

## The Political Philosophy of F.A. Bland

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### I

If the discipline of political science in Australia has a forgotten man, that man must surely be Francis Armand Bland. Professor of Public Administration at the University of Sydney from 1935 until his retirement in 1947, Bland was a prolific writer and commentator on public policy and affairs, and in his later years an energetic critic of the increasing scope of state activity. Yet with the exception of a small number of articles,<sup>1</sup> little of substance has been published about Bland since the obituary in *Public Administration* in September 1967, noting his death in April of that year at the age of 84.<sup>2</sup> Such references as one does encounter relate very often not to Bland's scholarly work, but to his role in establishing the New South Wales Division of the Royal Australian Institute of Public Administration,<sup>3</sup> or his activities as Chairman during the 1950s of the Joint Committee on Public Accounts of the Commonwealth Parliament. As a personality in Australian intellectual life in the 1930s, Bland has recently attracted a certain amount of attention, but his political and administrative thought has been subjected to virtually no sustained critical scrutiny.<sup>4</sup>

Yet Bland was in many ways an interesting and unusual figure—in the words of one of his students, an 'irrepressible wizard'<sup>5</sup>—and he offered useful insights on a range of political issues which remain significant to this day. Much of Bland's work was concerned

- 1 See E.N. Gladden, 'Francis Armand Bland, Australian Public Administration Pioneer—A Biographical Snapshot', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1975, pp.103-8; and Jean Holmes, 'F.A. Bland and Fifty Years of Public Administration', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 48, no. 4, December 1989, pp.322-9.
- 2 [T.H. Kewley and R.N. Spann], 'F.A. Bland, In Memoriam', *Public Administration* (Sydney), vol. 26, no. 3, September 1967, pp.283-6.
- 3 See Bernard Carey and Hilary Carey, *Educating the Guardians* (Sydney: Royal Australian Institute of Public Administration, 1985) pp.5-9.
- 4 Bland receives no mention at all in Peter Loveday, 'Australian Political Thought', in Richard Lucy (ed.), *The Pieces of Politics* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1983) pp.5-30, and only passing references in five other works in which some discussion of his ideas might have been expected: Peter Tiver, *The Liberal Party: Principles and Performance* (Milton: The Jacaranda Press, Milton, 1978); Tim Rowse, *Australian Liberalism and National Character* (Melbourne: Kibble Books, 1978); Marian Simms, *A Liberal Nation* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1982); Conal Condren, 'Political Theory', in Don Aitkin (ed.), *Surveys of Australian Political Science* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985) pp.36-85; and David Kemp, 'Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia since 1944', in Brian Head and James Walter (eds.), *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988) pp.322-62.
- 5 J.D.B. Miller, 'A Tracery of Influences', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 15, nos.3-4, Summer-Autumn 1980, pp.446-56 at p.447.

with detailed analysis of administrative institutions.<sup>6</sup> He was not by profession a philosopher, took little part in the controversies centred on the views of John Anderson, Challis Professor of Philosophy at Sydney University from 1927 to 1958,<sup>7</sup> and wrote no systematic study of philosophical topics. To approach his thought as if he were a Hobbes or a Hume, working on the frontier between ethics and political theory, would be to do him a serious disservice, and to misread fundamentally his writings. However, it would be equally wrong to treat Bland solely as an administrative historian. He was a practical political thinker, concerned with the realisation of political ideals in the nuts and bolts of politics and administration. Nonetheless, he also attempted to provide a philosophical grounding for his views about government, and it is on these more abstract elements of his thought that I wish to concentrate in this paper. In particular, I wish to focus on some important themes in Bland's political philosophy: his Christian theory of the state; his attitude to property, law, and citizenship; his commitment to democracy; and the liberal dimension of his thought.

## II

For much of his life, Bland was an active lay member of the Anglican Church, and this commitment was an important influence on his thought about social institutions. 'Only if the whole of life be influenced by the example of Christ', he wrote, 'shall we be able to realise in our institutions the essentials of a righteous system of life, the essentials of a just order'.<sup>8</sup> This pointed, in the circumstances in which he was writing, to a need for a radical approach to the organisation of society: '... if the Christian is to seek Christ's way of life, he must challenge the existing assumptions, and must insist upon the unity of life'.<sup>9</sup> However, Bland was not a literalist in his approach to the Scriptures,<sup>10</sup> and argued that 'it cannot be too often emphasized that if we are successfully to transplant Christ's teaching for modern application we must penetrate beneath the incidental utterances to the principles involved'.<sup>11</sup> 'Rather', he continued, 'if we can catch the essentials of Christ's way of life, we will have a liberated Christianity, contagious in its influence, inspiring in its example, and with an infinite capacity for expansion to meet the conditions of today'.<sup>12</sup> From these premises, he drew explicitly political conclusions—'that Christ's way of life points the citizen to the Kingdom of God as the ideal polity, and that membership entails the devotion and discipline of full time service'.<sup>13</sup> This, in turn, required 'a never ceasing attack on

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, F.A. Bland, *Shadows and Realities of Government* (Sydney: Workers' Educational Association of New South Wales, 1923); F.A. Bland, *Budget Control: An Introduction to the Financial System of New South Wales* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1936); F.A. Bland (ed.), *Government in Australia* (Sydney: New South Wales Government Printer, 1944); and F.A. Bland, *Planning the Modern State* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1945).

<sup>7</sup> For example, A.J. Baker, *Anderson's Social Philosophy: The Social Thought and Political Life of Professor John Anderson* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1979) makes no reference to Bland in discussing the controversies of that period.

<sup>8</sup> F.A. Bland, 'Citizenship in the Light of Christ's Way of Life', *The Morpeth Review*, vol. 2, no. 23, April 1933, pp.13–27 at p.15.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the notion of literalism, and its relationship to fundamentalism, see James Barr, 'Religious Fundamentalism', *Current Affairs Bulletin*, vol. 59, no. 1, June 1982, pp.24–30 at p.26.

<sup>11</sup> Bland, 'Citizenship in the Light of Christ's Way of Life', p.16.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.17.

every wrong institution until the Kingdom of God is established on earth and its principles influence every relationship of man with his fellows'.<sup>14</sup> Bland's exposition here left two important questions unresolved.

First, he adduced no technique which one might apply to discern from within the mass of incidental utterances in the Scriptures principles of general application—even though he cited such a penetration as necessary for the transplantation of Christ's teaching for modern application. Without explicitly embracing a Thomist notion that there is a natural law consisting in the participation of the eternal law in the rational creature, he did suggest that in seeking to find principles, 'it is entirely contrary to Christ's teaching to rely upon the technique of prayer alone'.<sup>15</sup> However, the 'patient studious preparation for tasks ahead' which by implication he endorsed<sup>16</sup> could hardly be regarded as a satisfactory mechanism for discovering the principles of conduct underlying Christ's pronouncements—despite his earlier cautioning, it almost amounted to an invitation to intuitionism—and this left the basis of his exegesis not fully developed.

A second, related problem pertained to his use of the expression 'Kingdom of God'. The term is of Scriptural origin and to attempt an elucidation of it out of context might be legitimately regarded as presumptuous. Yet recourse to the Scriptures does not carry one far in clarifying the notion. Christ proclaimed 'the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand',<sup>17</sup> but this must be read in the light of the Old Testament statement that 'Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations'.<sup>18</sup> This gives little indication of the concrete nature of the Kingdom of God or the ideal polity, especially if its attainment on earth is within man's grasp—as Bland's statement, on one reading, would suggest. Perhaps the closest Bland came to explaining his usage was in a 1932 address in which he defined 'community' as 'that type of society in which all the interests of man are integrated, and in which energies are released and efforts are employed for common service. Christians call it "The Kingdom of God"'.<sup>19</sup>

In his approach to identifying the appropriate limits of state action, Bland blended Christianity with a particular strand of English pluralism: he followed the line of thought developed by R.M. MacIver and Harold Laski,<sup>20</sup> for whom the state was 'merely another group, alongside economic, cultural and ecclesiastical groups', and not, as it was for J.N. Figgis, 'the community of communities'.<sup>21</sup> He wrote:<sup>22</sup>

Let us be clear what we as Christians think the State is. It is definitely not the same as society. It is simply an association like any other, economic, cultural, religious,

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>15</sup> F.A. Bland, 'God and Citizenship', *The Australian Intercollegian*, vol. 33, no. 3, September 1930, pp.159–63 at p.160.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.160.

<sup>17</sup> Mark, Chap. 1, v.15.

<sup>18</sup> Psalm 145, v.13.

<sup>19</sup> F.A. Bland, 'Life and Religion Week at University', Unpublished Address to the Faculty of Economics, University of Sydney, 24 June 1932.

<sup>20</sup> See R.M. MacIver, *The Modern State* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926) pp.5–8; and Herbert A. Deane, *The Political Ideas of Harold J. Laski* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955) p.78.

<sup>21</sup> David Nicholls, *The Pluralist State* (London: Macmillan, 1975) p.9.

<sup>22</sup> F.A. Bland, 'Religion and the New Social Order', Sermon at the Mathieson Memorial Congregational Church, 26 July 1936.

through which men and women seek to obtain specific satisfactions. That is to say, it is not an end in itself, it is merely a means for the realisation of a given end. That end may be summed up as the provision of conditions which will ensure the good life. It certainly has a universality which no other association possesses. It must be clothed with the power of coercion, but so are other associations. In any case the value of force may be exaggerated, for the more highly developed the community, the less the need of force. Men accept the commands of the State because they identify themselves with them. And in a really democratic community, they are able to identify themselves wholeheartedly with them because they themselves have willed the command. In any case, force can only enjoin formal and external obedience; it cannot enjoin a spirit or a belief. When the value of an act depends upon the spirit in which it is performed, then force is vain, even if it is wielded by the State. The most significant power possessed by the State is its ability to render justice impartially and to co-ordinate the activities of all the other associations. Beyond this the State ought not to go.

Bland's conclusion that the State should be limited to a justice-dispensing and coordinating role hardly followed from the argument which preceded it. At one point, however, Bland seemed to ground state authority in some form of popular consent, thereby amplifying slightly the formulation just quoted. He wrote that:<sup>23</sup>

the peculiar function of the State is to give unity to the whole system of social relationships. All these associations have rules for determining the conduct of their members. Those of the State are called laws, and are universal in their binding legal force upon all members. But when you ask why the State possesses this power, it must not be explained merely in terms of sovereignty, but in terms of function. The State's claim to allegiance and obedience must be based upon its ability to persuade the citizen that it is accomplishing the things he thinks it ought to do. The State must make the individual feel that his own good is bound up with the rules it prescribes. The State maintains these rules, not for the sake of the rules, but for what they do for individual lives. The sanction of the rules is force, but force is devoid of moral content. And once you import a notion of moral purpose, might is not right.

Furthermore, Bland's concept of justice, derived from his Anglicanism, could have radical implications. Nowhere was this clearer than in his discussion of private property.

### III

That the state should have a role in regulating property rights, Bland did not doubt. To the extent that he valued private property, it was on instrumental rather than deontological grounds.<sup>24</sup> 'Competition and self-interest', he argued, 'led under the approbation of the dominant philosophy of the early nineteenth century to a sacrifice of every other consideration but output. So serious were the results of this policy that the State was forced to step in. The whole trend of Labor organisation and industrial legislation has therefore been to combat the anti-social influences and disruptive tendencies manifested under a system dominated by the ideas of freedom of contract and free competition'.<sup>25</sup>

Property rights were intimately connected with the phenomenon of class struggle. 'There are many factors', he wrote, 'contributing to the aggressive class consciousness of today. It is not proposed to make an exhaustive classification of them, for that has often

<sup>23</sup> F.A. Bland, 'Running a Liberal Democratic State', Tutorial Classes Department, University of Sydney, 1936.

<sup>24</sup> See Alan Ryan, *Property and Political Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) pp. 7-8.

<sup>25</sup> F.A. Bland, 'The Modern Industrial Outlook', *The Printing Trades Journal*, vol. 2, no. 4, April 1918, pp. 80-1 at p. 80.

been done, but we may say that class consciousness and class conflict largely arise from unrest due to memories of the past, from outraged feelings because of the grossly unequal distribution of wealth and economic power, from the servile status and dehumanized position of labour, and from the realisation of the anomaly of autocratic control of industry in what is rapidly becoming a democratic world'.<sup>26</sup> 'The bitterness and severity of the initial struggle', he had earlier written, 'have left their imprint upon the life of society and bequeathed us the legacy of the class struggle so clearly foretold by Karl Marx. "Economists" have for some time been seeking a new valuation of industry. Old standards and their implications are being questioned. On all sides the enormous power of wealth has raised questions as to the validity of private property, and before the war a condition was fast being reached where the delicate equilibrium of society would be threatened'.<sup>27</sup>

Prudential reasons thus augmented the moral case for a critical reconsideration of capitalism and private property. 'Whom the Gods would destroy', Bland wrote, 'they first of all make mad, and the spectacle in Russia may yet be witnessed elsewhere if sanity be not restored to all classes, and especially to those in whose hands rectification lies. Nine-tenths of the profoundly thoughtful people throughout the world are convinced of the fundamental unsoundness of the existing order. But before any considerable change can be accomplished, it will be for them to convince all plain people that an order which gives greater sanctity to property rights than to humanity is rotten'.<sup>28</sup>

'Accumulated wealth', wrote Bland, 'has sanctity only so long as it functions for social wellbeing'.<sup>29</sup> This view permeated the extended discussion in Bland's unpublished MA thesis. He argued:<sup>30</sup>

whatever may be the advantages urged from a system of personal appropriation it is undoubtedly true that most of its benefits could be secured without carrying it to extremes. All that would be necessary to retain individual incentive would be to provide a sufficiently wide margin of personal appropriation ... The lines pointed out by Bentham in advocating another doctrine are very a propos here, viz. that the state should provide subsistence for all, endeavour to produce abundance; maintain security, and foster equality so far as compatible with security.

This did not entail a commitment to complete material equality: to Bland it was 'impossible to abolish all inequalities of wealth since they follow the natural inequalities ... and it is not desirable since we have seen that it is the love of acquisition (however unworthy ethically) which provided the necessary stimulus for the present industrial system'.<sup>31</sup> He saw serious difficulties confronting socialist control of the means of production, distribution and exchange: 'Undoubtedly there is much discontent under present conditions, but it is spread over a very large area, and distributed both as regards subjects and objects; but under the Socialistic regime, who can say that all discontent would vanish. If there were any, what a load the governing authorities would have to carry!—There would be no relief by a change

<sup>26</sup> F.A. Bland, *Class Consciousness* (Sydney: Social Problems Committee of the Diocese of Sydney, 1922) p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Bland, 'The Modern Industrial Outlook', p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> Bland, *Class Consciousness*, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> F.A. Bland, 'An Examination of the Institution of Private Property', Unpublished MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1914, pp. 34-5.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

of employer, and an extension of police activities would be rendered necessary, at the cost of favours as the price of support'.<sup>32</sup>

Bland therefore opted for a middle course.<sup>33</sup>

There is no panacea for all ills, and gradual evolution to higher and more intelligent forms of civilization is the only lasting cure for them. The present tendency seems to point to a policy of qualified individualism which has been described as a *via media* between the anarchy and brutality of unrestrained competition on the one hand, and the parasitism and tyranny of Socialism on the other. There is no doubt that the evils resulting from unrestrained competition should be reduced to a minimum, either by State regulation or by the pressure of other Agencies, but any system which neglects to take full account of the immeasurable importance of the individual is doomed to failure.

He concluded with the view that 'we must recognize, subject to the limitations already noticed, the right of private property; private enterprise, and freedom of contract. And finally while there can be no absolute statement as to the limit of State interference, the value of the State as a regulative and organizing agency representative of the whole mass of the people, must be recognised'.<sup>34</sup>

In addressing the problems raised by the institution of private property, Bland was determined more to depict the range of solutions which presented themselves than to recommend any one. He demonstrated that a number of widely mooted proposals—such as Henry George's proposal for a single tax on land—faced great practical objections, and the broad tone of his dissertation on property is negative rather than positive. However, he did venture some recommendations of his own. He argued that 'it is too late to make a very radical change in ownership of land, in most established countries. When population has become denser land acquires a monopolistic character, and difficulties of finance render it impossible for the State to acquire this monopoly. In New countries, however, it would be quite possible to accustom the people to, say, the leasehold system, and it is very probable that good results could be obtained'.<sup>35</sup> And as well as temporal constraints upon the holding of land, he also supported limits on the disposal of property by testament: 'It would seem quite reasonable that the testator should not be allowed to deprive his wife and children of all share except where possibly they had other means of support'.<sup>36</sup> He argued that upon the death of the testator, it was necessary 'to divert a share to the State by death duties, graduated according to the value of the estate, and according to the number of dependent relatives'.<sup>37</sup>

From the Scriptures, Bland also derived ideas of a predominantly individualist flavour, but he was quick to recognise the tension between an individualism stressing the isolated being and an individualism which recognised man as a social being in civil society. 'The fundamental contribution which Christianity made to citizenship', he wrote in 1930, 'was insistence upon the incalculable value of the individual soul. It has already been indicated that emphasis upon individual faithfulness tended to blur the social implications of this

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pp.75–6.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.80. My emphasis.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.80.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp.60–1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.64.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.67.

doctrine'.<sup>38</sup> And in 1933, he stated: 'It is unnecessary for me to remind you of the numerous instances when Christ stressed the significance and worth of the individual soul ... And yet, in some respects, the doctrine of human equality, the conception of the individual as an end in himself and not a means to the well-being of others, has tended at times to overshadow the significance of our obligations to and mutual dependence upon our fellows, and to lend support to a philosophy depicting men as a number of detached and competing individuals'.<sup>39</sup>

Bland saw the institution of law as an attempt to relieve this tension: 'Actually a working principle for reconciling individual and social duties was suggested at the very beginning of biblical history in the exclamation of Cain: "Am I my brother's keeper?" The world has ever inclined like Cain to disavow trusteeship, but it has been necessary to regulate human relationships. To this end were laws made, and the "rule of law" is of the foundations of English life. Law is simply an attempt to secure the frictionless working of social relations'.<sup>40</sup> However, Bland recognised the Scriptures as sources of moral obligations, wider in ambit than the obligations imposed by human law. The ordinary citizen, he argued, 'can go further, and he can so order his own life on the principle of his brother's keeper as to avoid giving offence. In other words, he can insist that citizenship shall stand not merely for "the rule of law" but for higher standards of conduct and for greater sensitiveness of social consciousness'.<sup>41</sup>

This notion of 'citizenship' was of great importance to Bland. In his view, it applied 'both a privilege and a bounden duty of every adult to participate in public affairs',<sup>42</sup> for in theory, 'the citizens are ultimately the governors of the community, for government is in accordance with popular opinion'.<sup>43</sup> The nature and purpose of citizenship, he believed, has been profoundly influenced by 'our belief in God as revealed to us by Jesus Christ'.<sup>44</sup> He saw this influence as quite proper, and argued that the 'conception of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man ... has given content to the functions of the State'.<sup>45</sup> 'Christ's way of life', he argued, 'proclaims a standard of conduct applicable not merely to personal actions, but to the whole social order'<sup>46</sup>—including, seemingly, the instruments of the State.

However, Bland remained hostile to any attempt to justify a collectivist state by the Standard of Christ's way of life: 'the ramifications of industry under mass production and the ever-increasing tendency of political societies to centralise control of all activities have reduced the individual, be he primary producer, industrialist, or citizen, to the insignificance, if not to impotence. The natural result of this process has been a flight from the duties of citizenship, because the individual feels that action is useless'.<sup>47</sup> Coping with this flight, in his view 'is not merely a question of getting men to assume the responsibilities of citizenship by opening the door of their interests and training their

<sup>38</sup> Bland, 'God and Citizenship', pp.160–1.

<sup>39</sup> Bland, 'Citizenship in the Light of Christ's Way of Life', pp.18–19.

<sup>40</sup> Bland, 'God and Citizenship', p.161.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.161.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.159.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, pp.159–160.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.159.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Bland, 'Citizenship in the Light of Christ's Way of Life', pp.17–18.

<sup>47</sup> Bland, 'God and Citizenship', p.161.



understanding. There is a further problem which is linked with the question of human behaviour. Throughout the ages human nature has changed very little. But how men will behave under given circumstances is another thing'.<sup>48</sup> This factor, Bland seemed to grasp, posed grave problems for those, like himself, interested in the design of appropriate political and administrative institutions. Thus, his conclusion that 'it would be easier if it were possible to induce men to submit to some over-riding principle, the principle of Christ's way of life'<sup>49</sup> carries some weight, although as to the possibilities of achieving this, Bland was not at all optimistic.

It thus emerges that religion was a major influence upon and source of the values which Bland held about social and political organisation. Although the principles rather than the literal words of the Scriptures were truly the rules to which the individual should look for guidance, nonetheless at certain points in the Scriptures one could find statements of principle which could serve as guides for both personal actions and the whole social order. The ideal polity was defined by the Scriptures, but rather than pursuing it directly in ways of his own devising, the individual should further it by following the rules of behaviour in the Scriptures, the principles of Christ's way of life, which would thereby facilitate the design of appropriate institutions within which the individual could undertake the active citizenship which Christ's way of life ordained. These principles were not necessarily conservative: on the contrary, as Bland's discussion of property demonstrated, a Christian theory of justice could have quite radical implications.

#### IV

In a way it is misleading to speak of Bland's 'democratic theory', for a certain shift in his notion of what constituted a democracy is apparent between his early and later writings. 'By democratic government', he wrote in 1933, 'I mean a system under which the ultimate determining power is vested in the majority of citizens, in which each member is entitled to a share in the selection and control of the governing authority, and in which each member counts for one in the estimate of public welfare'.<sup>50</sup> 'This form of polity', he added 'seems to me to supply, better than any other, the opportunities for following Christ's way of life, though it is also more exacting upon the citizen'.<sup>51</sup> However, he recognised that 'because of the interplay of conflicting group interests, democratic government may not emphasize Christ's teaching of the unity of life, although at the same time it is an excellent system for recognising what is probably one of the most outstanding features of his teaching, viz, the doctrine of human equality in the sight of God'.<sup>52</sup>

Several expressions in this formulation are not very clear. What does it mean to say that in a democracy 'each member counts for one in the estimate of public welfare'? Broadly read, this could be taken almost as implying that a democratic government must formulate its policies according to some sort of utilitarian calculus. More narrowly, it could be constituted as an endorsement of the quite different value of equality before the law. Bland's analysis makes it difficult to determine which of these, or, possibly, other interpretations he actually had in mind. Furthermore, it is unclear whether Bland would

<sup>48</sup> Bland, 'Citizenship in the Light of Christ's Way of Life', p.25.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p.26.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p.18.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

regard as democratic a system of constitutionalism in which a basic law limited the law-making capacity of the majority of citizens.<sup>53</sup> In one sense, the majority in this case would not possess 'ultimate determining power', as certain activities might lie beyond its capacity to act, yet in another, it would possess such power as long as no other body could override its determinations in areas for which it was constitutionally accorded responsibility.

However, his early formulation also had illiberal implications, which may ultimately have brought about his change of stance. F.A. Hayek has argued that it 'is at least conceivable, though unlikely, that an autocratic government will exercise self-restraint; but an omnipotent democratic government simply cannot do so'.<sup>54</sup> Bland reached a similar conclusion: 'Popular government', he wrote, 'can be even more arbitrary and tyrannical than other forms because it claims to derive from popular support ...'.<sup>55</sup>

Writing in 1940, he contrasted democracy with the philosophy of totalitarianism. Both democracy and totalitarianism, he argued, 'connote a system of ideas, a form of government and a political and social process. The conflict between them arises chiefly from their widely different conceptions of the nature and purpose of the State, and therefore of the nature and purpose of man'.<sup>56</sup> Bland's rejection of totalitarianism he tied quite explicitly to the view of man which he derived from the Scriptures. 'The totalitarian can reject any but the most efficient and economical methods [of social and political organisation], for man is not a citizen, but only a means to achieving whatever ends the government has in mind ...'.<sup>57</sup> 'If the State is the end, and man namely an animal', he continued, 'then he will be a wise animal if he chooses the type of government that will provide most efficiently and abundantly for his political needs. But if man has been made in the image of God, then he is degrading that image and betraying his soul if he seeks material benefits at the cost of the surrender of his own initiative and judgment to an arbitrary government, however able and disinterested that government may be. In some aspects, the democrat accepts this latter view of man'.<sup>58</sup> Democracy he saw as 'a temper of mind and a habit of free discussion of ideas, of free competition between ideas, and therefore of free discussion and competition between political parties. Democracy consists not so much in getting things done, but in a certain way of doing things. It is not a particular type of civilization, but a civilized way of acting ... Discussion and competition between ideas, however, are not enough. There must be a readiness to co-operate, a desire to discover the general good for the whole community. This rules out factions, for co-operation is impossible when factions or groups make the advantage of the faction or group the primary consideration'.<sup>59</sup>

Bland's introduction of the notion of a discoverable 'general good' is somewhat discordant. It is unclear what relationship such a notion would bear to Bland's conception

<sup>53</sup> See Chandran Kukathas, David W. Lovell and William Maley, *The Theory of Politics: An Australian Perspective* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1990) pp.34-59.

<sup>54</sup> F.A. Hayek, 'The Miscarriage of the Democratic Ideal', *Encounter*, vol. 50, no. 3, March 1978, pp.14-17.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in R.S. Parker, 'F.A. Bland's Contribution to Public Administration in Australia', *Public Administration* (Sydney), vol. 7, no. 3, September 1948, pp.165-82 at p.170.

<sup>56</sup> F.A. Bland, 'Does Totalitarianism Menace Australian Democracy?' *Public Administration* (Sydney), vol. 2, no. 2, June 1940, pp.61-75 at p.61.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.63.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, pp.63-64.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p.64.

of the Kingdom of God as the ideal polity, and just as unclear whether readiness to co-operate should be valued at any price. After all, it is quite conceivable that the ungodly could constitute a majority, in which case co-operation by those citizens committed to following Christ's example could involve a violation of the moral norms of the Scriptures in exchange for a trivial concession to their position by the governing party. In looking to procedural rather than substantive limits to the scope of the majority to enforce its policies, Bland seems without apparent justification to have concluded that a consensus which did not entail the violation of the moral commitments of one or more societal groups would always be possible in a community in which a 'desire to discover the general good for the whole community' prevails.

One is thus faced with the conclusion that even the polity which best supplies the opportunities for following Christ's way of life threatens to confront the individual citizen with the unenviable choice of whether to follow the injunctions of the Scriptures or of human law. This dilemma may, indeed, be what Bland had in mind when he recognised that democratic government may not emphasise Christ's teaching of the unity of life, but in any case, he did not produce an explicit rule of priority to guide the citizen when Scriptural and temporal injunctions conflict, which introduces an element of indeterminacy, if not incoherence, into his argument. However, the tone of Bland's discussion of democracy is instrumental, which suggests that he saw temporal injunctions as hierarchically subordinate to spiritual ones.

## V

Bland attached great value to personal liberty. Perhaps his most ferocious exposition of this position came in his 1948 pamphlet *Totalitarianism, Australia's Peril*. There, he argued that the 'totalitarian always tends to emphasize the doctrine of economic equality, and it is well-known that the greater the degree of economic equality imposed upon a community, the narrower is the range of individual liberty. The greater the degree of individual liberty, the wider will be the scope of economic inequality that will follow. In other words, economic equality always tends to be incompatible with individual liberty'.<sup>60</sup> However, this did not mean that Bland saw freedom as synonymous with anarchy or even a minimal state. In 1930, he had written that 'Paradoxically true freedom is impossible without control',<sup>61</sup> and his explanation of the institution of law which I noted earlier reinforced the validity of this insight. Thus, insofar as the enacting of laws is an activity of the State, it would seem slightly misleading to argue, as did Parker, that Bland was 'inclined to regard every extension of state activity as a net limitation of individual satisfactions'.<sup>62</sup>

It may have been writings such as Bland's 1948 pamphlet—written at the height of the Chifley Government's campaign to nationalise trading banks—which led Parker to the view that Bland tended 'to equate "individual" liberty' with the maintenance of property rights'.<sup>63</sup> However, in Bland's writings one can detect two separate notions of freedom. The first is that which Parker has in mind, a notion in which the state is the main source of

<sup>60</sup> F.A. Bland, *Totalitarianism: Australia's Peril* (Sydney: NSW Constitutional League, Sydney, 1948) p.15.

<sup>61</sup> F.A. Bland, 'Liberty and Discipline', *The Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy*, vol. 8 no. 3, September 1930, pp.200–4 at p.202.

<sup>62</sup> Parker, op cit, p.181.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

danger, and in which property rights provide a bulwark against the assaults by the state against the individual—a sense close to Isaiah Berlin's notion of 'negative freedom'.<sup>64</sup> The second, more apparent in Bland's earlier writings, is close to Berlin's notion of 'positive freedom'—that sense of the word which 'derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master'.<sup>65</sup>

Here Bland was indebted to T.H. Green, whose 'concept of "positive freedom" provided intellectual support for the newly emerging welfare-state proposals ...'.<sup>66</sup> To Green, all moral participation in a social life was 'the highest form of self-development, and to create the possibility of such participation was the end of a liberal society'.<sup>67</sup> Bland's adoption of a positive notion of freedom—derived from 'the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master'—was a striking aspect of his thought. 'Although freedom is claimed for thought and action', wrote Bland, 'men are, in fact, unfree. They are enslaved by business and pleasure. The methods of large-scale industry have reduced them to a hitherto unknown condition of dependence. Individuality is crushed by gigantic corporations'.<sup>68</sup> 'True liberty', he continued, 'is possible only when everybody is passionately anxious to provide conditions in which every one has the opportunity of being his best self. Herein lies the true significance of the discipline of service which is perfect freedom'.<sup>69</sup> This is highly reminiscent of Green's view that freedom meant 'the greater power on the part of the citizens as a body to make the most and best of themselves'.<sup>70</sup>

'Perfect freedom', in the sense in which Bland uses the term, consists, it would seem, in the voluntary following of the example of Christ's way of life within the context of a state operating so as not to infringe the 'negative' freedom of individual citizens. Were perfect freedom to be attained, the mere presence of large scale industry and gigantic corporations would not be a problem, for the collapse of the insidious 'differentiation between things secular and things sacred'<sup>71</sup> would ameliorate their dehumanising effects. None of this implies that Bland was in any way sanguine about the prospects of preserving or attaining freedom in either its negative or positive form. Indeed, a characteristic conclusion can be found in his 1933 paper: 'I recognise that I am in danger of ending on a note of pessimism. But I do not want to minimize the difficulties of Christian citizenship in a rapidly changing world'.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>64</sup> See Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' in his *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) pp.118–72.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p.131.

<sup>66</sup> Dante Germino, *Machiavelli to Marx: Modern Western Political Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972) pp.262–3.

<sup>67</sup> George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (London: Harrap, 1951) p.610.

<sup>68</sup> Bland, 'Liberty and Discipline', p.202.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p.204.

<sup>70</sup> Paul Harris and John Morrow (eds.), *T.H. Green: Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p.199. Bland was introduced to Green's thought by Sir Francis Anderson, Challis Professor of Logic and Mental Philosophy at Sydney University, who served as one of his thesis examiners. For further discussion of Green and his disciples, see A.J.M. Milne, *The Social Philosophy of English Idealism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962); and Peter P. Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists: Selected Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>71</sup> Bland, 'Citizenship in the Light of Christ's Way of Life', p.15.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p.27.

His concern about personal freedom continued long after he left the academic world, and permeated one of his last scholarly papers—his 1955 essay on 'Parliamentary Government and Liberty'. There he put most stress on the negative dimension of freedom, and scorned the capacity of the state to provide freedom by positive action: 'The Government cannot give us freedom, although it can deprive us of it. The Government is not able to tell us what interpretation we shall place upon our freedom, and it is quite incapable of deciding what values we shall attach to our freedom or how they should be pursued'.<sup>73</sup> Bland wrote that it followed from the nature of 'negative' liberty that 'the institutions of Parliamentary Government are restricted to maintaining a minimum standard of behaviour on the part of all as an indispensable condition of the enjoyment of freedom by anyone.'<sup>74</sup>

This provides no more satisfactory a solution than Mill's pronouncement that 'As soon as any part of a person's conduct affects prejudicially the interests of others, society has jurisdiction over it';<sup>75</sup> Hayek has pointed out that 'there is hardly any action that may not conceivably affect others,'<sup>76</sup> and equally, it is hard to think of many actions which could not possibly impinge upon the enjoyment of freedom by at least one other individual. Nonetheless, this remark of Bland's does show his awareness of the problem, and provides a frontier, albeit unclearly demarcated, to attempts by the state to control the affairs of the individual.

'Democracy', wrote Joseph Schumpeter, 'is a political method, that is to say, a certain type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political—legislative and administrative—decisions and hence incapable of being an end in itself, irrespective of what decisions it will produce under given historical circumstances'.<sup>77</sup> Bland to some extent seemed to share this perspective, and it is therefore reasonable to treat his attachment to the democratic system as a subordinate value in a hierarchy of values, albeit an important one. However, to set his liberal values into an appropriate hierarchical position is a somewhat more difficult task. On the one hand, while his 'positive' notion of freedom could be seen as simply a dimension of his Christian values, his 'negative' notion could not; a 'negative' notion of freedom of the type which Bland defended entails the defending of the right of the individual to act however he chooses as long as he does not fall below the minimum standard of behaviour indispensable for the enjoyment of freedom by anyone. To fail to love one's neighbour, for example, might be an exercise of freedom which Bland as a liberal could not invite the state to punish, which might not impinge upon the enjoyment of freedom by another, but which still would violate the injunction in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians: 'For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'<sup>78</sup>

<sup>73</sup> F.A. Bland, 'Parliamentary Government and Liberty', in John Wilkes (ed.), *Liberty in Australia* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1955) pp.149–70 at pp.149–50.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p.150.

<sup>75</sup> John Stuart Mill, 'On Liberty', in his *Utilitarianism, Liberty and Representative Government* (London: J.M. Dent, 1910) pp.61–170 at p.132.

<sup>76</sup> F.A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960) p.145.

<sup>77</sup> Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976) p.242.

<sup>78</sup> Galatians, Chap. 5, vs.13–14.

To this problem Bland might have reiterated that the Government is not able to tell us what interpretation we shall place upon our freedom. However, in support of this proposition he adduced no argument or evidence. As long as the human laws which may be enacted to sustain 'negative' liberty do not demand a violation of scriptural injunctions, the problem of indeterminacy in the rules guiding the moral action of the individual does not arise. However, if it does arise, the problem is more acute than if the human law is simply one enacted in pursuit of a democratic procedure, for the human law in this case is one which is to further an end not obviously subordinate to that of following Christ's Way of Life. Bland does not provide any argument or evidence that this situation could not arise; nor does he explain which rule would take precedence if it did. One need only contrast his inconsistent views on the implications of steps to reduce inequality to recognise the seriousness of this problem. One is left with the feeling that Bland was overly keen to have the best of all worlds.

## VI

According to Parker, Bland 'fitly described his method when he said after one rhetorical flight: "I cannot pretend to be able to answer all the questions I have asked. That, after all, was not my intention. My main purpose ... was to ask questions, to raise problems, and to offer some comments which might provoke a discussion".'<sup>79</sup> This modest statement of aims is worth bearing in mind, for it reinforces the need to avoid an ultimate assessment of Bland's social philosophy based on inappropriate criteria. However, it also suggests that Bland might not have been greatly perturbed by the conclusion to which the analysis in this paper points—that he did not have a cogent or integrated political philosophy, but rather several sets of values which coexisted somewhat uneasily.

Bland's Christian vision led him both to an appreciation of the tension within individualist thought and to a recognition of the problem of identifying appropriate limits to state action, as well as to a Scripturally-based notion of the ideal polity and a set of rules of behaviour which could foster its attainment. His commitment to unconstrained democracy waned in the face of his recognition of the potential for tyranny of the majority, and was replaced by a commitment to a form of democracy more encircled by limitations. However, these limitations were still not such as to guarantee that Scriptural and temporal injunctions could not conflict, and only implicitly did he see Scriptural injunctions as predominant. This implicit view is still clearly enough expressed to allow us to view democratic government in his sense as a subordinate rather than ultimate value. However, for the possible conflict between Christian and 'negative' liberal values and injunctions Bland offered no solution, and this stands out as the major weakness of his social philosophy.

Particularly given the modesty of Bland's own aims, this should not be a basis for discarding his values. In many ways they are attractive, and in many circumstances the incoherence which we have identified might not leave the individual committed to those values in any doubt about how to behave, about what course of action to follow. To the moral philosopher, an ethic should perhaps be judged in formal terms by the ease with which it copes with hard cases. However, Bland is in distinguished company in failing to produce a code of objective validity governing all situations. Mary Warnock has censured certain moral philosophers who 'cheated by telling us to do only the things we would have

<sup>79</sup> Parker, *op cit.*, p.166.

done anyway, like returning books we have borrowed. They did not tell us how to live, or how to treat other people in serious matters.'<sup>80</sup> Bland, to his great credit, did try to tell us these things, and even if his arguments were not without their flaws, they did set out a range of values as means to the realisation of which his more detailed political and administrative recommendations may be judged.

80 Mary Warnock, *Ethics Since 1900* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) p.141.

Paternoster Press, *Renewals 1* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989).  
5 Stephen R.L. Clark, *Civil Peace and Sacred Order*, p.11.