato into practice. (Burleigh was recently in Australia and an exclusive interview with him and review of *Earthly Powers* will appear in the next *IPA Review*.)

Burleigh examines the way in which, beginning with the French Revolution, revolutionaries attempted to replace the traditional beliefs of religion with an adherence to the secular and the political. This was done in order to create a 'new man' from the old Adam, 'an exercise that presumed that human personality is as malleable as wet clay'.

Alexis De Tocqueville noted the capacity of such recreations to create a particular fervour:

Because the Revolution seemed to be striving for the regeneration of the human race even more than for the reform of France, it lit a passion which the most violent political revolutions have never before been able to produce. It inspired conversions and generated propaganda. Thus, in the end, it took on that appearance of a religious revolution which so astonished contemporaries. Or rather, it itself became a new kind of religion...

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