Professor Dennis Pearce AO is emeritus professor at the Australian National University. This book of essays came out of papers given at a conference held in his honour in October 2014.

Pearce is a preeminent Australian authority on statutory interpretation, as the co-author of Statutory Interpretation in Australia with Robert Geddes, the 8th edition of which was published in 2014, and which has been cited in over 2000 Australian judgments. Pearce was made professor at the Australian National University from 1981, was dean of the ANU Law School from 1982 to 1984 and again from 1991 to 1993, and was acting deputy vice-chancellor in 1994. Upon retirement in 1996 he was appointed emeritus professor. His other appointments, which are too numerous to list fully, include the Commonwealth and Defence Force ombudsman from 1988 to 1990, chairman of the Australian Press Council from 1997 to 2000, and foundation adviser to the Senate Scrutiny of Bills Committee from 1981 to 1983.

The Honour Justice Gageler, in 'The Master of Words: Who Chooses Statutory Meaning', discusses when an administrative decision maker can give a meaning to statutory words in circumstances where the words permit of a range of potential meanings: that is, which is to have the authority to give them meaning – the decision maker or the court? Deftly his Honour weaves in reference to Lord Atkin's dissent in Liversidge v Anderson (1942) AC 206 and his invocation of a funny colloquy between Alice and 'the obtuse and erratic anthropomorphic egg', Humpty Dumpty, from Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass.

In the first chapter, 'Public Law and a Public Lawyer in the Age of Statutes', the editors Anthony Connolly and Daniel Stewart note the growth over the last 30 years of the delegation of legislative functions to the executive is a continuing theme in this book.

In an insightful essay on the 'Constitutional Dimensions of Statutory Interpretation', Cheryl Saunders explores the ways in which the Commonwealth Constitution affects the principles and practices of statutory interpretation in Australia. Saunders provides a framework divided between three pillars: mandate, influence, and catalyst.

In a detailed chapter titled 'Executive Versus Judiciary Revisited' Margaret Allars looks back on an essay of Dennis Pearce's from 1991 titled 'Executive Versus Judiciary', in which Pearce alluded to the concerns of the executive regarding the burdensome impact of judicial review proceedings. Allars bases the first part of her article on Attorney-General (NSW) v Quinn (1990) 170 CLR 1 (which came down not long after Pearce's original article), finding both synergies and obscurities between it and Marbury v Madison (1803) 5 US 137, a US case involving similar facts but delivered almost 200 years earlier.

In 'Private Standards as Delegated Legislation', Daniel Stewart, one of the editors of the book and a senior lecturer at the ANU Law School and a former John M Olin Fellow in Law and Economics at the University of Virginia, discusses how private standards such as Australian Standards – over a thousand of which are now referenced in Australian legislation – become legally binding obligations.

And in a timely piece titled 'Enquiring Minds or Inquiring Minders? Towards Clearer Standards for the Appointment of Royal Commissioners and Inquiry Heads', AJ Brown discusses the place of royal commissions and ad hoc public inquiries in Australia's modern system of governance and public integrity.

As a prologue Brown quotes part of a debate on the Judiciary (Diplomatic Representation) Bill 1942 (Cth) in which...
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ire was directed toward the appointment of Sir Owen Dixon as Australian Government minister to the US; moving forward half a century Brown suggests that the appointment of former High Court Justice Dyson Heydon AC to chair the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption in 2014 raises similar questions as to whether there should be limits on how former judges may accept government appointments to head major inquiries.

In a slight change of tack, the last three chapters look at the history and status of administrative review and governmental oversight bodies. Justice Susan Kenny in ‘The Administrative Review Council and Transformative Reform’ charts the history of the Administrative Review Council. Linda Pearson in ‘The Vision Splendid: Australian Tribunals in the 21st Century’ looks at the amalgamation of specialist tribunals into the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, and in doing so evokes Pearce’s query in 1991 as to whether the ‘vision splendid’ of the consolidation of Commonwealth tribunals into the Administrative Review Tribunal had faded. And in the last chapter, John McMillan, a former Commonwealth and Australian information commissioner, reflects on the effectiveness of organisations such as the ombudsmen in effecting organisational cultural change.

This is a timely collection of essays, with a vibrant range of topics of immediate relevance. It is worthy of honouring the life work of Dennis Pearce.

Review by Charles Gregory