

# **The Centre**

and other essays

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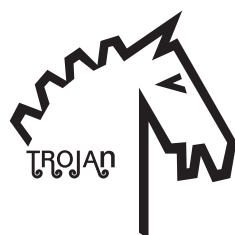
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# The Centre

and other essays

Chester Eagle



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## The centre

To begin with, I am talking about the centre of my country, Australia. The Macdonnell ranges, Uluru, Kata Tjuta, King's Canyon, Hermannsburg and all the tracts of land between them and around them, oh a mighty space! This is where we begin. Where we will end I cannot say, but I have some hope that these thoughts will return, eventually, to the centre.

The centre of what? This is both simple and awkward to answer. Let's be simple, to start with. I am talking about the central region of my country, which you can locate by opening an atlas. Midway from top to bottom, from east to west, there is a vast region, dry much of the time, containing marvellous features which are slowly establishing themselves in the minds of those who live in this land.

Which has a centre. Do you notice how the meaning of that word is changing as we use it? Landforms extend into the realm of metaphor; consider such expressions as 'She's at the *top* of her profession', or, 'They reached a *peak* in their performance today'. So it is with the centre; it has meanings attached which were not always with it. Older Australians will remember terms such as 'the dead heart', 'the never-never', the fairly benign 'outback' and other more derogatory terms for areas far from our coastal settlements. We do not speak, today, of the centre being dead. We mustn't, because its life is a drawcard for tourists, many of them from 'overseas', another place not to be spoken ill of, for tourists have money which we hope will leave their pockets here.

So the centre is not only a place, an area of considerable size, it is also the feeling or mixed feelings we have for the place, and in that sense even those who live on the coastal fringes carry the centre in our minds because we have an awareness of it, and a lurking suspicion that it has an importance which, just possibly and on limited occasions, may exceed the importance of the places where we live. Levels of importance are always rising and falling and the centre is currently enjoying a rise for reasons which are not easy to see.

The centre has always been different. Early settlers, noting the flow of rivers, deduced that there should be an inland sea. They went looking, but couldn't find it. Captain Sturt's party took a large whaleboat, finally abandoned west of the Darling, in country beyond what's now called Broken Hill. The keel of this boat hung for many years on the verandah of a cattle station and for all I know may be there still.

The search for an inland sea was long regarded as a foolish one, but those who decided to drill for artesian water, and did it successfully, could have congratulated themselves on finding what Sturt did not. The sea was underground. The aborigines knew this. They knew that at certain very important points the water came to the surface again, and they could drink. Life or death! The water must not fail. They were nomadic people, but their movements were tied to the creatures they hunted, the plants that fed them, and the availability of water. Their supply was underground, and to this day we can read the land as they must have done, watching the rain run off rocky hills, draining into the earth, but moving still, like a serpent tunnelling beneath the surface, its paths marked by redgums, twisting and winding in wavering loops

visible from the air, trees following water, a wriggling map of life's movements out of sight, but known, because the minds of the black people were open to the patterns of what was fundamental to life: water, offering itself abundantly in some places, rarely in others. Where there was water, they could live. Water. In the centre it stays out of sight, most of the time, and a pool among rocks is as big a luxury as the centre affords. It gives little away for nothing, or so we outsiders think, indulged by our urban supply systems, having stripped ourselves of the necessity to struggle.

In a consumer society everything is brought within temptation's reach. Once money is handed over, the purchase, the consumption, is performed with little further effort. This is not the way of the centre, nor of most of inland Australia, where something closer to aboriginal practice prevails. Fish, flesh, water itself, have to be found, then followed. The pattern of human life has to mesh with other patterns, people accepting their interdependence. No straight lines or squares in nature, only curves, twists and turns, everything ducking and dipping to get around an interruption or danger. Human thought has to live within natural systems rather than, as in our classificatory science, attempting to control from without, using the advantage of distance (sometimes known as objectivity). Where the bird nests, there lie eggs, and some will have to be left uneaten, because the birds also must continue. What a lesson in humility, in fitting in, in controlling from a consciousness of necessity controlling us. Mankind, in this aboriginal way, mustn't destroy the things it lives on. The limitations of the natural world, its supply, are limitations humanity has to accept. This is simple enough to grasp, but hard for the European to live within. We want dominance but we find, even as we grasp the desired treasures, that things are destroyed by our craving. We lose the capacity to have the things we want at the moment when we get them. Some such lesson was learned quite early in the European settlement of this land, leading to the adoption of an attitude which Don Watson calls a 'weary fatalism'. The present writer finds this attitude in himself, but, please note, it was not part of the aboriginal outlook. Early English writers regularly likened the aboriginal people to children, that is to say, they were impulsive, flared into rages, laughed, fought, made peace, performed endless rituals with no apparent purpose ...

What these observers were looking for, and not finding, was a sense of propriety, of respect for law and authority, of decorum, decency, and a sense of the fitness of various forms of behaviour. What they couldn't see was the underlying discipline of the native people and their submission to natural flows which people from northern lands couldn't even estimate, let alone submit to. The environmental movement has made it a little easier for us to see, today, how the two ways of seeing couldn't see each other. Control, for the aboriginal people, was innate; for the Europeans, institutionalised. The Europeans thought their systems were sensible, and, even better, visible. Explicable. They were justifiable to anybody who would listen. The aborigines, however, wouldn't explain, or couldn't, and - the curse of language barriers - didn't seem to have any useful words, that is, words that carried their major concepts. How tragic, in the light of this thought, is the loss of so many of the languages used across this land! Ideas that had once found form have vanished, never to be heard again, and never to be thought, either, unless new minds, dealing with new experience, find a need. Will it happen? Perhaps, perhaps not ...

What have we lost? We don't even know what we don't know. We are as ignorant and blinkered as our predecessors were when their boats brought them here, and we are even

more arrogant than they were because for the most part we are so obsessed with money-making that our minds aren't as open as the minds of settlers in a new continent had to be.

So is the centre a space filled with ignorance and unknowing? Yes, no, not entirely. Hordes of people visit, curious, feeling a need to learn, accepting that the centre lives in a way that coastal people find hard to fathom. Life is lived by other rules, out there. The degree of effort required to make tourists comfortable in the centre - supermarket shelves laden with fresh produce from the south, the north, everywhere but locally - is eloquent. Making people comfortable in a harsh land is farcical, but some of us at least can see the comedy in which our part is played. Perhaps most of us are aware of it at times. I like to imagine a busload of tourists being told to laugh at themselves as they climb aboard their bus, well-shod, to travel over spaces where the aborigines walked with hardened feet. Will it happen? Who knows ...

So water is the life-giver. It comes rarely, it tantalises, it pours down in buckets. Life forms adapt to this regime of poverty and plenty by being incredibly quick to grow, reproduce, and then to get away underground, or stay above the surface, ready to endure. The mountains that once reared high as the Himalayas have been ground to rolling curves, pushing themselves above the earth, pushed back into it. These remnants of ranges are the symbols of 'once was'. Once was plenty, once were animals long extinguished, once were palm valleys, thriving when there was water. Climate changed, vegetation died out, animals disappeared, but the black people adapted, remembering, I suppose, where the water and the luxuries had been. It was natural to make the places that could sustain them sacred, a holiness, to use our word, that wasn't only a product of the brain. The cathedrals of Europe are cathedrals of the mind, built though they are with stone. To get higher and higher above the earth was to climb towards heaven, hoping to enter. No such idea asserted itself to the aboriginal people. No city lights blocked out their stars. They lived with infinity, by day and night, open to it, exposed, unsheltered apart from caves, fissures in rock. They must often have been filled with meanness and rage, but they were surrounded by something more powerful than concept: air, life, other things that lived as dependently as they did, all in one vast system, or interlocking, intertwining systems, through which their minds had to follow in ways handed down. The vulnerability of this life seems heroic, to the modern mind, yet they had no choice, and one wonders if they had any idea of choice. One has only to consider the word 'lifestyle' to be ready to laugh. Lifestyle; the idea can only exist on top of the idea of choice, and the availability thereof. The black people must often have made decisions, but they would not have been choices, in the modern sense, but rather the acceptance that their survival chances, based on ancient experience, were most likely if they moved in a certain direction. They were always looking, watching for signs, traces, prints of other feet, signals that life of some sort was hidden where it could be caught. They were hunters with the cruelty, cunning and driving force of necessity. How did they explain the arrival of the white man? What forces drove him where he didn't need to be?

What forces drive him/her today, to visit the centre, looking at its famous rockbeds and valleys, staying in the resorts that mock the earliest of the whitefella's buildings? What do people getting out of planes at airports think they're going to see?

The historical question first. There are settlers in Australia from many lands, who came for too many reasons to be summarised here. Most of them arrived expecting the new place to be different, which means they landed with a variety of hopes. The centre is where their hopes, they have somehow learned to suspect, have least chance of being realised. In the land

of expectations the centre is paradoxically the place of no hope. Too different. So what has it got to offer?

It has certain attractions which they have come to photograph. Uluru can't fail, and neither can Kata Tjuta (the Olgas). Anyone can take a picture at any time of day. Distances are great, so the bus trips will have lots and lots of emptiness, which somehow tourists accept, grateful that the emptiness within is matched by a purposeful emptiness in the daily activity in which they're enrolled. They expect information, and tales, and there are plenty of both. Not a bad place to be. They suspect also, I think, that they will be put in the position of a modern, surrogate explorer, that is, they will feel what it's like at or beyond the edge of the civilisation from which they've taken time off. They will not be disappointed. They will see, painlessly enough, a place where the ways of the places they come from don't work, where they can accept the artificiality, perhaps stupidity, of activities deemed satisfying within their economic system. They will sense the surrounding infinity, even through the tinted windows of a bus, and they will have to get out somewhere, and feel their surroundings ignoring them because they have nothing to offer. They will be safe, and comfortable, even as they get a chance to know what it was, and is, like not to have safety and comfort. They will go beyond the edge of where they're used to living, and they will get back again, securely and on time. Buses will get through, planes will take off. They can go home having exposed themselves to something they couldn't live in without a total change, a little wiser, perhaps, having thought about the unthinkable.

This is what the centre can offer. Anything else? Something positive, something reassuring, uplifting, inspiring too, perhaps?

Yes.

The centre is the inescapable that lies behind anyone looking out to sea. Australia is an island, or two islands if you forget the land-link that used to block Bass Strait, many islands if you cruise along its coasts, dawdling as indolently as the reefs that lie in wait to wreck your boat, or delight your eyes if you go for a swim, goggles on, to look at coral. In the seething waters of the south, the fish-filled waters of the north, the oceans outline a mighty land, full of exciting promise because full of relief from the elemental surges of water pulled by ceaseless tides; but that description is something that defines from outside, the oceans exerting themselves in a sort of objectivity, as it were. The land, though, can speak for itself. One has only to drive, ride, or walk to feel its many messages, its tremendous, patient presence, offering nothing, but allowing anyone, anything, to look. This looking is incomplete without the central drama, and the huge silences that surround it. Deserts are like waiting rooms, and the rocks, craters and eroded tors the reminder of events long gone. The centre is a place where chronology has forgotten where it began, but lives in the ruins of evidence. The meanings are so ancient that they are no meanings any more, only reminders of meanings that might once have been made. The centre is without abstraction, but its detail, its currents of air and water, underground or above, are all there is. The centre is a place of awareness without thought, of observation and reaction but without ideas, fable without explanation. The centre is what the human mind reduces to when age strips away everything but determination to go on. It might be called the fons origo of that weary fatalism Don Watson mentions, except that the original people didn't see it that way at all. They saw it as a place of life systems, though I venture to say they never used that word. Systems are meant to move in an ordered way. Systems run on schedule, do they not? Growth, reproduction, streams flooding, then going underground, soaking into secret places, these aren't systems, they're forces that swing wildly and under

nobody's control. To live among these forces it's necessary to be like them, rising and falling on the winds and waves that ripple them. No systematic method of behaviour, no divinity nor decorum, can help sustain a people's life out there - so long as the people accept, that is to say, their own powerless condition, as the first people did. Yet even here there is a paradox. I call them powerless, but they were certainly empowered, because they lived, and that's a great deal more than surviving, the whitefella's word for the way they were. Elsewhere in these essays I've said that that word is a put-down, and should be avoided. Where and what is the positive that should replace it?

They were at one with it. They lived within it, as a part, not aspiring to control the whole of what they saw. They must often have been very hot, and just as often freezing cold on central nights. They must have died when the supply of other life failed. They appear to have aged quickly and not to have lived long. They carried all they knew, and thought, in their heads and not in books; this must have limited them, except that they wouldn't have thought themselves limited, when they had what we call infinity as their only boundary, the earth stretching forever and the skies filling every night above their heads with stars ...

... or clouds, lightning, rain when it finally arrived. They were, I think we might say, a species with not too many trappings, and only a few invented dangers, such as kadaitcha-men focussing evil forces on someone, causing them to die. They tell us very little about those forces, the black people of today, because they either know too little of something they've lost, or thrown away when they borrowed the whitefella's ideas, or perhaps it's because they know, from long and bitter experience that if they tell us anything about the forces they at least partially understand then we'll use their understandings against them, the way we listened to their knowledge, watched their movements, then pinched their water for our cattle. Badfella whitefellas! Nothing but trouble! Whitefellas know everything but don't know a thing that's useful! We knew all that before the whitefellas came!

So the centre is a reminder of many things, most of all that final point: the overwhelming power of European civilisation, now American, now Asian too, impresses itself on everything it sees, but memory and the dimly perceived sensations that come to us in the centre tell us that the invading ideas are mortal too, and would even be humble about themselves if they stopped to look and listen.

## The shape of an economy

In the days when Robert Menzies was prime minister, Australia was remarkably prosperous, or so it seemed when the basis for comparison was provided by memories of the 1930s depression and the war that followed. The days of Menzies were better than almost anyone could remember. The Prime Minister was wont, when anything appeared to ripple the surface, to point to something - anything - on the horizon and predict better times ahead, when, he would say, the approaching prosperity would trickle down to all members of the community. Trickle down. Today, we would say flow on; the difference is instructive. Trickling down implies a vertical society, with fairly clear distinctions of class: a British model, in short. Flowing on implies an endlessly moving economy, a sort of increasing and diminishing stream, with smart people building where the waters are widest, and the poor not consciously excluded but forced to camp where the flow is scarcely more than seepage. This representation accords with the thinking of the empire which has replaced British domination of the world.

I mention these two expressions because they offer orthodoxies about something which can be conceptualised in many ways. It is the work of this essay to consider whether or not an economy does have a shape, a terrain, a system of movement, or whether, or how much, an economy is merely a system of faith, which would mean, if that were so, that its measure would not be its shape, system or flow, but the level of intensity it had reached at any particular point or moment.

This may seem an unusual way to talk about 'an', or even 'the' economy, but it will prove, I think, to have its uses. Let us begin.

Where? Shall we stand outside the economy, looking at it, or place ourselves within? Whichever we do, the same question arises, where?

The question is important because, as we all know, what we see depends on our viewpoint. Looking into a valley from a road high above gives us a broad vista, but to know the animals and flowers we have to get to the bottom, amid the rocks and ferns. So, again, where?

I find the question troubles me, because it commits me, if I answer it, to a path that may take me away from the enlightenment I'd like to encounter. I'll try another. What is an economy? How do I know whether an action or transaction is part of the economy at work?

This is easy. The economy is the sum of all activities involving money, and money - I know you'll want definitions - money is not only the coins, notes, cheques, bills of exchange and whatever else involved in passing value from one to another, money is also the record that it exists; that is to say, money only moves from being a token, a value represented symbolically in the world, when it is set down in a system of accounts. The faith is made manifest by numbers in columns. This is important, and if you won't accept this idea, then stop here. I'll say it again. The coins, notes and cheques are representations only, and they stand for ...

... abstractions really, but abstractions you can count on - sorry about the pun - when you look in the places where they're kept. Money is faith, ultimately, but like the caves where riches were discovered in fairy tales ('Open sesame'), money has to be kept somewhere. Gold

can be kept in Fort Knox, or under your bed if it pleases you, but value, the power which activates the gold, diamonds, jewels, shares, and the notes in your wallet ... value is stored in accounts. It takes the form of numbers that can be believed in. Can you be sure of this, that is, that you can believe in those numbers on your bank statement, those numbers which are printed on the bottom line in the report of a company's activities? Yes, you can believe in them, most of the time. Usually they're not lies, although it happens, doesn't it, that they are. How do we know if they're lies or not? It's easy. We find a reason why those numbers should be transferred from where they are to where we want them to be, another account, presumably. This won't work unless our reasons are deemed to be legitimate, but if they are, and if the numbers are transferred, then the numbers were actual. Real. No bullshit. Not fraudulent. If the transaction went through, all's well. It's okay.

So the truth, the value, lies in the numbers, and the transaction is the test of the numbers' truth. 'Insufficient funds' means the transaction can't go through. The faith isn't strong enough, and must be built up before anything can happen. Back to work you go, earning more from a reliable source to top up the meagre pile in your account.

This may seem too obvious to be worth saying, but it's as well to know what underlies the pages and pages of legal documents produced by companies, and the statistics put out by stock exchanges each and every day. Words and numbers, do you note? Words to protect from legal attack, numbers to quantify the values moving around.

My question was, does this 'economy' have a shape? We're not ready, yet, to deal with the question. We have more preparation to be done. We (and I suppose that's a royal plural) have decided that the economy covers every movement of money, every transfer of value, even attempts to create some money or value, however early these moves may be. It's a broad field! Economies, however, are disfavoured when they're in decline and regarded when and if they grow. Economies are only said to be healthy when they're expanding. A country (or its economy) is said to be in recession (a bad thing) when its growth over two successive quarters is negative. It's then an economy going backwards. This is an interesting claim to virtue for economic activity, because, if you think about it, many activities are undesirable and should therefore be discouraged, or, if you like, encouraged to decline. Negative growth rates (declines) are good when they occur with diseases, murders, or road accidents. Things that should decline are frequently called 'traumas', whereas figures that point in an upwards direction are labelled 'positive'. This is interesting for two reasons. First, because it points us to the unquestioning and frequently dishonest categorisation that takes place in economic thinking, and secondly because it reminds us of the remarkable importance in economic thinking of the art/science/study of statistics. We will return to this point soon, but first to the point about growth, or a rise in sales, performance per man-hour ... anything at all, almost, being intrinsically virtuous. This is a staggering assumption. Economies - and this is an article of faith, there's no room for discussion or disbelief - economies, if healthy, will grow. In this notion the economy takes on a life of its own. It is a creature - perhaps I mean *creation* - of some sort. Obviously, an increase of population will, other things being constant, bring about an increase in demand. Therefore increase in population is a good, and decrease is a danger. That this idea may conflict with arguments based on the environmental effects of human dominance is obvious, but we have no room to discuss this now. Increase in population helps an economy to grow. So too will the economy grow if people's needs are better met, or perhaps better defined, and then better methods of production, transport or whatever are used in the pro-

cesses of meeting needs. And so, again, will production increase if demand increases; that is to say, if people are brought to feel a demand for goods and services on offer, and feel moved to satisfy those demands. Advertising enters here, but will be left for consideration until later in this series. Lastly, an economy can continue to grow if, and when, activities previously thought to be outside the economy are brought inside. The most obvious example is sport. In the world of my childhood, sport was categorised as leisure, indeed a relief from work. It added variety, and took its importance therefrom. Today, sport is part of the economic world. Football clubs produce trading profits or losses. Players of numerous sports 'at the top level' (the justification for their size of payment) are massively rewarded. Golfers fly around the world in private planes. Leading sports personalities have agents to make contracts for them. Sport itself is a form of advertisement for those who play it, and they, in turn, advertise things for other people wishing to cash in on the popularity, that is the watchability, of sport. The fences of the sporting arena and even the clothing of the players become places for advertisement, that is to say, encouragement for viewers to purchase whatever's displayed. This was not always the case. In the 1930s, Melbourne's footballers might - might - be paid a pound a game. Encouragement, or reward for a good game, came in the form of a note or two slipped into the palm or pocket of the player by a wealthy supporter. That was an early form of corruption. Sporting people demand much more now than they did then, because sport has a value in the financial world, basically because it offers opportunity for that world to validate and even expand itself.

So much for sport. Is there anything else? The next example is that of motor racing, another sport, you may say, though I doubt if it fits the category any longer. Racing cars. They are themselves advertisements, not only for the company that produces them - Ferrari, Jaguar, et cetera - but also for the companies that get to paint themselves on these speeding objects of viewer fixation. Drivers' eyes are on the road and their rivals, but spectators see the cars as mobile points of focus for their attention, and this, in a consumer society, with every last human persuadable, makes the cars so valuable that cities will compete to stage these races, and even in places where a concerted effort is being made to stamp out smoking the cars will carry encouragement to buy certain brands of cigarette. The show must go on, even if its staging undercuts values the society otherwise thinks are fundamental. Why is this so? The answer is that a Grand Prix is an economic event too large to be done without. If you or I wanted to paint our front fence with signs for a cigarette company we would be prevented, but when an event which is 'beneficial' to an economy does the same thing, it's unstoppable. This is significant because, as stated earlier, an economy is presumed to be beyond critique so long as it grows. This it must do!

(I want to put in here the nagging question about the end or final edge of a capitalist economy; if every single human activity was counted as part of the economic system, if every dissident thought had been co-opted and made useful in a graph or two, what would there be left to conquer? Would growth finally come to an end? You may say that the question is much the same as asking if the world will ever stop revolving, but a question it is, hanging there, teasing, reminding us of limits.)

Mention of graphs returns us to the matter of statistics, raised earlier. Statistics are at the same time regarded as exact, strict, definable, and so on, and as something worse than lies or damned lies. How can this be? Are statistics wild horses that can only be ridden by a master? Perhaps. I think the distinction that needs to be made is the difference between statistics

signalling, and statistics proving. If there is an intent to use figures to prove something, then there will probably be someone with the intention of deceiving, or at least persuading, and the two are close because the deceiver has normally to lie to him/herself in order to succeed. If the figures, however, are the answer to a neutrally posed question, they may be useful and even truthful. 'Useful'; let me explain. Numbers may look accurate, but what do they mean? Their very use may mislead unless the question which caused the figures to be produced is known, and within an area of critique. If I ask if tobacco consumption is increasing or decreasing, the numbers which provide an answer are obviously useful, or, to put it another way, the answer is as worthwhile as the question. If, however, numbers are displayed without reference to the question, assumption, or norm-to-be-tested which brought them into being, they are close to meaningless. BHP-Billiton shares fell three per cent yesterday. What are you going to do about that? Not much unless you know a number of other numbers as well. What's been their high and their low this year? How do they compare with their rivals? Is the fall a one-off event, or part of a trend? More importantly, is any part of the world without something it needs which BHP-Billiton could provide?

Notice the tendency of that last question. It takes the company outside the share market for examination in a wider context, the context in which any of us may be judged. Most economic statistics, figures, numbers, fall well within the safety zone where growth is the thing that's sought. Statistics, figures, numbers are used to offer small quantities of 'fact' in order to distract us from asking larger social questions. They tempt us to think we too could be profit-making players in the market, instead of inviting us to act as citizens considering the usefulness of any given activity to the society of which we are a part; an owner, a shareholder, in fact!

The study - I won't call it a science - of economics is a simplification for which many are grateful. If economic activity is ipso facto good then many, many problems are solved. I can concentrate on my work, my profit-creation, without bothering too much about the larger world. Greenies and moralists, I can say, give me the shits. They talk about things that others don't worry about. They are the modern equivalent of two types much hated in earlier generations, the nagger and the scold. People who won't be satisfied. Economic considerations offer a limitation on what we need to bother about. The transfer of value - passing money around - is in itself a reason to feel pleased. You're doing what everyone's doing. You're going along with things. Part of the crowd. Not everyone can be wrong!

We have reached the point, then, when we are in danger of being persuaded that the shape of an economy is the shape of the society it is alleged to serve. I say alleged because economic thinking, which once ruled on one plane of a society's thinking, is spreading onto other planes, a new, tougher strain which is strangling the growth of other, earlier forms of thought. We can see in some Americans the unnerving phenomenon of people with two, only, strands of thought - religious fundamentalism and economic ditto. The marriage of these two layers of the mind produces unfortunate offspring. I think it can be said that if anyone tries to clench an argument by saying, 'The bottom line is ...' they are not only trying to gain a victory by simplification but also by asserting that a thought originating on the economic plane of the mind or the society shaping that mind has automatic superiority. This is no more and no less than saying a soldier with a peaked cap is superior to a soldier with a felt hat, and both are superior to a bareheaded civilian. In wartime it may be so, but we are not always at war. In peacetime

things get too complicated for simple minds so simplifications are shouted to overcome the sophistications of those who can think with some complexity. It's the economy, stupid!

Does it have a shape?

I suppose it does, deep down; if we draw an artificial line between necessities and luxuries (your luxury is my necessity, if I've got enough money) we can draw some sort of diagram of the trade in what we classify as necessities. So much wheat, so much rice; so much oil, so much steel ... Then the difficulties rush in. What's made out of steel? Ah, pins. Surely pins are necessities? Everyone needs a pin to hold something together. This sounds satisfying, but when we buy a new shirt it will be displayed - presented to attract - in a certain way, with perhaps a dozen, perhaps twenty pins, and numerous bits of cardboard and plastic holding it for the potential buyer's judgment. Judgment of what? Of whether or not the shirt fits the cliché of what a shirt should look like: 'should', but never does, when it's fitted around a body like mine - or yours, there's no need for you to laugh!

The boundary between necessity and luxury can't be sustained then. Therefore no map or drawing of an economy is possible. Are we all done? No more bids? Do we knock the argument down at this point? All finished? Would anyone who hasn't spoken so far like to raise a hand?

There's a group who, although unwilling to raise hands, or send signals of any sort, have clearly got thoughts in mind. If we look more closely, we see that they're from the more backward peoples of the world - Afghans, Inuits, blacks from here and there, tribal people, desert people, jungle people, frozen-land people, you've got the idea. Outsiders, really. Somehow the question sounds differently in their ears. The looks on their faces suggest that we're trying to trick them by putting things in the way we do. Tut tut. If they won't speak, or can't, we must try to read their minds.

It seems that they think that their lives have always been a struggle, and they've always had to deal with nature's reverses. They've rarely known a surplus beyond a bigger haul of fish than they needed for tonight's dinner. Or can we put that differently? Have they, surrounded by nature's plenty, never felt a need for greed? Have they, when so motivated, been able to satisfy their greed with jewellery, robes, and ritual importances? Is that the way they've handled it? Humans will in some way demonstrate their importance, given the least opportunity to do so, even in the allegedly pacific isles. They're a disgruntled lot, these third-worlders, we see as we look at them, because they realise that in some way too clever for them to fit into their patterns of thinking, they've been got around, given trinkets for the valuables they've lost, made fools of inside their own societies. They've been relegated to lower status and they feel humiliated. They can't see how their fortunes can be restored. And they won't be, not while capital builds shining towers that only terrorists can destroy. At last, a glimmer of an answer to our first question appears.

An economy is a structure of wealth - the creation and distribution thereof - and it's built in such a way, this modelling of the human mind at work, that power to control the wealth is concentrated, and the concentration increases at the very same time as the system which creates it spreads further and further across the surface of our globe. Paradox! The more there is, the fewer people who have it in their hands. An economy is, like everything else in this world, fundamentally an idea and the management of that idea's interpretations is the business of the managerial class. They are paid to run companies and they do this, but their underlying

task is to manage the thought systems inside which we operate. Acquire! Hold! Sell! Borrow! Float! Report! Merge! Take over ...

Call for more capital, issue more shares ...

The third-worlders, the miserable multi-coloured people with dismal faces, have clung to their earlier thought systems and can't find a place for themselves in this aggressive, shiny-new-model system which is overwhelming them. There's no place for them, and that's how it's going to stay, unless they borrow from the central system and saddle themselves with debts they can't repay. They'll never be accorded equality because financial systems have democratic forms only, not democratic hearts. People are never equal; you've only to check their bank balances ... if they have such things, poor bastards.

The shape is coming clearer, then: a shining pyramid, with luxurious top floor apartments - penthouses with swimming pools, thirty or forty floors above the street - with incomes declining as we get nearer to the base, and, beyond the base, the earth itself, on which the whole thing rests, a sullen mass of discontents, or maybe they're people whose preoccupation with their ancient ways means they aren't even troubled by the penthouse people looking down. The earth has its comforts too.

## **No redemption: go forward, or stay as we are?**

Redemption is an idea which recurs endlessly, often in unexpected places. The operas of Richard Wagner are mostly concluded by acts of redemption. Love redeems, and Isolde is redeemed in death. Destruction can also redeem, as we see when Valhalla burns and the Rhine's magic gold is restored. The Christian church has long preached the redemptive power of Christ, linking the means of this redemption to the ineradicable sinfulness of humans, so bad that only the intervention of the Almighty (sacrificing his son) could give humanity the redemption which it obviously - so says the church - needs. Countless others have accepted that humanity is incapable of its necessary improvement, and have fallen back on a redemptive power to solve the insoluble problem.

This essay deals with some of the questions raised by that problem: is humanity ineradicably flawed; if so, is redemption what we should look, or hope, for; where should we turn for the redemption needed (if it is); and is there any alternative to the nagging sense of fallibility burdening the human race, any better way of looking at ourselves which will relieve us of the problem? These are not easy questions and I fear my treatment of them will be sketchy, but let us make the attempt.

Is humanity ineradicably flawed? Caution grips me, here at the start, because I want to say the answer's obvious, we all know the human race can't help itself. Look at the last century - wars, bombs, disasters ... you know the argument as well as I do. Perhaps I can start with the word 'flawed': a flaw means a defect, a fault, implying an otherwise well-made thing, something sound apart from the flaw. This may fit a statue or a piece of furniture, but won't apply to human character, which is not flawed in this way, but can be seen as a bundle of impulses, some productive, some socially desired, while others are risky or even disastrous. Impulses surge through us all the time. Most of them are better suppressed, though if our suppression systems are too effective, people will call us repressed. Inhibited. Stuffy, all tied up in knots. This is not good! If our suppression systems don't work as well as they should, we're thought to be sloppy, ill-mannered, all over the place, undisciplined, et cetera. This is not good either. Humans need focus, and sometimes it needs a disaster to bring out their best. Something terrible happens and people dig into themselves for their finest qualities. Bombs rain down and people are brave, supportive, thoughtful. The next day they may be miserable, mendacious and petty, but it's true that challenges produce finest hours, as Churchill had it. In the drama of a terrible war he could call on people to rise above themselves and make them feel that they could. Is humanity ineradicably flawed? We all know it is, but there's a paradox, as always; humanity acts on realisations, on understandings, and the blackest hours don't necessarily produce the blackest behaviours, though this, too, can happen. When something special's needed, something special may be produced. The idea of a dialectic is much more useful than the application of a stern morality, an endless rule of moral law and judgment, before which we'll fail. So what am I saying? We must have a rule of law, to keep things together, as

stable as can be, and we need also what I will call a rule for special occasions, when something beyond normality is required. When shall we switch from one set of rules to the other? That's too hard for me, dear reader, you will have to follow your own inclinations!

So humanity is flawed, in that we have disgraceful inclinations, and it's capable of surprising itself, usually in times of greatest need. People are brave when their ship's sinking, or when they hear screams from a burning house. The most ordinary people, on being awarded a medal for rescuing someone, say casually - and they believe it, which is overwhelming - 'Anyone would have done it.' What they have done came as such a natural urge that they cannot believe that they were set apart, supremely tested, and did something which brings honour to the race. Most of us could never have rushed into the flames to rescue the screaming one, yet we feel our humanity is reassured by their action. 'Anyone could have done it.' It's not true, or is it? Any one of us might have been put to the test - that is, been the first to hear the screams - and any one of us might have been the one with the courage to rush in. Any *one*; which, we'll never know until we're tested. What am I saying? We're all capable of rising above our normal level, and, alas, of falling far below it. We'll only know which sort we are when we're put to the test, something most of us prefer to avoid. And why not? I don't want to be a hero and I'm most anxious not to live with the knowledge that I was a coward when nobility was called for. I'd rather not know about those parts of myself that are above and below the ordinary, which is the level of safety, normality, where it's easiest to live.

So it's too simple to say that humanity's ineradicably flawed, though I wanted to say it was. The truer proposition is that we perform in relation to the test we understand is facing us, and we perform very well if we expect ourselves not to fail, and this performance is easier if there's no preparation or opportunity to find reasons to let down ourselves and the someone who needs us. Parents, especially mothers, can be heroic for their children, and what do they say? 'Anyone would have done it.' Anyone. They expected no less of themselves. There's another paradox here. If there's a community expectation that people will perform to a certain level, then some at least will fail. Setting a standard implies a judgement that some won't pass. The crisis, the test, is more likely to lead to success, achievement and honour, if it's unprepared for. To find out how good they are, people need, perhaps, not to think much of themselves, so that their success, when the test arrives, is a boost to everyone who knows about it. Some things can't, and shouldn't, be built into a system of law or thought.

Is redemption what we should look for? I am even more cautious with this question because to someone of my temperament the answer is no, no, no ad infinitum. No, no, no. I trust you understand me, or shall I say it again?

Not everyone, however, is made in the same way. As stated earlier, there seems to be a need for redemption, for forgiveness, deep in the psyches of vast numbers of people. For every brave soul who rushes into a burning building there are a dozen standing around, helpless, watching. We fail, whether against our own expectations or by the social standards around us, and not only do we fail but we know very well that we'll fail again, and again. We can't meet our own standards, or anybody's standards, let alone rise to the supreme, self-sacrificing virtues set down in Christ's sermon on the mount, or whatever else forms the bar we feel we should be able to jump. To have a morality included in our personality is to admit that we might not reach its standards. Failure may be our lot. If we know this, we are carrying a knowledge which may be too much for us. We turn to God, Allah, we kneel, we bow, we look for an overarching consciousness which will allow us to break with the past that saddles us,

and begin again. Humanity is forever needing new starts. It's a need just as great as the need to learn from the past, that is, to embody historical knowledge (the absence of forgetfulness) in our institutions and our everyday actions. Do you notice the contradiction here? We must remember, we must forget. We must begin all over again, as new people, and we mustn't allow ourselves any such bullshit. This is where the divinity comes in. He, He (you can have She if you want it) takes away the impossible burden, or should I say the burden of impossibility. Is redemption what we should look for? Two answers come to mind. You don't need it and it's rather immature to go looking for it, but, if you must have it, if it's all too hard without it, why, yes, you can have a redemptory scheme of thought for explaining things. Millions of worse and millions of better people have had such systems of thought, and where are they now?

Dead, dead, all of them dead, except the millions on earth today. You want redemption? Search, then, and it is to be hoped you will find it, but ...

... do not repeat the ancient error, horror, of condemning those who won't fall on their knees when you go down for prayer. Those who don't ask for forgiveness are forgiving those of you who need it. You are being allowed to continue in the old way because you haven't yet grown out of it. Sorry to be so blunt but let's understand how things are. As George Orwell didn't say, but might have, kneeling down is allowable, but standing up is better. If you must kneel before you can forgive yourselves, make sure you're up again fairly soon, thank you very much.

Next question: where should we turn for the redemption needed (if it is)? My answers are simple. Redemption isn't needed, and we're better off without the idea, but those who must have it can take it where they find it. If the Tiddlywink Primitives Club gives you relief via their practices, then do what they tell you. Just be careful that you aren't signing up for a mass suicide, or letting all your assets be moved under someone else's allegedly benign control. Redemption's a risky business unless you've absolutely nothing to lose.

And so to the last of the questions raised earlier: is there any alternative to the nagging sense of fallibility burdening the human race, any better way of looking at ourselves which will relieve us of the problem? Again my answer's simple. It might be painful to have a sense of fallibility, but the alternative's worse. Imagine how insufferable, or how much more insufferable, the human race would be without this awareness of its own shortcomings. We have to be able to live with each other and this is made easier if the balloons of vanity we inflate with feelings of importance are allowed to burst occasionally. Bang! We get a shock, and we're left with tatters in our fingers; this is surely good for us, from time to time? Come, you know it is. We like it when it happens to someone else; it's only when it happens to us that it's nasty.

Is our discussion of redemption ended, then? Can we leave Isolde, singing as she dies, or Christ on his cross, dying as his life gets ready to sing? I think we can. Most people - the millions - will always want redemption. Those who don't, however, have, it seems to me, a new responsibility. They, we, have to live with the accumulations of crime and pain that have been left on an earth where the smell of things done long ago still lingers, fouling the air for those who take notice of history's tales. Humanity may be flawed but its other qualities are no less ineradicable. It is possible to leave the earth a little better than we found it.

How can this be done?

Humanity could set itself some goals. I see cynical thoughts behind your eyes. Motherhood statements, you're thinking. Didn't Prime Minister Hawke promise that no Australian child

would live in poverty by ... when was it? 1990? (Last century!) The promise disappeared before he did. Promises ...

Humanity could set itself some goals. I'd start by controlling the arms trade. The drug trade would be next. You will say that what I'm proposing is impossible. There will always be weapons, as long as there's money to pay for them. As for drugs, if people want to wipe themselves out, who are we to stop them? Those are the things we say to prevent ourselves getting involved. If a problem's too big, though, it's always possible to break it up into stages. How many weapons are produced in a year, in every part of the world? Which parts? Who produces them? Who knows? Where do they go? How are they moved? Who pays how much for them? Can we map the money trails? Each of these questions could be answered by at least a decent estimate. With the best available answers in front of us, we could decide where to make the next move. It'd never happen, you say. You may be right, but moral fervour doesn't have to look up the barrel instead of down it, sights fixed between the critic's eyes. Those who want peace have to take control from the hands of those who're used to carrying guns. Mao Tse Tung said power grew out of the barrel of a gun; he should have said 'fear'. Power, fear and everything else exist in the mind of mankind, and that's where the changes have to take place, and where the courage to make the changes will have to come from. Nowhere else. Nothing's more powerful than an idea ...

... the time for which has come. This will not be an easy flower to nurture, this blossoming of Mao's gun. The ruling civilisation, the American empire, is as violent as it's rich, as corruptible as its rhetoric's high. Drug barons abound, in the US and elsewhere, as do arms dealers, but if the people of the world tell governments to start keeping registers of production and sales, a start will be made. Corruption will follow, records will certainly be falsified, or two lots of accounts will be kept, one for public production, and another, private one, for truth! None of this will be new, but a start will have been made. The movement will have to start in places where it's safe to start it, like the wealthy, well-managed centres of the world ... the very places where you'd expect the arms dealers and the drug traders to be settled, in comfort one would imagine, when they're not roaming the world, desperate for sales, or looking for underlings to do what's dirty or illegal. The movement will have to start, but how, exactly, will it begin?

In an unexpected place, obviously. Top level action would be squashed by timidity, or fear. People outside law don't want law getting in the way. Shame has to be spread around by people who set a higher standard for themselves. That is to say, life has to be made worth living for those who don't see it that way at present. Sounds easy? Sounds hard. Life has to be made worth living? How do you do that? By repression, or by gift? That is, do you impose regulation on people that they're fearful of avoiding, with punishments for failure that they're fearful of incurring? Or do you give and keep giving to those who fall down, drugging themselves to avoid knowing the full picture of their mind? You can do that if you like. If that's how you're made. The world will always need people to feed the poor, rescue the miserable, pick up people's disasters, that sort of thing. It's to anyone's credit to be one of humanity's salvators. It's one of humanity's finest traditions. But how do we lead ourselves upwards, out of the slime of weapons and mind-obscuring chemicals?

By doing without them ourselves, and then by putting the pressure of normality on those who can't, or won't. Public opinion must be hardened against them. The spaces in their minds which offer opportunity must be closed. This is never easy to do, perhaps impossible. A mental space, once opened, can rarely be closed. I've written elsewhere about the lingering

hauteur of the French people, never wiped out by the revolution, and for that matter there's an endless attempt to recreate a royal class, even in democratic Australia; the new royalty are media creations, young, glamorous, beautiful and probably blonde (women) or bristly (men). Sex wipes out all rules of refined behaviour.

Why do people take drugs? Why do people need to fight? First answer: a full consciousness of what the world's like, and what the individual's worth, is too painful. It can't be borne. Drugs are one way out, and it's called obliteration. Obliteration is also the word for what people do with the arms they buy, except that the arms, the weapons, are used against someone else. It's the someone else who's obliterated, and it's me, us, that do the wiping out. They get shot, we enjoy it, and later we get drunk and reminisce. How's that, easy enough?

That mentality is what's to be overtaken, and replaced. Sounds easy? No, but it's necessary if humanity's to keep moving up the long slippery slope we've been climbing for millenia. At which point you may well ask where this essay's going. Pious platitudes surround us like underwear at a post-Christmas clearance. Sale!

Crap! Faint hopes! The hopelessness of the long-term idealist! The blinkered eyes of the intending moralist, et cetera.

But wait, do you really want things to stay as they are? Are you contented, and will you willingly lie down to die, at peace with the world you know's around you? Let's hear the truth, you can whisper if it makes you feel embarrassed ...

I don't think you do. You wouldn't have read this far if you'd been the other sort. You'd have blown your brains out, one way or another, or somebody else's instead, but you didn't, you haven't, you're still with me. Please cling on a little longer.

Redemptive systems of thought are humanity's hangover cure. They're a different sort of drink from the one that made us crazy last night. In the light of a bitter morning we want to find a way out of the problem we can't solve. This is natural enough, but there's something better than faith, and it's called resolution. Here's what Frederic Manning said in 1929 about the soldiers he'd fought with, years before:

These apparently rude and brutal natures comforted, encouraged and reconciled each other to fate, with a tenderness and tact which was more moving than anything in life. They had nothing, not even their bodies, which had become mere implements of warfare. They turned from the wreckage and misery of life to an empty heaven, and from an empty heaven to the silence of their own hearts. They had been brought to the last extremity of hope, and yet they put their hands on each other's shoulders and said with a passionate conviction that it would be all right, though they had faith in nothing, but in themselves and each other. <sup>(1)</sup>

Men could face death nobly; how strange that it's harder to deal with life, to live well than to die well. Dying, of course, can be faced with a noble gesture; living takes more, much more. That's why it's so hard to do, yet millions have done it well, over the centuries, and so must we.

(1) from *Her Privates We* by Frederic Manning (Peter Davies, London, 1964)

## Getting what you want, or wanting what you get?

It is conventional to describe our society as affluent, which my dictionary tells me means 'flowing freely or abundantly (1816); plenteous, wealthy'. I want to say that the wealth we have created is to some extent very considerable; to some extent illusory, or a matter of definition which won't bear close examination; and to some extent the cause of a new form of slavery. Whole industries exist, in our society, to ensure that the two - what we want and what we get - never drift far apart. Citizens - a noble word, I have always thought, although the rights it implies, and their political expression, had to be snatched from a class of people who called themselves, in many parts of Europe, the nobility, and enjoyed their privileges by repressing lesser folk - *citizens* are steadily, daily and continuously being turned into *consumers*, a word restricting people to the economic plane of society, which means that they have to be inveigled, coerced, or encouraged to consume, an odd idea to be as central in modern thinking as it is. 'Consume' is a euphemism, and a crude one, for 'spend'. Empty the pockets. Pass money over the counter. Buy. Commit yourself to repayments for months or years ahead. Why do people accept debt which will govern their capacities and freedoms for perhaps the rest of their lives?

One answer, beyond the scope of this essay, is that freedom is as frightening as it is liberating, and people wish to rid themselves of the anxieties it brings. The second answer, the one I wish to deal with here, is that a process of manipulation, of appropriate definition and redefinition, is endlessly at work, causing people to think that what they get is what they want. The two, as stated before, must be kept together.

How is this done? The answer appears simple. Advertising surrounds us. You have only to look around, next time your car is stopped at a red light, to remind yourself of this. There will be signs appealing to you, trying to coerce, intent on seducing. Agencies will undress desirable bodies, or they will try to amuse you, mystify you, anything to plant an idea in your mind. This is what you want. You must get one of these. Fly off to this island for a holiday to dream of. A fantasy world imposes itself on reality, and it serves others' purposes to keep us this way. You know what I mean? If you don't, have a look around next time you're waiting for the lights, then reflect on what you've seen as you drive on. It's not a pretty arrangement, once you see it for what it is. A form of slavery, actually, but we'll put that aside for the moment.

How is it done, this merging of what we want with what we get? Let's go back a little. For most of human history, wants, needs, have been thought to be innate. So they are, most of the time. But clever people, knowing this, can anticipate, can whisper in the ear the very thought that's starting to emerge within. This is called suggestion, and it can fall on fertile ground, as we know. There are few things more powerful than to suggest an idea someone thought was theirs alone. In this sense the forerunners of advertising have always been with us, but the modern system has gone further. In the ancient form of suggestion, a new thought is put before the intended possessor of that thought. Nothing else, perhaps, has to change. The victim is presented with the thing s/he wants to be presented with. Simple. Now let us go

back to those traffic lights, and let us stare from the windows of our car. It may be, also, that we have the radio going in this not-private, not-cut-off vehicle that's taking us around. We look out, and we see, not one but many messages, enticements, suggestions, signs. There are bodies, there is writing. The lights change, we drive, concentrating, then we're stopped again. More enticements. From one end of the country to the other, they're the same. It is, after all, one large economy we're in. The same bodies, the same enticements, the same walls. Walls, you say? Walls?

Yes, walls; they're moving ones, of course, to enclose our minds, making us think that the suggestions are our thoughts, when they're not. The aim of modern advertising is that at any moment when we lift our eyes from what we're doing, we meet something we think is from within, placed there by a dissembler to help us deceive ourselves. When I was a child there was a song about the toys in a toy shop coming to life when the humans went away. This has now, in a sense, come about. The modern city is also the modern mind. Messages pop up everywhere, changing to stay up to date. They tell us that in present traffic conditions it will take us eight minutes to get to Springvale. This is the information age, you say: so what? But wait: lane closed, says a sign, and we merge, three becoming two. Messages feed in as we move along. Cricket scores, football, tennis, swimming. News. So many captured in Afghanistan, so many bombers pounding the al-Qaeda caves. Among these keep-up-to-date messages are others, changing only slightly less rapidly, telling us what to wear, what to own, where to go, and, most importantly, who to emulate. Once a society's role models are established the controls are in place. Choice? Of course we get a choice. Our society's about choosing. That was what generations of soldiers died for, wasn't it!

Well, not exactly, but perhaps on some level it was, though one imagines the soldiers turning in their graves at jingles urging them to the hardware to buy do-it-yourself paints or assemble-it-yourself swings for the kids. It's a system that offers luxuries for those who've been busy enough to get them, and comforts for those who've pushed everything else aside.

Like what? What else is there, apart from things money can buy?

The difficulty this question involves is a measure of how far we've been enslaved. I have on my desk a report from a television station: '... with marketers increasingly wanting to surround customers, one advertising medium is no longer enough.' The station is buying up other approaches to the consumer mind, so they can offer a multiple approach. (New language for new phenomena!) What else is there ...

Defensively I begin my answer. Lots of things! Fresh air on my cheeks as I walk along the beach, early in the morning. Afternoon in the mountains, looking into a deep valley. The thrill of flying into a city I've visited before, pointing out its landmarks to my children. As my list grows I see the advertisers, the marketers, smiling; they've heard it before. I'm easily satisfied. Great Beaches of the Eastern Seaboard, six nights, fares and accommodation, \$2295. High Country Experience, including three nights at the Fabulous Mount Buffalo Chalet, \$1645. Which city were you thinking of, sir? Rome? One moment. The screen brings up numbers. We have a special fare, available until March 22. \$1315, or we can do you a better price if you take a bus tour and seven nights accommodation ...

What you want, and what you get. The difference that matters is that even when they give you what you thought you wanted, it doesn't feel the same. If you get it by paying then you didn't discover it for yourself. You paid someone to put the bushes where you wanted to see them, while the mounted guards on their horses, you suspect, ride every day where the

tourists line up to see them. You have been discreetly placed where the preordained event is to happen. Who's watching whom when the tourists, embussed for many kilometres, line up to see the penguins 'parade'? Tour organisers, banking their proceeds, know that tourists are another form of penguin, and, God willing, they'll remain plentiful. Tourism is a ritualised observance, based in history and the popular mind's recollection of what it's been persuaded is important. And why is it important? Because it's *said* to be important, and this saying is the creative, and also the self-serving, part of the cycle which shapes the economy and also the minds of all involved. It's been said several times in these essays that the mind is where everything happens, and it's the mind which, when captured, dictates spending. Wanting what you get, or getting what you want? Is the question making any sense, now?

Let's take it on a step. How did we get where we are? Who hijacked whom? How did the servants of humanity become the masters? How is it that the person who sells is more important than the one who makes, and can impose this dominance on those who buy? Pass cash across the counter? Open the purse, write the cheque, push the card through the slot? Consumers are only active as consumers. If they were citizens they'd have a say in what's produced, but they aren't invited to do that, they're allowed only to say yes or no. Time payment is a delayed way of saying yes, but yes it is. Turning your back, meaning no, is a decision for oneself alone, because the next person who passes may buy. Consume. Governments stimulate demand in times of economic downturn; doesn't this strike you as strange? Doesn't it involve them in making the main plane of their activity the economic one? Are they not forgetting that human life is deeply varied and that many types of thinking must be active all at once if humans are to lead balanced, richly-fabricked lives? Some, of course, will want as little as possible, in order to deepen their spirituality, but this is almost an act of disloyalty, of stubborn wrong-headedness in a consumer society. It's like people who are mad on running crying out that no more music should be played. Shakespeare once put in the mouth of Toby Belch, speaking to Malvolio, 'Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?' The boot is now on the other foot. Virtue's not at a premium any more, but the mass consumption of cakes, ale, and other products is more than encouraged, it's studied, graphed, compared, and analysed in terms of its investment future to an extent that borders on the hysterical. Return on capital is a far greater good than virtue, today, because virtue doesn't, and can't, drive a system; it restrains it, and that's undesirable when it's growth that's wanted. The system is its own provider of purpose and its own measure of quality; there is no other. This is strange indeed!

The tail, then, is wagging the dog. The tail is the dog. The once-dog obeys the once-appendage. None of this seems unnatural so long as memory's controlled. History, which has always been written and rewritten for one purpose or another, is in the latest of its many up-dates. Society's need for history is to support the status quo, or perhaps the status to-which-we-are-moving. And what is that? The moment of importance is the moment of consumption, and its predecessor is the moment when need becomes aware of itself. Money too must be available so that the moment, when it comes, is one of spending. Money must change hands. Value lies in the transaction, not the thing exchanged, which may be of symbolic interest only. The excuse, the gesture, for an act of faith. Faith has not so much declined as shifted its manifestations. Faith, once so mystical, so disembodied, can now be measured. Graphed. Statisticised (to coin a word). This is the system we've created, and this is why it's necessary

to want whatever you're supposed to want, and why we have to be persuaded that what we're getting is what we want ...

... because it is! We only exist within our social system and our health depends on it. World population's too great for more than a few of us to take to the woods (if we could find them) and eke out a spiritual, if half-starved, existence. Provision points exist only within the system of which we're a part. Our very existence depends on belief in the great provider, who's left the heavens and set up on earth. Providers, plural; there's lots of them, we do get a choice, of sorts: we can choose the hand from which we take our nourishment, but not the sustenance itself. That's decided. We're allowed, indeed encouraged, to complain about the quality, but not the thing itself. To slip back to my childhood again, I hear my mother saying, 'Be a good boy, take your medicine, in it goes.' I swallow, and lick the spoon my mother holds for me to lick.

The spoon, today, is endlessly on offer. The centre of human focus has been moved from the heavens to the body. For my part, I support this move while remaining, as this essay shows, sceptical about the reasons. But perhaps, in focussing on the growth of consumerism, I am neglecting other, deeper forces at work. What I do feel sure has happened is that our very success in manufacturing, in creating, has given us the confidence to think of ourselves as the major creative force of the universe. Name me another. It is of course possible to say that the world itself, this earth we over-populate, is creativity incarnate (is there such a word for a thing made of rock, not flesh?). I will support this idea too, but if we want to establish it properly we'll find ourselves losing most of the terms of thought that have got us where we are today. The physics and the economics that I know won't endure in a world defined by what's being created and what's dying. What a philosophy, what an -ism, will be needed for that redefined world of my speculation!

It's too much. Let's go back to where we started. Whole industries exist to ensure that what we want and what we get never drift far apart. This is, despite the sourness in my tone, a success story. Research is done before money's committed. The product's fitted to consumer expectation. It's tested (on the road if it's a car) before it's put on the market. Observers watch (monitor is the word) to see if satisfaction's achieved. No complaints? Good. And you sir, what's the problem? We'll see what we can do. Our guarantees are good, it's only the other people who go back on their word. We'll test it sir, and it'll be perfect when we bring it back. Or that's how things are supposed to be. What more do you expect in a shonky world that was put together before people developed to the stage of doing things properly?

I find myself writing about the consumer world with a grudging admiration because anyone can see how many things are well done, and for the most part with half-decent intention. World history suggests that this is no mean achievement. So what's my grumble, my grudge; why am I not as happy as I'm supposed to be?

I search in my childhood for the third time in this essay and I hear voices everywhere, surrounding me, saying that when peace comes - meaning the end of war against Germans and Japanese - they hoped for a better world. They'd lived through the thirties depression, when the capitalist system failed them, they were embroiled in the wars of nations, hoping their remote country would survive, and they were pulled forward, sustained, by the lure of a better future. Something of this mood entered me. I expected to grow into a world that had learned to avoid mistakes. Has this new world come into being, or is it on the way?

It depends where you look. The United Nations has outlasted its predecessor, and will continue. Parts of the world at least look to international agencies, sometimes courts. Environmental issues, as well as the financial system, are too large to be left to single nations and their fallible if not corrupt governments. Something new in world history is undoubtedly coming into being, and yet ...

... the wealthy nations that should be leading are caught up in the trammels of their own systems for creating wealth (if that's what they're creating; wealth is a word for money, and money, remember, is an article of faith, perhaps a manifestation or 'proof' of faith) to the point where they believe their own statistics about themselves and curve their eyebrows when considering places that haven't been smart enough to adapt to, let alone join, the money system. This is a way of saying that those places deserve to be poor, to suffer diseases and famines, if they can't learn how to play the game. The result is squalor in the poor countries, and, in the rich ones ...

... the spiritual diminution of an opportunity ignored, the loss of stature that comes from too great selfishness, and the sapping of morale which follows performing below one's best. Getting what you want, or wanting what you get? The first implies a mind able to set its own goals, a person or a people capable of moving on, of adapting, of setting things up to bring about selected results - a democracy working at its finest, one would think. The second, a state of slavery or semi-slavery, as stated earlier, implies a people surrounded, people who've surrendered responsibility for their lives and development to others with a vested interest in securing control. The person not fully autonomous is the person incapable of living as a citizen of a democratic place. Autonomy - citizenship - has to be lived out on every plane of a life, although it's the economic plane where the attack, the erosion, is strongest at the moment. This is the reason for my disappointment. The hopes and dreams of those embroiled in a world of economic misery and then a spectacular war have been less than fulfilled, and this saddens me. The dreams were my mother's, my father's, and the dreams of most of those surrounding me. Dreams, you will say, are made in the sleeping mind, to be overpowered by the light of day. This may be true, but it's no less sad. In the next essay we shall dream a little more cogently, I hope, about what we might achieve that's better than being sold a trolley full of goods we don't entirely need.

## **Ideals for the globe (all species included)**

The title of this essay implies goals we are unlikely to reach, if for no other reason than that we are too inexperienced at thinking about what other species might want, apart from being unmolested by us! We may decide, after struggling for a time, that it is enough to have opened up some matters for better minds to pursue. So, nervously enough, let us begin with some preliminary questions. Does the human race know where it's going? Second: has its movement over, say, the last thousand (or two, three, even twenty-five thousand, if you wish) years been progressive, that is, from an inferior to a superior position? Third question (three will be enough, I think): who, if anybody, has been in charge of change? To bring that last question up to date, is anybody directing or managing the movement of human affairs, and if not, should we as a race try to influence what we make happen to ourselves? Or are we content to live with the results of letting individuals or groups who are not elected, managed or forced to give account of themselves take hold of the levers of social life and push and pull as they think fit?

If you consider those questions for a moment you will see that I've cheated, and there are many more than three problems raised. Nonetheless I will try, to begin with, to confine myself to the three areas nominated.

Does the human race know where it's going?

My first answer can only seem foolish: humans don't know where they're going, but when they get somewhere, they say they do, and may, quite possibly, have been seeking the destination they've reached. Does that sound silly? We only know where we wanted to be when we arrive, when we stumble through fortune's doorway, so to speak. It's as if blind striving does reveal some deeply buried sense of direction, of goal-seeking, and rejoices when it's satisfied. The human race, it might be said, is groping in the dark, hoping to create better conditions for itself, working without definitions, goals or procedures, trusting to luck that something will come along ...

This is the position that my essay hopes to alter, by articulating what it is that we are working towards. Let us see what we can find ...

Has the human race progressed? Has the last thousand, two or twenty-five thousand years seen progress, or are we marking time, then as now, and now as then? Is progress merely an illusion? It depends on the criteria employed. Humans, now as then, are born, develop, die after lives of doubtful usefulness, and sometimes downright evil. No change there! Parents are often inadequate, terrible illnesses befall us, in youth as in age. Inequalities persist. It's easy to describe human life and history so as to emphasize these things, but progress is there too, if we accept that what we see is progress. Let me develop this idea.

Life expectancy has lengthened considerably in certain countries at least. Treatment of disease and bodily failure is vastly more sophisticated and successful than it was a hundred

years ago. Human understanding has massively increased in a wide range of fields so that today we can fly through the air, send devices into space, look down with god-like eyes ...

We're clever. Some of us, that is. Most of the developments I speak of are outcomes of what we call scientific thinking, something more common in certain cultures than others. In other words, the development, if it is one, has been uneven. This does not deter me. Earlier stages of human evolution were, doubtless, uneven too; that is, the human race - its mind, its body - made leaps forward in particular places and times which spread, later, and with conquests and fighting involved, to further places. The story of these developments is largely lost, today, though archaeologists theorise about the bones they discover, God bless them for their ingenious narrative play. The problem, as I see it, is that certain parts of the earth declare themselves to have been progressive, while the inhabitants of places once blessedly remote ('untouched'), who have no self-distrust to scarify themselves with, can't see why the superior people think they're superior. Or so they say, until they too are invited to fly in an aeroplane, have an operation in a London hospital to snip away the cancer destroying them, until they too are invited to confer on themselves a presidential Rolls Royce (stretch limo if they're Americanised), or at the very least take delivery of a truckload of machine guns for getting rid of enemies. The temptations, mostly of doubtful morality, quickly sort out the genuine from the false among those who want to maintain a pure cultural relativity. You're only as good as me until you admit that you want what I've got, even though you were criticising it a minute ago because it was an unnecessary luxury and dangerous for the well-being of your people. (Your people? Who gave you the right to speak for them? Did you have a well run election with an up-to-date, well-maintained electoral roll? Eh? How else do you speak for *your* people unless they asked you to speak for them?)

So those branches of human civilisation that have sought progress have found something that satisfies them. Beyond this we cannot go. Let us move to the third of our nominated areas: who's been in charge of this change, this progress we have rather cautiously accepted?

Who indeed? The main initiatives for change in the world have come via the European traditions of science, with consequent discoveries. What was European, once, has spread throughout the American domain, even into tradition-ridden Japan, while numerous other civilisations, notably in China and the Middle East, have had their moments. What distinguishes this science? Restlessness, inquisitiveness, a willingness to disbelieve religious explanations and look for other understandings, despite the dangers attached in countries where priests were powerful. (Joan of Arc was relinquished to the mercies of the secular arm, and died in fire and smoke.) If we let our eyes scan hundreds of years of European life, it seems that the whole culture is responsible, not any particular group or institution. The scientist disbelieves, or suspends belief, waiting till his eyes and ears notice something that seems to count. Other cultures - hunters, agriculturalists - depend on their senses too, but the scientist is another sort of person, and has been tolerated variously at places and times; I think we can say that such progress as the race has made has only intermittently been caused by public policy and has in general relied on the willingness of all sorts of people to listen to the questions gnawing in their minds, hoping for answers to arrive.

So much for the preliminaries; what about those ideals referred to previously which might release humanity from its groping search and give its restlessness direction? Can we set out some of these for all of us to consider?

Two have already been mentioned: elimination of the trades in arms and drugs. These would certainly be progressive, if they could be achieved, but we need to step further back if we're to see our problem, and our answers, clearly.

I assume that we humans think we are at the top of evolution's tree and wish to remain there. Those who disagree may climb down at this point, and mustn't light a fire beneath those who prefer to stay *en haut*, otherwise we'll get the park rangers to tip you out of the place (there's precedent for that!). Likewise I assume that those who want to remain aloft are willing to minimise the effects we have on other species. You'd rather preserve than wipe out? Good. Let's plan the steps that will preserve these attitudes.

We will need, first, instantly available energy to do whatever we like in the locale we think's most suitable (we're preserving habitats for everything, don't forget, so we can't be chopping down the trees, the growth, that birds and lizards inhabit). We will have tiny, super-strong batteries for this power, and, for larger quantities, we'll have solar or wind-power devices which can easily be carried on our backs and set up where we need them. We'll stop digging huge holes in the earth. Industry will decentralise so that its components can be manufactured in places where energy's most easily available. Corporations will take pride in clever solutions because capitalism will transform itself to take count of the costs it's hitherto ignored; that is, the cost to the earth of drawing on its 'raw' materials. The ultimate shareholder will be the earth itself, and its state, its health, its whereabouts in the stages of renewability, will replace the dubious statistic of the stockmarket's index. Motion up and down will become a minor movement viewed only in relation to the stability of the overall system. Growth will only take place in the context of no change. Matter, as any physicist has known (until recently), can only be transformed, not created or destroyed. It may be that we shall have to shift away from that view, but if we have to, we will. Growth will take place in the context of no change. There is therefore a limit on the amount of human activity, human demand, over any given period. Those who want energy, or water, or anything else from the earth's limited - that's the word! - resources, must fund it by their own arrangements. No more printing money! And - we aren't joking now - the population, that is the human population, will massively decrease. China and India, are you ready to lead the way? Japan and other whalers, long-line fishing countries, are you ready to follow? Humanity must relinquish its capacities to wipe out species and despoil oceans. Discharge of waste must end because in a truly well-trained society there are no wastes, only stages in a virtuous cycle, each step of which is examined for its effects, the gains and losses it inflicts, and the processes are designed and redesigned until they take nothing without replacing it somewhere in the system or systems endlessly swirling about us. Eventually we will cease to think of ourselves as central and see ourselves as hardly more than smoke, moving endlessly, stable only to become unstable a moment later ... but how's that different from human history as it's been thus far?

At this stage you may fairly say that I am speaking from *en haut*, and that in doing so I am a globalist, that is, I'm trying to call a new world into being. If I am a globalist, you may say, what about the local? Will it be overwhelmed, made to conform, deprived of its freedom to opt out of worldwide arrangements?

This is the most difficult question raised so far in these essays, and there's no final answer, only an unremitting tension between the two. Globalisation's earlier form is imperialism, and the birth of the later version is proving long and hard. This isn't going to change, and yet ...

The tension between the two - global and local - is the subject of a later essay, but let us say, here, that humanity will be crazy if it doesn't preserve as much diversity, both in its genetic and its cultural make-up, as possible. We need differences because they're instructive. They are the source of energies and ideas we don't yet know we need. This puts us in the position of having to preserve - of forcing ourselves to preserve - aspects of a culture that for the most part we condemn. As a democrat, I want the world managed only by people selected by fair and transparent process; as a cultural preservationist, to coin a term, I suppose I have to support the continuation of monarchs and chieftains if certain parts of the world are used to them. Do I have any difficulty with this?

Yes. I'll have to swallow very hard to get those solitary, despotic rulers into my digestive system, and this difficulty leads us to another, though it's a difficulty that may provide us with some hope. Globalisation rests on two things: the fact, now fully accepted (we've looked at the earth from space!) that the planet is a globe, and the perhaps more remarkable fact that practically everyone on earth knows this to be so. No flat-earthers any more! This, trite as it may be, has far-reaching effects on our political and other systems. Nobody can any longer claim that their system or part thereof is divinely, traditionally, or in any other way ordained, because within sight and sound on this greatly reduced planet's surface there will be an example of something different, and, moreover, everybody will know about it. Globalisation, like everything else, is finally a state of mind, of knowledge, and all parts of the earth will know what's happening in other parts. The days of systems growing up in isolation are gone. Any development, today, will occur under the examination of people from all parts of the globe. The human race has not had to deal with this challenge before, because earlier wars, exploratory journeys and sudden lifts in standards and/or self-esteem took place within cultures which thought themselves central and superior. Is the day of the empire also at an end? Logically, it is, though logic hasn't been the basis for any of the empires we've seen so far. The whole world now knows what's happening in any of its parts, therefore the independent customs of its peoples are likely to be eroded by the knowledge of their opposites or at least variants. Uniformity, according to this argument, is just around the corner after next.

But not unless we want it. Ideals, surely, can be achieved in a variety of ways. Let us suppose we set it down as an ideal that all populations will live in a sustainable state, not using any more of the earth's elements than they put back. This obviously can be achieved in more than one way. The sustainable jungle-life is not the same as the sustainable island- or desert-life. Democrat though I am, I would be prepared, at least initially, to allow governments to claim legitimacy - that would be the key to their existence, in my scheme of judgment - on the basis of their longstanding customs. Breakdowns in customary law would be seen by the world, criticised or scorned, and future practice would, perhaps, be amended. We are speaking of a slow, organic development here, by which the whole world gains respect for itself. This won't be easy! The mind boggles, but the process is already underway, and there's no escaping it unless we plunge into failure's pit ...

... yet again.

Our capacity for self-destruction is too great to allow of failure, now the H-bomb's been exploded, and any part of the earth's surface can be targeted from space. Things that were developed in order to give superiority in firepower have turned into instruments of self-discipline. Military crackpots have to be held in order by political classes, however crazy they may also be. Survival depends upon it. So one of our ideals for the future, an absolute necessity,

is an iron discipline. This is why the arms industry has to be brought under control, instead of being its present mixture of state-capitalism and pure, roistering piracy. I keep thinking of the way that soldiers in poor countries celebrate by firing shots into the air as if the bullets won't return to earth, somewhere not far away. This never ceases to amaze me, not least because it shows stupidity bordering on the blissful; anyone who believes a bullet only travels one way needs to start thinking. Every action has effects. Morality will have to change as we accept that an action is incomplete until its effects are known. Much of our present morality is no more than a pair of lists, one lot getting ticks, the other crosses. Good ones, bad ones, when for the most part you can't yet be sure. We'll have to find ways to account for energies released, and I don't mean the burning of fuel, I mean emotions, ideas, political movements, and banding together of minds to achieve certain ends. These must all keep account of themselves, and this will involve watching for the unexpected. It will be new, this world we're moving into, and much that we did in the past won't be any use any more. That will be difficult, but probably a relief, as we become a little more realistic about ourselves, the world's most obnoxious yet cleverest species. We've always known about ourselves, of course, but blamed our evils on various darkening forces, tempting us, misleading ...

The most valuable, indeed the most necessary thing we can ask from ourselves in this world we're moving into - 'O brave new world'; remember Shakespeare's Miranda, and her father's reply, 'Tis new to thee' - the most valuable thing we can attempt to develop before we can expect our goals, our ideals, to be realised is self-knowledge. Awareness and understanding of ourselves as individuals and as a species. Without this we're still groping in the dark, hoping to stumble on fortune's doorway, as the human race has been doing for thousands of years. The only progress is in knowledge about ourselves, and without this we're as lost as ever. I'm sceptical about whether this can be achieved in the foreseeable future because the developed parts of the world are trying to adapt to a technological revolution, the electronic revolution, which is making, or is being treated as if it's making, the older forms of knowledge and artistic wisdom irrelevant. Much of the best-digested human experience, the poetry, music, painting that's been humanity's compost-heap for centuries is, we might say, expressed in a language that's all but forgotten today. Humanity has done its usual risky thing, setting off for a spectacular new journey without its only road-maps. It presents a challenge, does it not?

## **Inclusion/exclusion: is a dynamic kinship society possible?**

It's hard to ignore someone when you see them every day, harder when you know their blood relationship to those around you, or to yourself. Once you acknowledge someone's existence they make you feel at least a little responsibility for them. If they fall from grace, so do you; if they're hungry or sick, you must act on their behalf, or lose some of your humanity in turning your back. I use the term kinship society to mean a society structured on some definition of family relationships between individuals and groups, be they clans, totems, or whatever. In modern capitalist countries such as Australia, family bonds are still important, but so many of our interactions are based on economic, educational, legal, political or scientific grounds that it is no longer easy for us to imagine what life in a kinship society would be like. We are likely to look down on such a society, as we do when we hear that the civil servants of a country may take days to do the simplest tasks because they have no concept of managing the functions of a nation state; they are merely attending one of several workplaces to accumulate the currency needed for survival, and they acquire their positions in these workplaces through family influence. Thus the nation's daily work is likely to remain undone because nobody sees any need for it to be done while family members are fed and content. The nation exists, insofar as any reason needs to be found for it, to ensure that all members of my family - I may not be concerned with yours - are looked after.

The other sort of society, for the purposes of my simplification, the societies that exclude members for one reason or another, are more common in the developed world. The 'Great Britain that settled whitefella Australia was clearly an exclusion society; people who committed crimes we would think minor were sent to the other side of the world. The United States of America currently has one of the highest jail populations, by percentage, of any country on earth, to which number we could add all the other exclusions, the homeless on the streets, the starving, the wandering job-seekers, et cetera ad nauseam. Two great and powerful empires have been built, then, by nations prepared to exclude some of their members - citizens - from the status, processes and benefits conferred by the society. With both, you were either in or out!

Which brings me to the question raised in the title of this essay. Can we have the virtues of both types of society, or, to put it another way, can the two types of merit - the inclusiveness of one and the dynamism of the other - be brought together? A big ask, you may think, and it is; is there anything wrong with that?

Let's take the inclusive, kinship society first. How does it come about? What are its strengths and drawbacks? Can the drawbacks be overcome, or are they inherent in the beast?

Kinship societies are often small in the numbers they contain. Detailed knowledge of relationships and familial ties is only possible with the restricted numbers of a reassuringly intimate (if oppressively closed) body of people. The way of life needs to be reasonably settled,

and the society will be aware of its limits. These may or may not be spatial; it's possible that the limits are not so much in area as in an awareness of an 'other' people not far away. Them and us. The presence of a possible threat, a rival group, another body of people with a different history, is a powerful bonding agent, and it is one reason why local groupings will be important as globalisation continues.

Kinship societies are normally oral cultures, rather than depending on the written or printed word. Books and documents can be expected to contain the ideas and evidence which will allow challenges to the received 'wisdom' of family members, who are inclined to be more aggressive and domineering as their grip loosens on the facts. We are, I think, likely, in a world where the family is ever-reducing in importance, to imagine virtues for family which, even when they exist, are at least balanced by the rivalries and sheer malice of relationships in situations where the intensity of the passions greatly exceeds the value of the prizes to be gained. Dominance struggles, revenge-seeking, and seething resentments, all the more passionate because unexpressed and possibly unsatisfiable, are features which characterise life in a kinship society. All's not always well around the family table!

A kinship society, whatever its other merits, is subject to its own definitions of the ties within and across families. Patriarchy is hard to break down, and the system of handing on property (eldest son takes all, let us say, while other sons go searching, and daughters get married!) is diabolically hard to change once it's set; there's too much at stake for the beneficiaries not to fight for what custom says is theirs. Custom's not law, though the two are linked. Custom's a matter of memory, which means of self-interest, and custom can be wrenched around, sometimes, if the will, the personality, is strong enough. Family warfare is as vicious as any other sort.

The greatest merit of a kinship society is, though, that by definition it doesn't drop out its members. It can't. There's nowhere in the society that isn't charted by the ties and bonds of people's origins. Everyone's an uncle or an aunt, a cousin, grandparent or grandchild, a son or daughter of someone who's a son or daughter of others who are themselves sons and daughters ...

That's why there's no disconnected member of a kinship society, although there will always be the products of forbidden relationships, the daughter made pregnant by her father or uncle, the nun in her cloister swelling mysteriously, the person whose facial features don't agree with the family name, and, always important, the outsider who's not properly connected with anybody and is therefore troublesome and possibly alluring, however poor. No disconnected members, or not many: it's an attractive idea for a larger, exclusionist society that's regularly bewildered by crimes which aren't attributable to anyone because most of the society's members are moving around without observation, so they can, if it takes their mind, set fire to the bush, burn hedges, they can spray paint on bridges, trains, people's cars, they can mask their faces and hold up shops or service stations to get money for drugs ... anything at all, really, because where there's no identity there's no check.

Identity. It's a trap as well as a blessing. We all need it, even as we try, often enough, to escape it. Con men thrive on its absence. Trust me, they say, knowing we can't check on them because we don't know who their connections are. Not for nothing is the crime world a place of aliases, false names, nicknames and word-of-mouth assurances. Identity. If it can't be proved, it can be made up ... but not in a kinship society. You can't escape your identity there

because everyone knows who you are. You're the son of, daughter of, grandchild of, father/mother/brother/sister of ...

There's no escaping who you are because your identity's reconferred by everyone you meet. They know you even if you don't want to be known. In an exclusionist society identity's unevenly spread. Possessions help, and addresses. Certain areas of a city add cachet, certain opinions are heard long before others'. Networks spread through everything, recommending, barring, blackening reputations, advancing those thought desirable. Identity is a sort of wealth, and the presence of someone famous is a gift to others in the room. They were there when X was being photographed, welcomed, queues lining up to press the flesh. Stardom! Still to come is the punishing exit, and the long, dreary years when it's not available any more, having been conferred on the latest great, glamorous and gifted. Identity's a dream, a yearning, a craving too, perhaps, and yet it's solid, and it underpins the states that exclude their members when they're not productive, or they've disgraced themselves, as discussed above.

To our question, then. Can the two types of merit - the inclusiveness of one and the dynamism of the other - be brought together? Why not? Or, to give the question another flavour, where does the dynamic society get its dynamism from? If it's fear of failure, then the answer's simple: no such match or mixture will work for long. Remove the fear and you remove the drive. Only when there's a disaster waiting for us, so the argument goes, are we motivated to strive for the excellent, the success that will ensure our wealth, prosperity, happiness - the American, and Australian, dream.

But this is too simple. The empires I referred to before, the British and the American, were and are driven by more than fear, yet if we ask what else has driven them, the answers are hard to find. It seems that some societies experience a swelling of confidence, a certainty about their purposes, that allows them to press forward, suppressing or ignoring doubts about what they're doing. The conquest of other peoples, however justified (the virtues of our civilisation versus their limited skills) can only look ugly when considered from the safety, and the vantage point, of another time. Few of us, today, would see much merit in the Spanish conquests in South America, yet the Spanish didn't hold back. They had a golden age! At this point you will reasonably object that I've misshapen the argument I'm inviting you to consider; I'm equating dynamic societies with the particular form of dynamism that gets the empire-building process underway.

J'accepte. I'll have to consider 'dynamic' in some other way. Let's start again.

Kinship societies never imagine that they're going anywhere, but exclusionist, dynamic, societies, almost by definition, think they are. They are given to using terms such as 'progress', which they assume they're making. The world of the future, being built here in the present, will be better than the past. You've only to look at the past, see what's happening as we speak, and it's obvious! Progress is being made. Change is called 'reform', because there's an underlying feeling that things are being improved, whether they are or not. Claims of this sort can be made because nobody's in a position to deny the progress. Why? Because we all believe in it. We do think the world's been improved in the last couple of centuries, way out of sight! We believe in the terms of our own time, and we can do no other, silly as that will make us seem when it's our turn to be viewed from another vantage point. How will we look then? We've no idea, because we can't know how those at that other point will do their judging. We only know that they will see us in a way not available to ourselves, so, really they're no use to us. We have to go ahead assuming that what we think is right.

It's this forward movement, this rejection of a judgment we can't conceive of, that makes us the people of what I call a dynamic society. We think we're going somewhere. The status quo has no virtue innate. Progress has to be slowed a little only so people can reconcile themselves to what's going on, much as people look down when they're getting on and off an escalator. Mind the feet!

To conclude this line of argument, then, it seems that we, being people of one sort - *the dynamics* - find it almost impossible to judge, to estimate, what life would be like if we were the other sort. This makes it hard for us to calculate what we would need to do to bring the two types of system together, as proposed in this essay's title. Are we finished, then? That's far as we can go?

We can, of course, look over our shoulders at the welfare state, a largely European creation, though Australian too, which was brought about in the years after World War 2, when the nation state was strong enough for people to expect it to remedy life's more obvious imperfections. If states could tear each other apart they could surely look after their own! Unfortunately, the welfare state is now declining, as the state itself is declining in influence against the worldwide companies and activities that are surrounding nations, turning them into islands of resistance to the economic tide. Life is forever being understood differently, and these changes of thinking free up the obstacles to further change. Change itself becomes a thing sought after, an irresistible inevitable ... I nearly added 'God only wise', but the world's too secular for that, today. Each period, epoch, era creates its own ethos and adjusts every aspect of its practices to fit the new way of seeing. The nation state, in this respect, is a thing of the past, a benign old relative that's no longer central to the action going on in board rooms the world over, but particularly in ...

... the United States. Everyone is following the US, or trying to anticipate. Can we, then, bring together the two qualities, if that's the word, which we wish to marry - the inclusiveness and the dynamism? The answer's simple. Of course we can, if that's what we set out to do. It's no harder than that. But will we? The answer's simple again. No, we won't, as long as the raging, rampant cruelty of the American way of business is setting norms for the world around it. The Americans are prepared to crush or leave out those who don't contribute to their economic systems, and their rivals too, as our agriculturalists could remind us. Economic self-aggrandisement is America's main gift to the world, apart from its rhetoric which we've learned by now not to trust. The splendid rhetoric is their way of convincing, indeed deceiving, themselves, and if we let them do it to us, then we too can be convinced if not deceived. Beware rhetoric! Beware those who face us, talking with forked tongues. Watch their feet in the grass, dragging spears, as Angus McMillan did, early explorer of eastern Victoria. Watch those fingers reaching for the buttons that send missiles wailing into cities. Destruction and commercial exploitation, these are the two poles of the American empire, and while it exists the bringing together I've been talking about won't happen. Sorry to be so pessimistic, but you tell me where I'm wrong.

## **Borders between global and local: a price to get through?**

Globalisation is happening all around us, sometimes visibly, sometimes out of sight. We sense it as a force barely understood, under nobody's control, and likely to be active for generations to come. Some want to resist it, but can't, some to exploit it for all it's worth, and others to manage it for one reason or another. I belong to the third group, and I am writing in an effort to understand what I should be doing, though I am aware that globalisation, a mass movement sweeping humanity along, is never likely to be predictable. What will the world be like in another two hundred years? Who knows? Almost the only thing we can be sure of is that certain polarities will continue to exist - uniformity and diversity, freedom and restriction, the acceptable and the unacceptable (you may overlap those two with right and wrong, and see what you make of the exercise), and many more. The first of these pairs - uniformity and diversity - is the starting point for this essay, and it roughly equates with the words global and local in my title: global organisations will of necessity possess considerable uniformity, with diversity to be found in the many forms of local custom - the Arab burnous, the Inuits' suits of fur, the near-nakedness of tropical or island people, the suits and jumpers in cool to moderate climes.

Global and local: there is surely no more important polarisation for the centuries before us. One would think that only a descent into chaos or some subsuming of the many locals into an overwhelming global would bring to an end the period I am trying to look into. Where to begin? This is hard, even though I have no doubt that when people, centuries hence, write the history of their time they will say that its origins were clearly visible in this time we inhabit, blindly perhaps.

Perhaps. What can we see, if we look about us?

The first is that people want difference, love the exotic, and need places unlike their own to visit in wonder and excitement. Young people, launching their adult lives, must make journeys until they find a place that suits them. How else can they know what they are? A uniform, homogenous society is always an imposition, them making rules to squash people like us, who don't care for the imposition but can't muster the numbers or the guns for a change. We know, of course, that if we wait long enough our time will come, the rules will crack, we'll slip through, and then, next stage, it'll be us that make the rules. Consider the case of censorship. The morally restrictive used to hold the power, but this is no longer so. Actors fuck live on screen. Sex, forced to be the opposite pole from spirituality, and therefore having to be covered at all times, is forcing its way back to the status of the central and most revered god/dess. All things reverse under the caressing hand of time. Will it not, therefore, happen that the forces and things done globally will interchange with those worked out locally? May not the riders change horses every century, every generation or so? If this happens, why do we need to think about it now?

This question bores into me; what can I say? My first answer is that thinking about what's going to happen is the only way I can ready myself for the future, even if it brings what I didn't expect. My second is that those of us who don't think about the issue will find, one day, that the future's been shaped by others more rapacious or swifter than we are. So we must push on.

Perhaps the best way to start is to ask myself what I most hope from, and most fear about, the globalisation process. This is simple. Globalisation gives us an opportunity to wipe out barbarism, both by controls over recalcitrant areas, and by offering to all the world's peoples the best that humanity can create or devise. Sounds good? The worry is that democracy may not be able to work, worldwide; world government - there has to be someone controlling - may not always be benign. If it's to be responsible, and accountable, power must lie with the voters who elected it - if they did. Can you imagine world elections? Countries with a decent electoral system, such as our own, could hardly be expected to accept the numbers produced by more dubious regimes. We'll scrap elections, then, for a century or two, and fall back on national representation, as with the present UN. Compromise. This means the existing power-balance is to some extent enshrined in the world organisation, which means that the move from the latest stage of imperialism to a truly global rule is delayed further. It's not easy, is it? Such a compromise leaves the UN (I'll use that term) in a guiding position, cajoling, offering or withholding funds or disaster relief, trying to bend and shape stubborn or dishonest governments, which will never want to ask too much of their peoples. Governments are popular when they've got something to hand out, disliked when they ask more than people want to give. Nonetheless, world opinion will exist, and people around the globe will feel it. Exerting pressure will certainly happen. Let us move, then, to the agreement nations will undertake when they accept that global forces exist.

We must accept, right at the outset, that the backward, the stupid and the greedy, are sometimes right. Self-interest isn't always blind and blatant. Such world government as we may achieve will either be built on domination (generally unacceptable, I'm arguing) or consensus. Consensus is hard to achieve, not least because it subsumes, that is to say it includes, many unpleasant facts. Let us take the example of AIDS. Treatment for this disease is costly. The poorest nations, whose suffering is worst, are least able to pay for what their people need. Drug companies, operating as businesses, are inclined to say tough luck. This is a fascinating problem, which I don't feel qualified to discuss, but the point's been made: if something has to be paid for then commercial thought will predominate when common (is it?) sense tells us some other type of thought should prevail. What do we do about this? Is this a drawback, or an opportunity?

The problem will recur. We can only talk about global and local if there's a line between them; how will that line be drawn? By whom? Where? Clashes of interest are certain to occur. Nations will compete to attract industries, as we see with rivalries between states in this country. Jobs created, jobs lost. Incentives to get your business in our city, shire, state, nation. As long as business is dynamic and governments - authorities - are reactive, that is to say merely regulatory, then business will hold the initiative, and to a fair extent the ascendancy. Business will have to be attracted, placated, and in some cases bribed to stick around. I think this is demeaning, but what to do?

Two steps, thoroughly unpopular ones, real hue-and-cry ones, could be taken. The first would be to detach money - pay - from work. From jobs. We can talk about that in a moment.

Another would be for governments - authorities - to claim ownership of intellectual or other property used within their jurisdiction. Knowledge can travel, but not the ownership thereof. What I'm proposing here is a sort of bargaining boundary with balanced, if differentiated, powers on each side. The multinational corporation has the expertise in delivering its processes but a poor or simply pernickety nation can get someone else to manage the processes at a cheaper rate. Yes, this is open to abuse, but what isn't? Multinationals, or shall we call them 'globals', can't be allowed to dominate the states they allegedly 'serve'; this is the end of democracy, which, as we have said, will be hard enough to institute on a global scale, and it's the beginning, or is it the continuation, of a new form of slavery. If you don't like that word, call it 'power imbalance'; it's the permanent state of human affairs, it's maddening, it won't go away, and it's at the heart of this problem of global and local. States must be able to look after their people. States mustn't sell their people to global corporations. Citizens mustn't be defined as customers or consumers. Value must be attached to the person, not the product. Perhaps my argument is edging me towards a currency which has two faces, two sides, as notes and coins do now. One side represents its value within any given state, the other its value in the global economy, that is, outside the borders of any or every state. Given a note or coin you can spend it within a state or you can spend it - invest, probably - in the realm that floats above and through the boundaries of states. This would force individuals to think both locally and globally because they would have an economic loyalty to both. The balance of their interests would change all the time.

This leads me back to the idea of detaching money - pay - from work, from jobs. The local, or national, value of the notes and coins I have been talking about, could, at least in part, be allocated by governments to their people, at birth, perhaps; perhaps later, in reward for work, ideas, or service to communities. In a sense this is done now, all the time. Grants are made by governments and their subsidiaries; businesses, too, confer benefits on causes deemed worthy. Businesses are always acting outside the spheres of their balance sheet, because their directors know that public acceptance is vital, so the company makes gestures, though all too often, in this country, the gestures are connected with high profile sport. This may change when some advertising genius finds a way to attach a message to a high note reverberating around a theatre, or perhaps to the glass which the Prime Minister picks up when he needs a sip.

Pay - money - detached from jobs? Well, it needn't be as severe as that; you could be paid different amounts for different things. It has always fascinated me that people who work for laundries or cleaning firms are paid for what they do while others, doing the same things at home, washing clothes, sweeping rooms, 'earn' nothing. This tells us that only certain actions are recognised within the society's system of value, that is, its system of payments. We may be happy with this if we think that money corrupts, but we might want to see the value system extend to cover all action, all life. Money as a system of morality, a recognition of virtue and vice! It sounds silly? Of course it does. It is. But is it any sillier than what we have at the moment, with certain individuals paid vast sums to ...

... do what? Manage companies that society doesn't particularly need? Let's put that aside. Our concern is the line between global and local. The local must protect, must nurture, provide recognition, and identity. The global must serve many locals without defining them any more than it can help. The local needs to be owned by individuals, selfish, scrawny, complaining though they may be, while the global has in a sense been released from the pettiness, and also the regulation, the checks, of the local. The issues are complex, because the terms I'm

using are only signpost-terms, allusions to things more complex, with everything happening in a world where the public can be circumvented by events too large, too sweeping, for it to control. Remember the Australia card? The Prime Minister of the day, Robert Hawke, wanted to introduce a means of identification, but had to pull back because the idea was unpopular. Police state, said the public, its mind formed in the days of Stalinism and Orwell's response. The Australia card was scrapped, but the development of data bases, intelligence systems and electronic retrieval of information pressed on without interruption. The symbol - the card - was defeated, but the process won, hands down. People's only protection, then, is vast and up-to-date knowledge, otherwise globalisation will be a form of appropriation by which much is removed from people's control without them knowing it's gone. Can we institute a system whereby the global is policed by the local, and vice versa? Corruption will always be hard to keep out, so we had better insist that anyone who checks on anybody has to be elected and investigated, though who runs the elections and who does the investigations? The potential for corruption, for cheating on a prodigious scale, is always there. Systems are no more perfect than the people who operate them. I think it's obvious that open systems, with accountability built in, not left to trust, are better than systems without. Which brings me to a difficulty which I'd better be honest enough to expose.

I am as prone as many of my once-left type to say 'Power to the people!' and similar slogans. I'm a democrat through and through, but I want more than its forms: democracy is a collection of habits, consistently dictating the shape of almost every action, even thought, of our lives. It's not easy. It's based on respect for every individual person ...

... but not for populations per se. I cannot wish my country to participate in global systems which give one value one person weighting to states with excessive populations, nor, indeed, to almost any nation which includes in its title the words 'The Democratic Republic of ...' The next couple of centuries will be difficult enough without making fools of ourselves in the name of democratic forms. Democracy, as stated above, is an advanced form of thinking, of government, of general behaviour, and it's acquired slowly, the test being not only forms of voting, et cetera, but also the processes of internalisation which they require. Dictators can be democratic when they're in crowd-attracting mode, but let them be punctilious when the times and the going get tougher; we'll judge them then. So population masses won't shape the globalisation that I'd allow, and if I'm being inconsistent, so be it.

As things stand at the start of this century, those activities which are globalised (international) tend to be superior, or more advanced technologically, than much that is done at a local level. The global is new, and it reaches over and beyond the more limited local. The global is the leader, the frontrunner, making the pace. Will this always be so? This depends on what sort of line, or barrier, separates global and local, defining them. The cession of power that's taken place so far has largely been in favour of the global, because it's got the initiators on its side, while the local (I'm sorry about this word; I mean nation states as we've known and understood them until recently) is feeling uncertain, aware that it's somehow being left behind. This is weak of local authorities. They have to set a price on their coöperation. They must know what they want and what they'll yield to get it. Bargaining will take place. This is nothing new. Present-day multinationals know that they have to play by the local rules of each country where they operate, and this gives them an advantage in that they are often more skilled than those they negotiate with because they have to do it more often. This will change. Governments will cling to services they deem vital, and contract out the others. This will

put new demands on governments, which, traditionally have been slacker, more complacent employers than private firms. Or so it is believed by most, and, God help us, by governments themselves. 'The private sector is more efficient!' How many times have you heard that said, or at least implied? Don't start to count, it'd take too long. It's an idea that holds us captive, and we have to break free from it, or we won't handle this global/local divide at all well. If the publicly owned capitulates then all energy, all innovation and motivation will rush to the privatised, globalised side of the line. The public, the nation's half of the pie, must have more up its sleeve than merely the permission it gives to someone else to do its work. It must retain its capacity to do any or all the things its people require. A confident nation must never let itself be put in the position of looking abject, as will happen if it allows forces above and beyond its control to make claims that the state feels it can't match. Are you following me? Airlines are a nice example, though in reverse. They cost torrents of money to run, and they're lucky if they're profitable. Yet nations want to own them. Tinpot states own a 'fleet' of third or fourth hand jets, royally painted, as symbols of something. Pretentiousness, really. National pride attaches to these machines. Flag-carriers, they're called, the flags, of course, belonging to the nations that ... I was going to say 'own' them, but they probably don't. The national pride of tiny countries' airlines is on lease from a New York bank. I speak of airlines because they are the most obviously international things in this world, yet, because they were new, not long ago, and still possess a certain amount of glamour, nations want to own them. This is foolishness on the part of nations, and laziness too; if a nation can't think about what it wants any more deeply than wanting its flag on the tails of planes it leases, then the nation has little between its collective ears. Nations must understand that they are an agreement between their citizens, and that anything that is only an option, a possibility, a choice, can and probably should be left to the global players.

And yet that's not all. The global is also the caretaker of the less satisfactory or less fortunate nations. The global must be able, at times and in carefully regulated situations, to intervene. The governments of nations that generate more than some modest flow of refugees, of displaced, unhappy or starving people, have to be aware that the global force, at once more benign and more powerful than they, will replace them. There will be a coup from without, a swift blow that scatters the former rulers and puts new people in their place. We're used to this. It's happening as I write, in East Timor and Afghanistan. Early in this essay I warned that this global force may not always be benign. It must therefore be impermanent, an agreement between constituent parts which are only brought together by their own agreement, and by their own initiative. Permanent structures gain force, a power base, of their own. The world force, therefore, should own nothing, not even a base camp. It should be no more, and no less, than a set of procedures. What sort of procedures (the devil's in the fine print)?

What sort of procedures? I find that I can't deal with this question because I haven't yet managed to define the proper relationship, and balance, between the global and the local. The globalised world is still new to us and we haven't yet learned to think through its forms in the way we're used to doing inside our nations, if they've had any decent sort of history (plenty haven't). As time passes, and we accept that the globe is as finite as our nations, merely larger, we'll get better at thinking two ways at once. We'll yin-and-yan the world, whether we know what we're doing or not. We'll be citizens of the globe as well as of our own place. Many have already reached that point. Many are still trapped in the old pre-ways, rushing about in trucks,

firing weapons supplied by arms traders, who are, we must grudgingly admit, one of the better organised global industries. Getting them under control will take a month or two!

The difference between what's global and what's managed locally will ultimately come to a division in the self; two sides of the mind talking to each other in a space crossed in a nanosecond. We'll all feel we own the globe, eventually. It will be ours to the extent that only the dim-witted will think that we can get away with doing things in one place that won't have effects elsewhere. Pollution, for instance, doesn't stay within the boundaries of nations. Regulation will have to do with emissions and natural cycles, not boundaries, which will give way to an understanding based on the steps and stairs, the stages, of processes, those in nature and those of the mind. We know all this already, but we haven't yet developed the forms for thinking in this way. One feels that the human mind is facing a mighty cleaning out, with habits of centuries unacceptable in the world we're making. Humanity itself will be redefined because it will understand itself in different ways. One of the jobs of nations - those that look after the local - will be to protect the primitive in each of us, the unruly, greedy, trigger-happy poor bastard lurking inside most of us. The global and the local will lock in dispute over aspects of the world's conscience, visionaries to the right and self-justifiers to the left, no reference intended to previous occupiers of those strongholds. We will discover, I think, that the old dichotomies - uniformity and diversity, freedom and restriction, acceptable and unacceptable, all the others you can think of - will align themselves internally and externally, globally and locally, and after centuries of turmoil we will wake to find humanity infinitely better off ... and much the same as we always were. Feel like setting out to see if I'm right?

## **Aboriginal as local: the role of tourism**

Many years ago people tore pages from library books to prevent readers having access to lists of convicts transported to this country from Great Britain. They did this from shame, fearing a loss of respectability if their past was uncovered. Convictism was a stain when to be spotless was a virtue.

Time passed and the unmentionable became a source of pride. People boasted of convict ancestry, if they could find it. I have no doubt that a similar reversal will take place in the fortunes of our aborigines and those many people who have what was once sneeringly called 'a touch of the tar-brush'. People will go looking for an aboriginal connection and speak of it with pride. This will be a reversal of somewhat greater importance than the acceptance of convicts in the family past. The very difference between the aboriginal way of life, their minds and values, and the European, the American, and the emerging global way of living, the difference which today makes it so hard for us to reconcile the culture that invaded and the culture that resisted, that difference, that stubborn resistance to the globally inventive and innovative, will be a lode of quality beyond almost all other values.

A strange claim? I think not. I'd better get one point made straight away, because everything that follows will depend on it. The Australia that has been built up since white settlement has been as much an international - or global, as we say today - creation as it has been a local one. That is to say, in the dichotomy running through these essays, we are only modestly differentiated from what's been known as global at any time in our history. There is a difference, it's true, everyone knows it and many of us are proud of those differences; not for nothing do people seize on our soldiers, our unionists, our voting habits, our wonderful way of tossing things off because we don't have stifling traditions to cripple us, but - but - if we look at the world that's forming, the world that the world is becoming, and draw that global/local line somewhere, anywhere really, then - then - much of what has happened in this country since 1788 has happened on the global side of the line.

We are perhaps the first area on the earth's surface at least reasonably attuned to what's coming. Our multiculturalism shows this, as does our cheerful acceptance that there's no one tradition - religious, familial, culinary, musical - senior to the rest. Aristocracy never settled here, even at the height of British influence, and, saturated as we are, almost to the point of brain damage, by America, we are in little doubt, or so I think, that the influence of that overwhelming empire will recede one day, as any wave does, however engulfing. And when America loses its world power ranking of one, what then? I don't think we need to care. By then we'll be pretty sophisticated at handling the latest line of bosses, if, of course, there is another line: the global organisations may, as these essays suggest, be less imperial than those who came before them. Their positions may depend on listening.

So let's get clear what I'm saying. Insofar as the last two of the world's numerous empires have been global organisations, or clusters of organisation, then we in this country have had an international identity, however remote or unimportant we may have felt, following our

masters into war whenever they wanted us. Obedient we may have been, but also at least moderately informed. Australians have always felt that news about Australia only was not enough. Our news services roam the world more ardently than do those of most countries because we know that we need to know. We know that we've always been an extension of the widely extended empires of our time. We know also, or we think we know, we believe, or we think we believe, that our local culture, the growth in this place of our thoughts and efforts, has produced something distinct, characteristic, indefinable but insistently there, rebellious but conformist too, acceptable but independent enough to give us pride, an identity that sometimes the world can see, and sometimes only we as insiders to our own joke can sense, that is subtly defining as a source of identity and pride.

As we take in migrants from every country on earth, we train them in this duplicitous outlook, of belonging and not belonging to the ruling empires. They learn, they sense, this ambivalence, this feeling that we can belong when we want to belong and withdraw our membership when it suits us, or when events make the policies of major powers distasteful. This mostly takes place in the realm of myth-making, this argument that I'm proposing, but the realm of myth exists even if it's mythical ... if you see what I mean. The discussion of national pride that has gone on in my lifetime has been within two guiding lines, two polarities, perhaps: the influence of the dominating empires and our wish to gain the benefits of belonging to them, and the creation, the growth, of something independent, visibly if only subtly Australian.

For the aboriginal people, however, these distinctions are, I can only assume, between Tweedledum and Tweedledee. It is of course an advantage to them if their whitefella overlords think of themselves as Aussies through and through, because their consideration for the aboriginal people is likely to be greater if they think in this way; however, it will be apparent to the black people that these same overlords, however well-intentioned, have at least half their awareness attuned to the requirements of the financial centres of the world. The duality, the duplicity, of those who think of themselves as Australian locals when they are also, and perhaps very committed to being, financial and political globalists, eyes on New York and London, will be apparent to most aboriginals, even those who gather by fires in remote settlements. The people of these settlements, skilled at getting about in hilarious automotive wrecks, are well aware that the whitefellas' ways have always been imported, however much the settlers have been forced to see, or realised freely, that the land they inhabit, eroded, fertile, boring, endlessly fascinating, infinitely demanding of patience and resource, is changing them as they live in it. The land makes locals of us all, in the end ...

... but the end is not in sight. To know what is in view, we must watch the visitors who fly into our country and travel about in buses, stopping wherever they're taken to see things about our country that make them curious. The Barrier Reef, the famous places of the centre, the capital cities of course, the galleries, sports stadia, the Opera House (the one with caps!), our artists, cricketers, golfers, tennis players ... anything and anybody that the media nominate as worthwhile. This is not enough for our visitors, however; they must have the aborigines' places, their caves, their open plains, infinity. In a world of travel, travellers and travel-operators' requirements, the aboriginal people are regaining the place the white invaders took from them. How much they will be able to rebuild is an open question but there is undoubtedly an interest, sympathy, curiosity and to some extent supportiveness being carried around in jets, buses, trains and hire cars. Tourists want them to be there - wherever that is! - functioning,

living, and celebrating their lives with the art that has caught the eyes of the world. They do know something, they do have a point of view, they can claim your attention and make you wonder: their humanity is no longer in question, and their very existence, their difference, makes it clear that there must be ways in which they are superior. This is a fascinating rediscovery, because even the earliest whites, certain of their superiority, could see that the black people had skills, and a fitness, a litheness, that set them apart. Here is Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor-General of NSW, writing in 1846:

We set off early, guided by our native friend. He was a very perfect specimen of the genus homo ... His motions in walking were more graceful than can be imagined by any of those who have only seen those of the draped and shod animal. The deeply set yet flexible spine; the taper form of the limbs; the fulness yet perfect elasticity of the glutei muscles. The hollowness of the back, and symmetrical balance of the upper part of the torso, ornamented as it was, like a piece of fine carving, with raised scarifications most tastefully placed; such were some of the characteristics of this perfect "piece of work". Compared with it, the civilised animals, when considered merely in the light of a specimen in natural history, how inferior. In vain might we look amongst thousands of that class for such teeth; such digestive powers; for such organs of sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling; for such powers of running, climbing, or walking; for such full enjoyment of the limpid water, and of all that nature provides for her children of the woods. Such health and exemption from disease; such intensity of existence, in short, must be far beyond the enjoyments of civilised men, with all that art can do for them; and the proof of this is to be found in the failure of all attempts to persuade these free denizens of uncultivated earth to forsake it for tilled ground ... The only kindness we could do for them, would be to let them and their wide range of territory alone; to act otherwise and profess good will is but hypocrisy. We cannot occupy the land without producing a change, fully as great to the aborigines as that which took place on man's fall and expulsion from Eden. (1)

'The genus homo.' 'The only kindness we could do for them would be to let them and their ... territory alone.' Mitchell saw the likelihood of the encounter of two races being tragic; and it was. What he could not foresee was that the problem of coexistence would become central to human life one and a half centuries later. We must now coexist: either that or a dominant culture swallows all. We must coexist; that is, many cultures must live on while - and this is the new part - being aware of the others surrounding them. Cultures must admit their relativity; none can claim to be absolute, that is, necessarily irreplaceable or superior. We know we cannot entertain such ideas, and at the same time we know that as humans we can hardly avoid thinking in those ways. A problem, eh? One cannot help remembering, however, that many colonial administrators of the European empires found the native ways fascinating, and sometimes superior to their own. Dominance is not the only answer to the problem; relativity is acceptable to most human minds, and those who want to feel better than the rest will have to do without - that, or tell themselves whatever they want, in secret.

The aborigines and tourists: what can they do for each other? The best thing any group of people can do for another is to present a challenge to their understandings. In trying to understand the nature of a challenge, its source and implications, we are made more aware of being alive and of the particular way in which we, habitually, live. This, apart from sending postcards home - wish you were here, pity it's only me that's seeing these wonderful things - is the very best of travelling. The extreme difference of the aboriginal way of life from the globalised customs of travellers is the best advantage the black people have received since Thomas Mitchell and his fellow settlers descended. There is also the challenge, however: the

millenia of isolation they'd enjoyed made it all the harder to take the invaders into their mental systems. Used to living with each other as they were, with tribal areas abutting each other all over the continent, they could find no way of getting on top of the ruthless invaders. Treated as inferiors, they fell too quickly into defeatism. Why? Because they could see no way of getting on top, would be my first answer, but the second is perhaps more important: their mental system, their view of the universe, couldn't admit of any other. Their universality - and we must grant them that - didn't allow for the relativity which came more easily to the further-travelled Europeans. The despair of many aboriginal people today must stem from this fall, every bit as disastrous in their history as the Fall which Mitchell talks about in the thinking of the Christian. Christianity stands or falls, it seems to me, on the idea of the fall; our aboriginal people today are in a similar position. Perhaps it will do us good to look at each other, tourists from all over the world, and local peoples who have to watch the watchers watching them. We will be reminded, every waking minute, of the relativities of the world!

Relativism covers everything like a cloud of smoke. Everything has to be seen from within itself and at the same time from without. This is our philosophical position, today, and the practice, or is it an industry, of tourism, embodies this. Those who are travelling are watching those who are at home. Or we hope it's that way; we don't want to deteriorate to the position where nobody has a home for their lives, their thinking, and there is nothing to do but circulate, studying the meaninglessness of the lives that pass each other, staring. Perhaps the best thing that could be done for those of our aboriginal people who are still demoralised by what they call the invasion, although it's the protracted aftermath that has done the damage, would be to let them travel too, seeing parts of the world where people are coping and places where they aren't. If travel is an expression of relativism, it might as well be universal, since we're all in the same position, that is, both looking on and being looked on. But if we take them on trips of this sort, or, better, let them organise them for themselves, what do they do when they get back?

Aboriginal tribes put their young people through initiation, but the word obscures as much as it explains. Their way of life appears to have been an ongoing initiation, with knowledge and customary practice sequestered and shown only to people judged ready for it. Secrecy surrounded much, in a world where everyone was, apparently, unclad. Understandings had to be carried in the mind, and shared when the time was right. Men and women had to grow. Perhaps the best, the most hopeful sign that our aboriginal people had recovered from the shock of invasion would be if they treated us, local Australians and world tourists, as youngsters seeking initiation, letting us see their art, their world, not as anthropologists wanting to 'study' them, but as people setting out to learn what they were capable of absorbing. The very act of putting up barriers to tourists while welcoming them would be an aid to the black people in reconstructing the damaged identities they've been left with. They could seek each other's help in rebuilding what they needed to know. Instead of taking us on tours which allowed us to make a judgement of how interesting or boring it all was, they could ask us, 'What did you see?' They could teach us to link our fleeting perceptions and show us how these relate to the other perceptions flickering through the world they know better than we do. The more battered and degraded of them would have to take lessons themselves, from their own people of course. Their world has to stand up for itself again, and in the very act of getting on its feet and demanding respect it will ...

... change forever. The isolation of all those thousands of years on an island apart from the world - yes, I know about contact with the places we call Indonesia - will finally have ended when the black people themselves accept that the isolation - *isola* means an island - has ended. This will be a matter of infinite sadness, a moment when history, and time itself, must pause to wipe their eyes because the step, once taken, can never be taken back. If the aboriginal people accept the job of teaching us, whitefella Australians but perhaps more importantly the tourists, they will have joined us. This may not be a particularly welcome idea, but, if you think about it, they will have done it on the basis of equality. The watcher and the watched both know they're in a world where neither can escape the other, and that's how things are, these days.

(1) from *Journal of an expedition into the interior of tropical Australia in search of a route from Sydney to the Gulf of Carpentaria* by Thomas Mitchell (Longman Brown, London, 1848)

## What's to be done about power?

Power is humanity's hot potato. It's not good for anybody to hold it for long. It must be shared. Checks and balances should oppose its misuse. Controls should exist for its every application. Humanity has seen the abuse of power too often not to have learned. Popular sayings (Power corrupts ...) are correct, and yet, dangerous as power is, we cannot be rid of it. There is good, or necessary, political action as well as bad, and the good, the necessary, cannot be done without power to enforce. All law, all attempt to manage human activity - and we cannot do without regulation - entails the ability to enforce. Enforcement involves power. Power is paradoxical. It involves considerable danger of being vicious even when used in virtuous action. It is an unavoidable, ongoing test of the morality, the virtue, of every single action. Abuse is therefore unavoidable, but must be minimised by all involved or affected.

I speak in woolly generalities, but what else is there to do? We know all there is to be known about power. Its temptations and deceptions are established in us all. The question 'What's to be done about power?' can be rewritten as 'What can we do to make ourselves behave well?'

I see you reeling, dear reader, and counting the pages. I shall be brief.

Power takes many forms. Parents have power over their children. Dictators, or warrior-generals, give orders, and armies roll forward to fight. Politicians trade for positions of influence. Newspaper proprietors indicate by scowls, no words needed, what they want; journalists obey. Governments regulate, and shopkeepers close their doors, or open them. Police cars drive on roads where nobody's speeding. Thugs beat up someone who annoys them. Women in many parts of the world, even today, have a single moment when they're empowered to say yes or no to a marriage proposition. Power is a virtuosic chameleon, changing for every situation, but always there, lurking, sometimes hidden, but sensed by everyone whose life's in play. Any change involves a shift in power because the decision to do something, to enforce, as we said before, involves the capacity to make it happen. We are forever acquiring, or losing, powers, trying, perhaps, to win as full and varied a hand as we can. It's an endless game, and fascinating. Master-players get to the top, even if, as sometimes occurs, they've no other recommendation. Leaders of nations may be fools in most or all other respects, but if they're leaders they've outplayed the others in the local power game. It's Monopoly on a worldwide scale - or does that name date me? What do *you* call it, that board whereon you play out your games, hey?

Before moving on, we should mention one other source of power: confidence. Those who are sure they can do well will usually do well. Confidence of course is fragile; we're all familiar with sporting stars who succeed until they start failing, and then fail in what appears to be inescapable succession. Something returns their confidence and they succeed again. So it is with nations, movements ... Why is this? It seems to be because the line between success and failure is thin, and a feeling that one cannot fail is the best guarantee that one won't. There is also the fact that judgement often lies in the minds of the viewers, readers, or, perhaps the best example, those who look at paintings. The artist whose message is strong may alter the

viewing habits of those who admire his work, so much so that as the artist's work changes, so do the viewers' expectations. Continuing success is based on a continuing change in the minds of those who judge.

All these considerations take us well beyond what I shall call constitutional power, which of course has always to be supported by legal power, which in turn has to be backed by uglier, crueller forms: the bars, guns and perhaps even extermination camps of those whose power is brutally held. So why have I raised this complex matter for us to think about?

I do so because globalisation presents the old problems in new forms. If we look back to the League of Nations, we see the creation of a meeting place, a bargaining table, where *nations* could try to resolve differences. Disputes. Anything which might lead them to making war. The world had come out of what had been called The Great War, and hoped to avoid a repeat. As we know, there was a repeat, and the show with its many sideshows goes on. The first move to a constitutional internationalism was a peacemaking device. Obviously a world government will always have that role, but much more will be expected. It will have to be able to replace regimes that brutalise their own people. To do this it will need power of several sorts: military might; plenty of money; procedures to give it consistency, and legal forms which accord with its need to possess a moral ascendancy. The world body can't afford to be seen to be acting in its own interests or as the enforcer of the wishes of only a section of its members. It will have to represent the world, while at the same time disciplining restive parts thereof at the wishes of the rest, or those noisy enough to claim that they are the rest. Tricky stuff! At this point you may ask why it is that the world body is situated in New York. If we think ourselves back to the time of its creation, the answer's easy: much of Europe was in ruins, America represented humanity's new hope. New York! But why shouldn't it move? It's not so many centuries since monarchs of England moved about their constituent dukedoms, offloading the costs of their considerable households; why couldn't, or shouldn't, the world body move about, placing itself in one country after another, observing, warning, dropping hints ... If we recall, the first national parliament of our own country occupied the chambers of Victoria's parliament because it was the most stately of the nation's legislatures. The Victorian parliament took itself off to the nearby Exhibition building; we are so accustomed, today, to a national government sitting in a national parliament (the second such) that it's hard to think ourselves back into a time when the national parliament was new. Yet there was such a time, and we are moving into a time when world government of some sort or another is coming into being. Let us be bold enough to ask, 'What sort?'

This is not easy. We are already well beyond the bargaining-table, listening-room days of the League, when nations ruled the roost. Activities are thriving on all sides which have some or even much of their lives beyond the jurisdiction of nations; perhaps more importantly, people are thinking outside, or between, nations: for some, the nation is a boundary rather than a basis, something to be placated rather than drawn upon. Something is evolving which, it seems to me, is both free of nations and parasitical upon them. I am reminded of the shearing sheds of my childhood, with lean, hyperactive shearers dragging their victims from the catching pen, which was refilled from the rest of the flock. Nations, today, for all the dignity of their ancient paraphernalia, are to some extent catching pens for those who can seize a business opportunity and relocate almost anywhere. National loyalties won't determine where a business is registered, any more than ships need be registered in the ports of countries with protective standards, or sporting stars need pay tax in the land that gave them their character.

What sort? We are in a puzzling time, with opportunists opening cracks everywhere, and slipping through to make their fortunes. This is by no means altogether bad. The internet has made the surveillance systems of repressive countries out of date. Information of the sort long suppressed can girdle the earth in seconds. Networks can inform people who will never meet each other. That much of the 'information' in circulation at any time is rubbish is obvious, but the means of getting that information around is unstoppable. The world's people have been handed something by the electronic revolution which has already remade the world; power has changed its substance.

We normally think of power as 'power to'; power to legislate, power to execute, power to allocate or deprive, power to build, and so on. We should also think of people's power to resist, reject, or refuse to accept an idea. People are aware of the power of their own passivity; even if flags are forced upon them, they can flutter them daintily rather than boisterously. They can smile out of courtesy, a sign of equality, rather than out of submission. So the struggle for power reveals itself as a struggle for people's minds and in this sense local consciousness must resist or be wary of global constructs, useful as they may be. We all, today, use decimal currencies; whether or not they're called dollars hardly matters, because they're all interchangeable at the going rate, which means they're close to being the same currency. Money is money the world over. So are words: consider metre, litre, tonne, kilogram, hectare, et cetera. All are measuring devices - standards - which have become global in their usage in the course of a little over two centuries. Where we use the same words, we have the same thoughts. Where now do we fall back when we want to resist the global? Places with firm footing are hard to find. Power rests finally on the power of ideas, which are agreements that certain words mean much the same to you as to me. Power is inbuilt in words and manifests itself in the actions that follow: you speak, I genuflect, you say a holy name, I cross myself. If this is so, you, obviously, hold the power. Power, then, is a matter of belief systems, and they, to go back to the start of this essay, are not easy to manage.

Although they can be imposed, as all the world knows. Our television shows us glimpses of the current Pope, in terminal decline, tottering about the earth restoring faith. One admires him at the same time as one despises what he offers. It's hard to laugh when one is saddened, or is it? Laughing and crying have always been associated, and perhaps, strange as it may seem, it's time to bring them into these thoughts about power. Cartoonists are the best snipers the world has ever seen. Nothing's so dangerous that it can't be laughed at. Laughter leaves nothing broken, but things are changed by it. How can this be so? What does this have to do with power? A great deal. Laughter separates us from the thing we laugh at. Laughter re-sets the terms on which we accept. We draw the sting, or at least some of it, of the thing we laugh at. If our streets were full of Uncle Sams, grotesquely performing, we'd be in less danger of being Americanised, not more. Continuous caricature, endless comment, could be our salvation because the grip of satire is vicelike. Humour is dangerously ambivalent. People apologise, 'It was just a joke.' There's hardly anything more serious than a joke, because when people laugh they are adjusting the tensions of their obedience. That this is of concern to those who exercise power is obvious. They have to stop us laughing at them. They must keep us afraid. Out come the guns, the batons; on go the lights in the torture chambers. Who's laughing? Arrest that person. That one, there! Drag the prisoner inside, get the questioning underway. The door slams, screaming begins. It's hard to laugh, isn't it? Not very funny, is

it? We know who's in control, don't we? We're shitting ourselves; they've wiped the smiles off our faces ...

Normally we don't let things get to that stage, do we? Not in this country, we say, knowing that such things go on elsewhere and will continue for centuries yet ... unless we laugh at the dictators, the standover men, the mafiosi. The crudest humour's too kind for the world's power-lust people, who have to be restrained by any means available. Cut them down to size before they get on top of us. Laugh at them. Imitate them. Dress like them, ridicule them, make everyone recognise the imitation as being the reality it is. Get everyone laughing, shrieking, remembering, smiling inwardly when the power's reimposed and it's dangerous, again, to be seen laughing. Give people a resistance they can keep hidden, to be brought out only when it's safe, among friends, in the cellar over a late night brandy. The mind that can't laugh is truly lost. That reminds me, did you hear the one about George Washington's axe? The museum kept it up to date with two new heads and three new handles. Sorry I haven't got any jokes about Stealth bombers but there must be some somewhere, probably in the USAF, if the truth be known.

Knowing the truth; it's the only defence against the misuse of power, isn't it? We have to keep telling each other what we know about what's going on. People who want power often feel ashamed of their desires, so, if we ensure they hear us talking, we might restrain them. Even the brutal have some idea of what people think, so we have to let our thoughts play freely about the lives of those who'd like to control us. Laughing is a group activity as well as a solitary one, and it's a great way of keeping the sane and the decent in the majority, because it's one of the greatest ways of bonding people, and bonding, after all, beats hell out of being bound, which is what those who want power want to do to us. So the sign of freedom is a joke? Yes, I think it is.

I've been talking about laughter as resistance to power. The other great antidote is knowledge. Awareness. Those who are stone-blind ignorant can't exercise restraint because they don't understand the levers they need to pull, or because they're so easily persuaded that they have no resistance to rhetoric. The world that's well informed is well protected. The internet, as discussed a moment ago, is immensely valuable, but it's also chaotic. Those who use it don't necessarily have well-trained minds. To be sceptical is to have made a start but the body politic needs knowledge circulating endlessly in a disciplined, relentless stream. The health of a nation can be gauged in something like the way a doctor takes blood pressure and listens to the heart. But what about the globe, the world beyond the jurisdiction of national governments and regulatory bodies, what can we do about that? It's the problem looming for us as organisations, as stated above, wriggle out of nations' grips.

Perhaps there's no answer yet. We can hardly regulate a world that's still being conceived. Perhaps we're in a somewhat anarchic stage where nations have to make patch-up arrangements to cover whatever's happening. Some of my best friends like anarchy! The only way to control it is to cede powers to bodies that haven't been created yet, let alone having earned our trust. No thanks. We're in a phase of human history where we can do little but watch, and try to control influences that cross our borders. It doesn't sound much? It isn't much, but liberties mustn't be taken off people by those who're fearful of what might happen. We'll do more damage by restricting than by allowing the supranationals to operate. They have to have a base somewhere, which means they can be got at by the exertion of pressure on the nation that comes closest to owning them. If that's the United States, or the European Union, we're

not actually going backwards, even if we're not advancing. Power's always getting loose, it's never under total control, it's always dangerous, always necessary ...

Humanity doesn't change much, does it, though it goes through good and bad phases. We're heading out into the unknown again, my friends, and all we can say is that we've done it often enough. When European sailors set sail for China and found America, they could hardly be said to have known what they were doing. It's a rarity for humans to know what they're doing unless it's been done before, and that's a luxury we don't enjoy today. So sleep well and see what the world's like tomorrow. That there will be tomorrow is about all we can be sure of.