

Glyn Davis, *On Life's Lottery* (Melbourne: Hachette, 2021). 80 pp. RRP \$14.46 paperback.

Glyn Davis writes as CEO of the Paul Ramsey Foundation, formerly Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, and with a background in political science. This is also a personal book as he relates his own experience as a Meals on Wheels volunteer while a student in Canberra, seemingly influenced by the example of his devout parents volunteering with the St Vincent de Paul Society.

The book opens with the Ursula Le Guin story the city of Omelas whose wealth depended on the deprivation of a lonely child in a basement (surely inspired by the Grand Inquisitor's question in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*). Are we Australians like the residents of Omelas?

Davis' title however comes from a quotation from Rev Thomas Malthus about those who seem to have drawn a blank in life's lottery (p15). Malthus of course (that is the real Malthus, not the caricature created by the lake poets and later Marx for their own purposes) struggled with similar questions to Davis about the causes and cures for poverty in 18th-century Britain, responding to the unhelpful fantasies of William Godwin and Condorcet. Malthus also struggled through different editions of his *Essay on the Principle of Population* with the theological question of how poverty could be produced by the economic mechanisms of a world created by a loving God, eventually coming to emphasise God-given human moral capacities as a solution, albeit operating through the narrow channel of postponing marriage.

Davis, though reticent about God, does touch briefly on the question of our moral obligation towards those in poverty, offering Peter Singer's utilitarian account of moral obligation for our consideration (p15). At a few places in the book he raises the question of moral motivation (his laments about the political dominance of low taxing parties p21, and his closing comment about us seeming to lack the will to deal with poverty even as we have made progress on the means p71) which is a subtly different question to that of moral obligation, a question which utilitarian moral philosophy like much moral philosophy really doesn't help us much with. Where will get the renewed moral motivation to with intergenerational poverty to me is the crucial unexplored question in Davis' book.

Much of this short book is taken up with a discussion of a collective impact model of dealing with intergenerational poverty (p51) and inspiring examples from Doveton and Bourke of how this works. Its essence is collaboration, and requires community leadership, integrated service delivery, and personalisation, all things that governments struggle with. Data and robust methods for measuring impact are needed. The Davis quotes a Ramsey Foundation colleague on how this sort of approach provides the off ramps to poverty (p32) that are needed, alongside the alleviation of immediate suffering that charities tend to focus on. He puts in a good word for social enterprise and some of the new financing structures that are

emerging to support it, though emphasising that unfair rules of the game need to be addressed, which has typically been outside the aims of social enterprises, and perhaps must remain so (p64).

For me as an economist involved in a prospective Pentecostal university there are two challenges.

Firstly, what is the role of our churches in all of this? More Australians now attend Pentecostal churches than any other group apart from the Catholic Church, and Pentecostal congregations unlike those of traditional denominations tend not to delegate their social responsibilities to large denominational social welfare organisations. So it would seem to me that Pentecostal churches have an almost unique opportunity to be the centre of the collective impact model that Davis describes. All this depends on the full gospel being preached and exemplified in our Pentecostal churches, of which there are encouraging signs (such as the work of Pastor Paul Bartlett who leads community engagement in the Australian Christian churches, or Pastor Donna Crouch who has as done the same at Hillsong Church for many years). I'd like to think that we at Alphacrucis are playing our part in this educating the next generation of Pentecostal leaders.

Secondly, where are the economists? When economics arose as a discipline in the 18th and early 19th centuries economic progress in the alleviation of poverty were central concerns, and I think this was perhaps even more so for much of the 20th century. However, economics is now seen by many (but thankfully not all) students to be a route to riches and consulting or finance, rather than a set of tools for understanding and alleviating the poverty that blocks human flourishing. And with the decline of the history of economics within the profession students are not even aware of the changing nature of their discipline. It was worrying to see further confirmation of this trend in recent research by the Reserve Bank of Australia on economics enrolments, showing continuing decline in school students enrolling in the subject, the contraction of the subject to elite schools and Go8 universities, as well as changing reasons for students taking the subject. All this is sad because economics has the tools to contribute much more to discussions about poverty that are more and more being left to others.

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