

Eighth Manning Clark Lecture

Restoring the Primacy of Reason – ‘Telling Truth to Power’ in an Age of Fundamentalism

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I feel privileged to have been invited to deliver the Eighth Annual Manning Clark Lecture here in Canberra where he lived from 1949 until his death in 1991. I begin, as he would have wished, by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land where we meet, the Ngunnawal people. I also pay tribute not only to the memory of Manning Clark and his wife, the incomparable Dymphna, and members of his family.

Manning Clark

Charles Hope Manning Clark (1915-1991), born in Sydney, son of an Anglican clergyman, was brought up in Victoria, attended State schools, then Melbourne Grammar and Melbourne University. The political scientist W. Macmahon Ball was a major influence on the young Manning as he was to be, fifteen years later, on the young me. In 1937 Manning won a scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford and among his teachers were Hugh Trevor-Roper, A J P Taylor and Christopher Hill, representing a wide spectrum of opinion. He began work on de Tocqueville, was active on the cricket pitch and a visit to Germany in 1938 reinforced his detestation of the Nazi regime. In 1939 in Oxford he married Dymphna Lodewyckx (1916-2000), a linguist, returned to Australia in mid-1940, and – rejected for army service – taught history at Geelong Grammar. He then began reading Australian history systematically.

It comes as a shock to realise that when Manning Clark was appointed as a lecturer in Australian history at Melbourne University in 1945, he was Australia’s first. Among his students were Geoffrey Blainey, Geoffrey Serle, Ken Inglis and Ian Turner. In 1949 he became Professor of History at the Canberra University College (CUC) which was absorbed into the Australian National University in 1960. In 1972 he became Professor of Australian History at ANU, the first time this title had been used at an Australian university. In earlier generations, other academics such as Arnold Wood and Ernest Scott wrote extensively about Australia, but they were not specialists.

I met Manning Clark first in February 1950, at a student camp at Ocean Grove.

As a historian and prophet, somewhat in the tradition of Thomas Carlyle, Manning Clark had a powerful influence on many Australians of my generation. I read him avidly, and although never taught by him, I seized every opportunity to attend his lectures and book launches, and we had friends in common, Stephen Murray Smith and Geoffrey Serle being the most prominent.

Until about 1954, he was generally regarded as a moderate, even conservative, critic of historians on the Left. In addition to Carlyle, his major stylistic influences were Gibbon and Macaulay (Thomas, not James), the King James Bible, and the great Russian novelists. None – not even Tolstoy – were conspicuously Left influences. He showed little interest in the concept of class struggle.

In 1962 the first of six substantial volumes in Manning Clark's *A History of Australia* appeared, and created controversy from the outset. The series, which took twenty-five years to complete, was written from a universalist, almost Dostoevskian, perspective. I read every word. Clark's writing was heroic in scale, passionately committed, with some aspects of a novel, with huge, flawed, possessed characters. The work ran to 2651 pages, emphasising the period of European settlement, beginning in 1788, ending in 1935. Events up to the settling of Sydney Cove in 1788 were covered in 73 pages and a six page Epilogue follows the end of the grand narrative.

Manning Clark argued passionately at the close of *A History of Australia*, that 'this generation' [he was writing in 1986] had a chance to 'make their own history...With the end of the domination by the straiteners, the enlargers of life now have their chance'. He died in 1991 and on this occasion, his prophetic gift seemed to have failed. However, Paul Keating took up the analysis in his 2002 Manning Clark Lecture describing the Liberals as 'punishers and straiteners', a charge vigorously repudiated by John Howard. Frank Brennan, in his 2006 Lecture, argued that the straiteners 'appeal to our baser instincts in times of uncertainty, isolation and material acquisitiveness'.

The History, especially the later volumes, came under unprecedented, even savage, conservative attack and Manning Clark was denounced as the high priest of the 'black armband' school of historians, who constantly denigrated European settlement and British institutions. It was always a wildly excessive claim but it marked the declaration of the 'history wars' which is still being fought.

The gap between Manning Clark's and Geoffrey Blainey's views was grossly exaggerated. Paradoxically, Blainey took a serious interest in Aborigines and women's issues long before Clark.

Several elements in Manning Clark's writing had a strong appeal to me. From childhood, as a voracious reader of history, I was far more attracted by the macro than the micro, looking for the universal, and was fascinated especially by history's overlap with politics and biography. Second was his sense of the apocalyptic, that the transcendent was locked up, even concealed, in the conventional and familiar. Next was his fascination with the great Russian novelists, especially Feodor Dostoevsky, with their uncanny insight into the complexities of human character. Fourth was his deep preoccupation with the relationship

between the secular and the material, and experience of the 'numinous'. I often heard Manning quote the words of Ivan Karamazov: 'I want to be there when everyone suddenly finds out what it has all been for. All religions on earth are built on this longing, and I am a believer'. I felt exactly the same. The word 'numinous', from the Latin *numen* ('deity'), is defined as 'awe-inspiring' or 'filled with a sense of the presence of divinity' and was first used in the medieval era, then revived in 1917 by Rudolf Otto, a German theologian, and taken up by Carl Gustav Jung, William Temple and C S Lewis. Pursuit of the 'numinous' overlapped with Manning's 'quest for grace', which became the title of his last book (Viking, 1990). His characteristic generosity of spirit was not reciprocated by his attackers who spectacularly misread his noble intentions. He pursued flashes of light to illuminate the human condition and the juxtaposition of good and evil, setting out a grand narrative which opened up the *terra incognita* within us all, sometimes going deeper and further than the documentary evidence would allow. We also shared a passion for J S Bach.

When I was a Minister in the Hawke Government I used to encourage Manning to come to Parliament House – both Old and New, at the time of transition – for lunch, to meet MPs and then to stay on for Question Time in the House of Representatives. I took many photographs of him, which he said he liked but he may have been diplomatic. I used to quote some of my favourite sentences from Lord Acton to Manning: 'Beware of too much explaining, lest we end by too much excusing: truth is ill-served when the strong man with the dagger is followed by the weaker man with the sponge. First, the criminal who slays; then the sophist who defends the slayer'. He nodded his approval.

Of course, there were important areas that we did not discuss, such as his passion for the Carlton Football Club. I later served as a patron of Manning Clark House in Canberra.

An age of oversimplification in public policy: the assault on reason, and decline of 'the public good'.

After 2001, fears of terrorism, and emphasis on national security and patriotism, dethroned reason, elevated the irrational, debased democratic practice, perhaps permanently, so that the rule of law was disposable, truth, evidence and analysis became marginal, or irrelevant, leading to the concept of 'the new normal' in the United States, and in Australia fear that arguing an alternative point of view would be political suicide. At its worst, it was an attack on the principles of the Enlightenment, an attack on rationality and a return to the pre-modern.

As I was concluding my autobiography, *A Thinking Reed* in 2005, I felt deeply disturbed by the cumulative effect of serious changes in the political process since 1979. Reason seemed to have been abandoned in high public policy, leadership failed, political parties gave up even a pretence of commitment to principle, the politics of greed was morally bankrupt. The political process has been deformed, Parliaments have lost much of their moral authority, the public service has adopted the cult of managerialism and been increasingly politicised, universities have become trading corporations, the media is preoccupied with infotainment, while lobbying and use of consultants ensures that vested interest is more influential than community interest. Public debate is dominated by the black arts of 'spin', so that 'framing' the debate becomes central. Appeals to emotion, especially fear and gullibility, and to

immediate economic or cultural self-interest ('wedge politics') are exploited cynically and ruthlessly. Establishing the truth of a complex proposition (evolution, stem cell research, climate change, going to war in Iraq, Industrial Relations changes) is less significant than how simple arguments, essentially propaganda, can be sold. Unilateralism had failed, terrorism was spreading and the great problems of poverty, disease, famine and climate change were ignored.

The English writer Francis Wheen argued:

Although 1979 may not have the same historical resonance as 1789, 1848 or 1917, it too marks a moment when the world was jolted by a violent reaction to the complacency of the existing order. Two events from that year can both now be recognised as harbingers of a new era: the return of the Ayatollah Khomeini to Iran, and the election of Margaret Thatcher's Tories in Britain.(1)

He pointed to the philosopher Roger Scruton's concern about a counter-revolution 'which puts our entire tradition of learning in question... Reason is now on the retreat, both as an ideal and as a reality', a repudiation of the principles of the 18th-century Enlightenment, in which 'despite their quarrelsome diversity' most thinkers 'shared certain intellectual traits – an insistence on intellectual autonomy, a rejection of tradition and authority as the infallible sources of truth, a loathing for bigotry and persecution, a commitment to free enquiry, a belief...that knowledge is indeed power'.(2)

The second half of the 18th-century eliminated trials and executions for witchcraft and heresy, restricted imposition of the death penalty, proscribed torture, began rational treatment of the insane and ended the slave trade, promoted religious toleration, including emancipation of the Jews, and the systematic organisation and propagation of knowledge, through encyclopedias and dictionaries.

'Enlightenment' has lost its historic meaning and is now often used in the context of self-awareness cults, feng shui, the transforming power of crystals, mysticism, the Rosicrucians and 'new age' religions.

The Islamic revolution, marked by Khomeini's overthrow of the Shah in February 1979, attacked Western materialism, democratic pluralism, modernity, scientific method, the concept of progress, and imposed a theocracy and *Shariah* law, including strict observance of Islamic principles, traditions and punishments, such as stoning and amputation. Iran held U.S. embassy staff hostage in Teheran for 444 days (1979-80), effectively destroying Jimmy Carter's presidency, and assisting the election of Ronald Reagan. Iran's leaders regarded Saddam Hussein as an apostate, and in the bitter Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) the Americans assisted Saddam, providing him with 'weapons of mass destruction' (WMD).

Margaret Thatcher's victory in May 1979 repudiated bipartisan support for the interventionist economic policies developed by John Maynard Keynes, replacing them with market fundamentalism.

She also denigrated 'the public sphere' (such as public education or public health), and emphasised 'the private sphere', marking the end of a generation of consensus politics.

Four fundamentalist elements that Khomeini and Thatcher shared were a conviction of infallibility, scepticism about 'progress', a commitment to absolutes and an invoking of the Manichean contest between Good and Evil.

When writing *Sleepers, Wake!* in 1979-81, I worried about the implications of adopting economics as the dominant intellectual paradigm, and its impact on non-material values, as if nothing else mattered. Inevitably, as the public domain contracted, education, health and child care were regarded as commodities to be traded rather than elements of the public good, universities fell into the hands of accountants and auditors, research was judged by the potential for economic return and in the arts best sellers displaced the masterpiece. Language became deformed. Citizens, passengers, patients, patrons, audiences, taxpayers, even students, all became 'customers' or 'clients', as if the trading nexus was the most important defining element in life. Values were commercialised, all with a dollar equivalent. Essentially, the 'nation-state' was transformed into a 'market-state'.

The cult of management became a dominant factor in public life, exactly as James Burnham had predicted in *The Managerial Revolution* (1941), taking up a prophetic insight by Karl Marx. In Britain in the Thatcher era, and in Australia, after 1983, there was a growing conviction that relying on specialist knowledge and experience might create serious distortions in policy-making, and that generic managers, usually accountants, or economists, would provide a more detached view. As a result, expertise was fragmented, otherwise, health specialists would push health issues, educators education, scientists science, and so on.

At its most brutal, the argument was put that there are no health, education, transport, environment or media problems, only management problems: get the management right, and all the other problems will disappear. Coupled with the managerial dogma was the reluctance of senior public servants to give what used to be called 'frank and fearless' advice. Generic managers promoted the use of 'management-speak', a coded alternative to natural language. It helped protect insiders from open enquiry. A consultant has been defined as somebody to whom you lend your watch, then ask him to tell you the time. Consultants, eager for repeat business, provide government with exactly the answers that they want to receive. Lobbyists, many of them former politicians or bureaucrats, are part of the decision-making inner circle.

The managerial revolution involves a covert attack on democratic processes because many important decisions are made without public debate, community knowledge or parliamentary scrutiny. The process of 'public private partnerships', known by the acronym 'PPP', has been widely adopted in the UK and Australia and involves a substantial impact on public policy with a long term cost to the community. However, the process is far from transparent.

Fundamentalism v. rationalism

The decay of mainstream religion has not led to an increase in rationality and enlightened scepticism. Instead the move has been towards fundamentalism, a variety of cults, primitive superstition, confusion and paranoia. Fundamentalism is a relatively modern concept, beginning in the United States in 1909 with the publication of *The Fundamentals*, four volumes which asserted the inerrancy of Scripture and attacked scientific, rational, historical, psychological or other secular explanations of how the world worked. The authoritarian premise in fundamentalism asserts, 'Since I believe, you must too'. This suggests that the challenges of modern life are not to be worked through, by applying reason and questioning, because the answers have already been laid down, generally in print, and may not be contested. Fundamentalism now has a Muslim counterpart which, like the Christian original, is a reaction to complexity and uncertainty. The more complex the world seems, the more people yearn for simple explanations, a formula which provides the meaning of everything.

Christian fundamentalists see the Bible as a magic artefact, printed if not written in English, read selectively or arbitrarily and regarded as the unshakeable word of God right down to THE END.

Fundamentalism and bibliolatry seem to offer cheap grace, a superficial transaction promising lifelong, even post-life, guarantees, just like buying a commercial product such as assurance. Questioning, individual judgment or knowledge are not required, and may be actively discouraged. Fundamentalism is not merely intellectually crippling, it is profoundly contemptuous of Jesus whose teaching is far more profound, universal, stimulating, controversial and compassionate than fundamentalists will concede. Fundamentalism offers a creed without history, without scholarship, without depth, without context, and yet its phenomenal growth confirms that it meets community needs and anxieties far more than mainstream churches.

Australia is a strikingly secular society compared to the United States, where religious observance is high and fundamentalist religion is influential in politics, education, health and research, despite the clear separation of Church and State set out in the Constitution. In the United States, 40 per cent of citizens claim to be 'born again'. Nevertheless, rates of homicide, sexually transmitted diseases, abortion and teen pregnancy are far higher in the 'Bible belt' of the US than in secular Australia.

'Creation science' has only a marginal market share in Australia, while in the United States it is entrenched as a significant paradigm in some states. Relentless commercialisation and commodification of life has not been inhibited by American religious observance. Religious polarisation is far deeper there than in Australia and the Them v. Us dichotomy more conflicted.

In 'Made in England' (2003), published as a *Quarterly Essay*, David Malouf distinguished between the mind-set and language of founding fathers in the American colonies and the colonisation of New Holland/ Australia by act of state. The American colonists from the 17th-century were 'passionately evangelical and utopian, deeply imbued with the religious fanaticism and radical violence of the time...' Slavery was still an open question, and so was the concept of divine-right monarchy. In the late 18th-century, Australia, originally a convict settlement, tough and pragmatic, lacked a millenarian element, and was overwhelmingly

practical in its operations. After the Enlightenment, slavery and absolute monarchy were no longer on the political or social agenda: they had become settled issues. We had no place for a 'language of the transcendental'. Our religious practices, like so much in Australia, became more suburban than universal.

After 2000 the most dynamic political force in the United States was a coalition between evangelical fundamentalism, the neocons (neo-conservatives) and corporate power, strongly supported by mass-media ownership. This was not Fascism in a European context, but there were disturbing ideological parallels, which Philip Roth took up in his novel *The Plot Against America* (2004). President George W. Bush claims Jesus as his 'favourite philosopher' and believes in the infallibility of Scripture. Bush, unlike his Episcopalian father, is a Southern Methodist, a group which broke away from mainstream Methodists in 1940, strong only in the former slave states. 'Prosperity Christianity', while stopping short of insisting that God is American, sees the hand of God in establishing United States hegemony, rejects argument and analysis. It was hard to reconcile 'Prosperity Christianity' with Luke xiv: 33: 'So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple'.

Marion Maddox argues that

Sociologists of religion have long pointed out that as societies become more secular, religion comes to be seen in increasingly instrumental terms. It becomes less a system of beliefs relating to a cosmic order that makes claims upon us than a toolbox of therapeutic and goal-setting techniques that can be adopted selectively to achieve individual ends...(3)

Churches have sharp differences about the problem of poverty. Whose responsibility is it? Is poverty the result of personal failure in which destitution is the penalty for non-performance (the Hobbesian view) or is the pauper the victim of society, which then imposes on society the moral responsibility to provide restitution or support (Lockean). This issue has profound moral implications and there are deep divisions within the churches. Fundamentalist and charismatic churches tend to be opposed to the 'welfare state' while mainstream churches tend to support it.

It is ironic that the United States, with the world's greatest universities and an unequalled record of scientific achievement, should have an enormous anti-science constituency. (4) Nearly 50 per cent of Americans consider Genesis to be the final authority on the creation of the world, a significant minority are doubtful about a heliocentric universe, 40 per cent believe that angels exist and 75 per cent reject Darwin's theory of evolution.

September 11, 2001 and 'the new normal'.

Fear of difference has been compounded by terrorism and other horrors, before and after September 11, 2001. Appeals to fear are quick, easy and dirty, while rebuilding confidence is hard, complex and long term. Words are bullets – or chain saws – and damage caused quickly may take years to repair, if ever.

The year 2001, when politics dropped out of politics, and paranoia broke the spirit of political Oppositions contributed to my sense of exile.

The September 11 attack by al-Qaida on the twin towers of New York's World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in Washington, causing nearly 3000 deaths, was mass murder. These cruelly calculated acts of terror provoked understandable outrage, but then led to a deluded attack on the wrong target. These cataclysmic events impelled governments to react instinctively rather than rationally, reducing the role of evidence, analysis and enlightened scepticism in policy formulation. Usama bin Laden declared war on Western materialist values, and the United States and its allies used their material/military strength to retaliate. Since most of the 9/11 terrorists were Saudi nationals, as was Usama, Saudi Arabia, where they were recruited and financed, might have been a logical target for retaliation but the US never considered the option. The first target was the Taliban in Afghanistan, a plausible choice, because terrorists were trained there by al-Qaida. But the main target, irrationally, was Saddam Hussein's brutal and secular regime in Iraq, old enemies of bin Laden and al-Qaida.

Some aspects of the post 9/11 world were baffling. The Americans had been victims of an 'asymmetrical war' on 9/11 and did not know how to respond appropriately. Americans, understandably shocked by the 2001 attacks, had a deep psychological need to retaliate, somewhere, preferably against a state, and Afghanistan, it seemed, was not enough. They were instinctively drawn to a traditional war, state v. state, even if in the case of Iraq, it was a weak and failing one, and – even more significant – the most secular Arab nation in the Middle East – strongly opposed to Islamic fundamentalism and a countervailing force to Iran. After 2001 I never doubted that the United States would invade Iraq. I felt more threatened by al-Qaida and its allies than by Iraq because its sphere of operations was wider, more random and not predictable: Nairobi and Dar es Salaam one day, New York and Washington another, then Madrid, Bali and London.

Some apologists for a pre-emptive strike against Iraq argued that Bush and Donald Rumsfeld should not be judged too harshly for concentrating on the wrong target because their reaction has to be seen through the 'prism' of their own experience. If not a moving, elusive target, then a fixed one. If not Usama, then Saddam, if not al-Qaida then why not Iraq? They showed 'moral clarity', even if they punished the wrong enemy.

On 21 October 2001, Vice-President Dick Cheney, in justifying use of Executive power to restrict civil liberties, limit access to courts, restrict debate, and cripple Freedom of Information legislation told *The Washington Post*: 'Many of the steps we have now been forced to take will become permanent in American life, part of a "new normalcy" (sic) that reflects an understanding of the world as it is.'

In the United States, writers are now adopting, and some promoting, the term the 'new normal.' In this view, the 'old normal', where decisions might have been based on evidence, analysis, reason and judgment, using techniques refined by the Enlightenment of the 18th-century, had come to an end on 9/11. The 'new normal' depends on instant decisions based on 'gut', 'instinct' and 'faith'. Increasingly, policies have to be 'faith based.'

On 26 February 2007, the Google search engine listed 486,000,000 citations of the 'new normal', but the term has had virtually no currency or recognition outside the United States.

As Joan Didion wrote:

The 'new normal' required that we adopt a 'new paradigm' which in turn required, according to an internal White House memo signed by President Bush, 'new thinking in the law of war', in other words a reconsideration of the Geneva Convention's prohibitions against torture. 'Torture'...had become 'extreme interrogation', which under the 'new paradigm' could be justified when the information obtained by interrogation failed to tally with the information required by policy...

The word 'truth'...had been redefined, the empirical method abandoned: 'the truth' was now whatever we needed it to be, the confirmation of those propositions or policies in which we 'believed in our hearts', or had 'faith'...It was now possible to 'believe' in one proposition or another on the basis of no evidence that it was so...as if the existence of weapons [of mass destruction] was a doctrinal point on the order of transubstantiation...(5)

The Bush Administration is encouraging 'faith-based' schools, charities, prisoner rehabilitation and even national parks (the last promoting the creationist explanation that God formed the Grand Canyon in six days).

October 21, 2004.

In an era of 'Twin Fundamentalisms', Christian and Islamic, when proponents insist, 'I am carrying out God's will', God does not intervene to confirm which view is correct. One of the disturbing questions of the 21st-century is why the United States, with its sophisticated knowledge base in research, industry, arts, literature and music should have such a primitive, fundamentalist attitude to politics, religion and understanding the outside world. Both Bush and Blair are sympathetic to 'creation science' and 'intelligent design' being included in the syllabus of public schools.

Fundamentalist rhetoric in the United States contributed to a radical simplification of foreign policy as the struggle between forces of light v. forces of darkness. Peter Singer drew attention to Bush's use of the word 'evil' as a noun 914 times over two years in speeches made as President, raising 'the question of what meaning evil can have in a secular modern world'.(6) The significance of the invocation of EVIL is that it avoids the need for evidence, analysis, thought or working through complexity. The forces of anti-Christ are easier to attack if personalised, as they have been in the United States for generations: Hitler, Tojo, Stalin, Mao, the two Kims, Ho, Castro, Gaddafi, Aided, Khomeini, Saddam.

Bush has far more in common with Usama bin Laden than he has with me: both are on a divine mission, fundamentalist, punitive, monocultural, prefer faith over evidence, believe in pre-emptive strikes and that necessity overrides the rule of law, manipulate fear, confuse

revenge with justice, lack scepticism or intellectual detachment, are prepared to rewrite history, anti-scientific in mindset, resistant to ideas, surround themselves with unquestioning enthusiasts and never ask, 'What if I am wrong?'

For the United States, invading Iraq was a 'faith based' decision, not 'evidence based', but for Australia it was neither, determined by fear of offending the White House. Under the 'new normal', a *belief* that the WMDs existed was enough and the priority was for immediate action, not for understanding or judgment. Control of Iraq's huge oil reserves, which would have been a completely rational (but not morally uplifting) reason for invasion, was never mentioned. If Iraq had been the world's greatest producer of broccoli, Saddam, for all his hideous cruelty, would not have been disturbed.

After the invasion, WMDs were displaced by 'regime change' as the *ex post facto* justification for war, and confident assertions about their existence were heard no more. Then WMDs became irrelevant, and discussing them, ultimately, a source of irritation: 'Why mention them? We can't rewrite history'. The WMD fiasco was a textbook example of retrospective judgment.

Bush said, 'I'm not a textbook player. I'm a gut player', and he refers to his 'instincts', which are often 'visceral'. He rarely refers to evidence, or to his knowledge or experience. Failure to explain coherently and avoiding complexity may have a powerful electoral appeal to voters who feel threatened and confused anyway. Bush's dyslexia may actually add to his political appeal.

In 2002, the President claimed that Iraq had a fleet of unmanned aircraft with the capacity to strike US cities, but the fleet mysteriously disappeared. Perhaps they will turn up in somebody's shed. Australia's leaders should be asking (but are not): 'On what evidence are decisions affecting life and death made? How far does fear, much of it rational, some of it not, influence judgment?'

Before the 2004 Presidential elections I made a glum prediction that bin Laden would intervene to help Bush's campaign because a second term for George W. Bush would reinforce al-Qaida's apocalyptic view of the world. He did that with his televised address on 29 October.

Since World War II, the political heartland/homeland in the United States has moved South and West. Many factors contribute: demography, climate, lifestyle, ageing. The American Civil War is not yet over, but this time the Confederates seem to be winning. No US President has been elected from the North since John F. Kennedy from Massachusetts in 1960.(7)

Southern values now dominate US politics. Emphasis on American patriotism, exceptionalism and the export of democracy, United States style, overlooks the complexity and ambiguity of national history, a half slave state 1789-1865, *de jure* segregated state 1865-1954 and a *de facto* one from 1954.

In 2004, George W. Bush's defeat of Senator John Kerry from Massachusetts was significant, but not overwhelming. Bush, with 51 per cent of the popular vote, won the Old Confederacy and the heartland of Middle America, areas which are historically isolationist, morally conservative, with strong fundamentalist and evangelical churches, committed to gun ownership and the death penalty. Kerry, with 48 per cent, won the Pacific coast, the north-east, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Simon Schama, eminent Anglo-American historian, incandescent with fury, argued that the United States was now deeply split between 'Worldly America', which Kerry won by a landslide, and 'Godly America', which Bush won overwhelmingly. Worldly America is 'pragmatic, practical, rational and sceptical' while Godly America is 'mythic, messianic, conversionary'. Worldly America engages with the world and is nourished by it, while Godly America 'turns its back on that dangerous, promiscuous, impure world... If Worldly America is a city, a street and a port, Godly America is at its heart... a church, a farm and a barracks, places that are walled, fenced and consecrated. Worldly America is about finding civil ways to share crowded space... Godly America is about making over space in its image.'(8)

The Cambridge political philosopher David Runciman points to 'the familiar phenomenon of a leader who rules by generating fear of the unknown, rooted in some iconic catastrophe to which such fear can be related. The "war on terror" was ideal for this purpose, a war that had no enemy and could thus never be won, a war that need never end. As in George Orwell's *Nineteen eighty-four*, such a war empowers a leader to fight any battle he chooses, and to require any sacrifice, since he can declare the existence of the State to be at risk'.(9) Was I the only person to comment on the similarity between Usama and Orwell's Emmanuel Goldstein?

In *Nineteen eighty-four* the rulers of Oceania propose three central mantras, 'War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength.' In the 2004 Presidential election, ignorance proved to be a powerful campaigning tool. Complexity could be ignored. Only one point of view needed to be considered. There was no room for doubt.

Under the 'old normal' before September 11, 2001, I assumed that our side, the democracies, never began wars (although, as in Vietnam, they were prepared to intervene in existing colonial struggles), even when our opponents were brutal and corrupt and when a pre-emptive strike might have been to our strategic advantage. This assumption no longer applies, and the moral basis for action is now displaced by sheer opportunism and adventurism. Torture is now routinely justified instead of being outlawed. The arguments 'We only torture in a good cause' and 'If they can do it, so can we...' should have been dismissed out of hand, but were not. We should have asked: 'How are torturers recruited? Self-selection? Going with the flow? Does the Eichmann defence of 'superior orders' apply?'

The rule of law, presumption of innocence, access to courts and legal representation can all be withdrawn at will. Violence and sexual humiliation of prisoners was routinely carried out by American military personnel at the Abu Ghraib prison, itself a

dark memorial to Saddam's abuses, until media disclosures forced a change in practice. Moving prospective torturees to a jurisdiction beyond the reach of US courts is coyly described as 'rendition' or 'extraordinary rendition', meaning 'outsourced, privatised torture'. Freedom of Information requests are refused and 'plausible deniability' becomes the norm.

It is intriguing that the US – although identifying Baathist Syria with the enemy camp – was prepared to make use of Syria for 'extraordinary rendition' and outsourced torture. However, American use of Guantánamo Bay in Castro's Cuba is no odder as a precedent.

Albert Camus wrote: 'Man's greatness lies in his decision to be stronger than his condition. And if his condition is unjust, he has only one way of overcoming it, which is to be just himself'.(10)

What happened to the rule of law? Presumption of innocence? Habeas corpus? Constitutional guarantees? They only apply when convenient. There are no absolutes.

The 'new normal' is pre-modern in its rejection of objective evidence. Glaucon's argument in favour of the rule of force that Socrates dismissed so convincingly in Plato's *Republic* is current again. The Salem witch-trials provoked Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953). Will 'faith based' politics stimulate a new generation of playwrights and essayists, or will they all be employed as spin-doctors?

We live in an era of instinctive, reactive and ill-informed leaders and followers, marked by contempt for truth, living by the dictum that 'the end justifies the means'. It hardly matters whether that view is driven by cynicism or ideology.

Francis Fukuyama, who became an inspiration to American neoconservatives with his thesis on 'the end of history', came to repudiate his admirers. He argued that, through a combination of ignorance and incompetence, they assumed that Communism's sudden collapse in 1989 would be a model for an equally sudden collapse of Islamic fundamentalism after which democracy, American style, introduced by military force, would emerge as a default position in the Middle East. (11)

'Objectivity' and the problem of double standards

Every government hates a media outlet that is not a cheer squad for its policies and personalities but access to diversity of opinion is a central element in a pluralistic democracy.

In the United States and Australia the most outstanding recent example of double standards has been over the treatment of Iraq's alleged 'weapons of mass destruction' and the alleged threat they posed to the West, compared with reaction to global warming/ climate change and the human contribution to rising CO² levels in the atmosphere.

Despite scientific consensus, the United States and Australia have been isolated in the developed world in refusing to accept that human activity contributes to global warming, with more extreme weather events, both floods and droughts, and more severe hurricanes. Australia's *per capita* contribution to Greenhouse gas emissions is now No. 1 in the world, but in absolute terms the US is the greatest polluter, although China is rapidly catching up.

Jim Hansen of NASA (*NYRB*, July 13, 2006) pointed out that in the Greenhouse gas/climate change/global warming controversy, many US media outlets insisted that any arguments supporting the thesis that human activity was contributing to the problem had to be countered by a 'contrarian' spokesperson, a sceptic about global warming. Since senior climatologists, meteorologists and atmospheric physicists support the 'Greenhouse' thesis by at least 95 per cent to 5 per cent, a forced, artificial 50/50 balance between proponents and 'contrarians' gave a completely misleading impression of the state of the science, as if the issue was completely open, with no urgency about curbing CO² emissions. This gave airspace and column centimetres to some very dubious expertise. It also enabled non-signatories to the Kyoto Treaty (all four of them, the US, Australia, Monaco and Lichtenstein) to evade a scientific confrontation, since they insisted that the debate was not between science v. government, or science v. industry, but between scientists v. scientists. At times scientific consensus in the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) became itself a subject for attack – climate scientists were accused of 'group think', presumably in striking contrast to the pluralism and openness of the resources and motor industries.

A similar situation has occurred in the US over the evolution v. 'creationism' or evolution v. 'intelligent design' debate. In sharp distinction, the Iraq WMD controversy was not conspicuous for exposure to 'contrarian' argument, which was perhaps deemed to be against the national interest.

There are other significant contemporary controversies about evidence. 'Holocaust deniers', such as David Irving, challenge the historicity of the extermination of 6 million Jews in the 'Final Solution', citing the lack of a paper trail of documents. The tobacco industry and retailers vigorously contest the linkage between smoking and lung cancer, despite overwhelming clinical evidence, pointing out that some heavily smoking people, Japanese and Greek males for example, have long life expectancies.

As Prime Minister, John Howard perfected the idea that compassion is an Australian export, but not an import. We were prepared to fight for the Iraqis, whether they liked it or not, but we would not let Saddam's victims come here as refugees. Nor would we admit refugees from Aceh whose habitat had been swept into the ocean.

The case of David Hicks raises disturbing examples of double standards. It is inconceivable that Hicks could have been held by, say, the French, or the Russians, under comparable conditions as at Guantánamo Bay, without expressions of outrage from John Howard, or even Philip Ruddock.

No American citizen could be detained at Guantánamo Bay because it would violate the US Bill of Rights – but Australian citizens are liable so long as its Government makes no protest. Prime Minister Howard and the US Ambassador Robert Macallum have already declared

Hicks guilty of unspecified but serious offences, and now want him to be convicted of something (almost anything will do) by some tribunal, anywhere but in Australia. Given the composition of the Military Commission set up to try Hicks, and its ability to rely on uncontested and unchallengeable evidence, some extracted by torture, it is inconceivable that Hicks could be acquitted. (If such a miracle occurred, an acquittal would be profoundly embarrassing to the US and Australian Governments).

Joseph Lelyveld, former editor of *The New York Times*, wrote in *The New York Review of Books* (February 15, 2007):

The Bush Administration seems never to have put it quite so baldly but in its rush to consolidate its authority after the terrorist attacks of September 11, it came close to asserting the power of the commander in chief to declare anyone in the world, of whatever citizenship or location, “an unlawful combatant” and – solely on the basis of that designation – to detain that person indefinitely without charge, beyond reach of any court. As we now know, it then acted on its own theory; according to a list being compiled by Human Rights Watch, alleged terrorists were detained at American behest in Mauritania, Bosnia, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen – as well as Afghanistan and the border areas of Pakistan where most al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters were captured.

The Canadian philosopher Ronald Wright argues: ‘States arrogate to themselves the power of coercive violence: the right to crack the whip, execute prisoners, send young men to the battlefield. From this stems... [what] J.M. Coetzee has called “the black flower of civilization” – torture, wrongful imprisonment, violence for display – the forging of might into right’. States employ ‘various styles of human sacrifice’... as forms of ‘the ultimate political theatre’.

On major issues, it is depressingly common to hear the mantra, ‘There is no alternative’ (TINA). The task of Government and its advisers is to find a formula, or sales-pitch, try it out on focus groups, call in consultants, put a spin on it and use all the propaganda resources that our taxes can provide to sell it. The concept of the dialectic, or the Socratic dialogue, where an argument is proposed, supporting evidence led, a contrary position put, then examined rigorously and a conclusion or verdict reached is now confined to the law courts, or royal commissions. It has dropped out of politics. James Walter argued in his prophetic book *Tunnel Vision: The Failure of Political Imagination* (Allen & Unwin, 1996): ‘the greatest problem is that once we abandon politics for economics, we abandon the capacity to imagine new solutions’.

‘Speaking Truth to Power’.

This 17th Century Quaker phrase, revived in the 1950s, seems particularly apposite now.

Vaclav Havel, dramatist and former Czech President, referred to a ‘loss of transcendence’, the decline of an over-arching belief system which makes sense of the contemporary world, contributing to the rise of cults committed to a conspiratorial or apocalyptic view, with members seeing themselves as victims, leading to an absolute commitment to a cause or leader, including, all too often, the use of killing and terror as ideological instruments.

I was inconceivably lucky to be born in remote, safe, democratic, pluralistic, open, improvisatory Australia, far from the killing fields of Europe, Asia or Africa. I think constantly of my contemporaries in Germany who finished up in the fighting line in the last months of World War II. If I had been born German, would my family have resisted the prevailing ideology, like the inspiring Sophie Scholl? I doubt it.

From the fall of the Bastille in 1789 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was a period of exactly 200 years. Future historians may see those two centuries as an anomaly when it was possible to organise human affairs to secure agreed outcomes.

'Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!' had been proclaimed as the great objectives of the French Revolution in 1789. By 1989, liberty was being defined in a narrow and restricted way – as freedom to exploit and consume, but only within a society which was comfortable with itself, and liberty could be withdrawn arbitrarily from those considered to pose a real – or even a hypothetical – threat. Parties which used to regard themselves as 'Left' no longer espouse egalitarianism. Fraternity was also a contested element, and was limited to the familiar and culturally comfortable, not to 'the Other', to refugees or Aborigines, perceived rights given to minorities provoking a serious backlash with mainstream voters. By 2007, 'Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!' had been displaced by 'Materialism! Self-interest! Exclusion!'

The linguistic divide brings a wall of incomprehension between us and 'the Other', who are then speedily transmuted into 'the Enemy'.⁽¹²⁾ Fear of difference, of other cultures, races, religions, a turbulent climate of suspicion and intolerance, increases the probability of ceaseless escalation, an unending cycle of violence, terror, reprisal, retribution and blood lust. This cycle has dominated the Middle East, much of the Balkans, parts of Africa and Ireland for decades, in some cases centuries. Despite the radical transformation of public and political life since 1979, I struggle on, trying to find value and meaning and to promote the abundant life for others.

I want to redefine and promote strong belief systems. The open society, rational politics and a sceptical media have been largely crippled by 2001 and its aftermath. It is both difficult and painful to persuade citizens that they have an obligation to participate fully in the way their countries are run, and an even higher obligation as humans, to contribute to the common concerns of our species, *Homo sapiens sapiens*.

Tackling the problem of terrorism by the application of force is unlikely to succeed. Pouring blood on the Iraqi desert produced an upsurge of terrorism where none had been before: cruelty, genocide even, but not terrorism, let alone fundamentalist terrorism.

Terrorism will continue to damage open societies until we understand how to eliminate its causes and we will not be safe so long as we pursue politics that strengthen the cause of martyrdom.

Our prevailing policy line in the West is that terrorism has no cause – it is a baffling phenomenon, beyond rational analysis, an epidemic, a manifestation of evil, not seen as a political reaction, to be resolved, or even understood, by

rational processes. Since terrorism is random, irrational and causeless, then negotiation is out of the question. The threat, pervasive, permanent and unpredictable is seen as totally unrelated to cause, hence the insistence of the Spanish and British Prime Ministers that terrorist attacks in Madrid and in London were not payback against participation in the Iraq war.

Contrary to the popular stereotype, some suicide bombers and kamikaze pilots are not religious fanatics, brain-washed zombies, but are shaped more by political commitment than religious zeal, well educated, with some experience of the outside world (e.g. Hamburg, Leeds, Florida), committed to murder/suicide on the issue of dispossession and land rights. Australia's draconian Anti-Terrorism Act No. 2 (2005), passed by the Senate after less than six hours debate, is harsher than comparable legislation in the US and UK, imposes heavy penalties on committing, participating, recruiting, supporting, advocating or justifying acts of terror. What about analysing terrorism? Conducting research? Attempting to explain or understand? Where is the line to be drawn? There are legitimate fears that the laws might inhibit research or reportage. Children can be held in secret preventative detention – and it is an offence (maximum penalty five years imprisonment) for a parent to tell a spouse that their child was being held. Jesus, as a person of Middle Eastern appearance, might well be detained under the Act. Weakening democratic structures to defend freedom made no sense.

Sixty years after World War II ended, Stalin is irrelevant, but Hitler's example is alive and growing, the 'soft Fascism' that Philip Roth described in *The Plot against America*.

Hitler, A Film from Germany (*Hitler, ein Film aus Deutschland*, 1977), directed by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, is more than seven hours long, and therefore rarely exhibited. The critic Susan Sontag called it 'possibly the greatest film ever made'. The film argues that Hitler is not merely an Austrian-German figure, but a universal archetype who expresses feelings of rage, impotence, resentment and the demonisation of enemies, and that most of us have a touch of Hitler in us, the main reason for our continuing fascination and horror. (Few of us have a touch of Stalin.) Hitler and his henchmen appear in the film, sometimes as actors, sometimes as puppets. Towards the close, an aged Hitler, as a ventriloquist's dummy, accompanied by music from *Götterdämmerung*, embarks on a monologue. 'No one before me has changed the West as thoroughly as we have... I know what to say and do for the masses. I am the school of the successful democrat...' He insists that since World War II his ideology has become more powerful than ever. Racism, nationalism, militarism, religious hatred, democratic populism, suppression of dissent, contempt for expert or critical opinion, appeals to the irrational, using propaganda, resolving problems by violence, promoting fear of difference, attacking organised labour, weakening the rule of law, using torture and execution, have never been so widespread. 'So long as Wagner's music is played, I will not be forgotten... Everything is going to plan after all. And we did win...' (13)

We have to ask *why* things happen, why hatred and violence is an instinctive reaction, and use analysis and reason to pursue peace and security. An endless cycle of eye for eye, tooth for tooth, will lead to a blind and toothless world. Even if it leads to some delay, there must be examination of alternative explanations, with room for scepticism, detachment and irony, even after sudden tragic events.

I recognise that my capacity and commitment to understand another point of view, to grasp the case against some course of action, to avoid oversimplification and comprehend complexity and a commitment to act rationally, would be disabling factors in contemporary politics.

It is essential not to confuse democratic forms with the democratic ethos: remember that Jesus lost a vote to Barabbas and Hitler came first in two free elections in 1932. I am committed to democracy but recognise that democratic processes often produce inflammatory results, witness the success of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran, Hamas in Palestine, the Shiites in Iraq and Ian Paisley in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, I want the political process to be revived. This will not just depend on Parliament, political parties and voting. There must be a balancing process with countervailing forces and creative involvement by intermediate bodies, for example, business groups and trades unionists, churches, environmentalists, a fearless judiciary, universities and other research communities, stronger and more diverse media. Reviving politics will involve encouraging knowledge, curiosity, understanding, scepticism and transparency. It will also require a revolution in education to redefine non-economic values and a critical spirit, with heavier emphasis on history, philosophy and language, as well as the skills needed for vocations.

Activists in public life, politicians, academics and journalists must make a commitment to restoring the primacy of reason, rejecting a paranoid view of history and 'telling truth to power'. As he lay dying, Leo Tolstoy reaffirmed his commitment to rationality: 'Even in the valley of the shadow of death two plus two does not make six'. When Primo Levi was a prisoner in Auschwitz, he broke off an icicle and sucked it to relieve his thirst, until a guard knocked it out of his hand. 'Warum?' ('Why?'), he asked. The guard replied, 'Hier ist kein Warum'. ('Here is no why'). In too many of our public acts, there is no 'Why?' Australia's blind adoption of irrational policies, supine and unquestioning acquiescence, is destructive. Democratic society depends on insisting on answers to the 'Why?' questions.

I live in the spirit of Samuel Beckett's words in his novel *The Unnamable*:

It will be I? It will be the silence, where I am? I don't know. I'll never know, in the silence you don't know. You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on.

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- (1) Francis Wheen, *How Mumbo-Jumbo Conquered the World*, Fourth Estate, 2004, pp. 6-9.
 - (2) Roger Scruton, 'Whatever Happened to Reason?', *City Journal*, New York, vol. 9, no. 2, Spring 1999.
 - (3) Marion Maddox, *God under Howard*, Allen & Unwin, 2005, p. 187.
 - (4) James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation*, Yale University Press, 2003, passim.
 - (5) Joan Didion, 'Politics in the "New Normal" America', *New York Review of Books*,
 - (6) Peter Singer, *The President of Good & Evil*, Text, 2004, p. 2.
 - (7) Since 1960, Presidents have only been elected from the South (Texas x 3, Georgia and Arkansas) and the West (California x 2).

- (8) 'Onward Christian Soldiers', *The Guardian*, Nov. 5, 2004.
- (9) Simon Jenkins, reviewing David Runciman's *The Politics of Good Intentions* in *The Times Literary Supplement*, February 24, 2006.
- (10) 'The Night of Truth', in *Combat*, Paris, 25 August 1944.
- (11) Francis Fukuyama, *After the Neocons: America at the Crossroads*, Profile Books, 2006.
- (12) Hannah Arendt wrote about the concept of 'othering' in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Penguin Books, 1963.
- (13) Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, *Hitler, a Film from Germany*, Farrer, Strauss and Giroux, 1982, pp. 201-8.
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Much of this Lecture is adapted from my autobiography, *A Thinking Reed* (Allen & Unwin, 2006), Chapters 13 and 15.