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Thoughts in the key of Oxford

INTERNATIONAL

Benedict Coleridge

Here in Oxford at the end of a busy week I took up yoga, entranced by notions of myself perfectly balanced in a state of other-worldly calm. And then the class started: 'Lie on your back, put your backside to the ceiling and rest your knees on either side of your head ... and now relax ... breathe calmly ... let your mind become detached'. It was an exercise akin to Luke Skywalker trying to channel the force while flying his X-wing around the death-star.

Even in the moments of physical relaxation, I found it hard to concentrate — things that I'd heard during the week kept entering my mind, making it hard to find the mental detachment the yoga master recommended.

Later I was thinking of these same things I had heard during the week, entertaining them further. One of Oxford's more remarkable qualities is its soundscape — take the bells: some are loud and triumphant in the morning and some ring dimly in the middle of the night, subdued and respectful. I'm struck by what I might term the aural landscape of a week — the collection of sounds, voices and verses that assemble in the mind over a few days.

It's a diverse collection, from the woman at the canteen yelling 'Urrry up! Speed up! Who dropped that?', to the 30 second washing detergent ad that prefaces a video you want to watch on YouTube. Or the man who was homeless, talking to his dog over a sandwich: 'Get lost Chance! It's mine, you've 'ad yours!' And Chance replying: 'Grrrr!' All these snippets of sound linger in the mind.

When I first arrived in Oxford I heard a psalm at Evensong that still resonates — perhaps because in the midst of heavy sandstone and biting winds it reminds me of cedar trees: 'They will take root like the forests of Lebanon.' The vision of the 'forests of Lebanon' conveys a sense of great richness, deeply rooted, strong and bountiful. The 19th century Russian school of spiritual thought — 'Sophiology' — understood the world to be humming with 'presence' and 'wisdom', filled with 'deeper currents'.

Metaphysical beliefs aside, it's interesting to think of the aural landscape of a week in a similar way — as a current of sounds, various but similarly rich. It's a current that, when attended to, gives some reflective shape to our daily lives. Words rise on the current, words like the psalm, or a snippet of poetry, or the voices of the men and women in the back streets of Oxford.

The American novelist Marilynne Robinson, in a conversation at Georgetown University, told the audience that 'the dark is full of light. That's one of the things I'm always trying to tell my students. Write from your deeper mind.' To think from the deeper mind, says Robinson, is to find access into one's life 'more deeply than you would otherwise'. She calls this a discipline of introspection: 'things come to

your mind. Your mind makes selections — this deeper mind — on other terms than your front office mind.'

To me this implies a position of radical attentiveness — it's a kind of mindfulness where a clear distinction between following your thoughts and being detached from thought is not insisted on.

This thought resurfaced in a lecture on the early 20th century economic historian and socialist R. H. Tawney and his public activism. Tawney 'bemoaned the division of commerce and social morality' which he thought of as a product of the Protestant Reformation — he detested what Charles Taylor calls 'the affirmation of ordinary life', where values of thriftiness and industry become associated with righteousness.

In Tawney I see Robinson's 'deeper mind' at work, a mind whose reflectiveness was brought to bear on the struggles of working people. 'Radicalism' like 'ideology' might seem to have nothing 'deep' about it, coming from an uncritical understanding of powerful texts or cultural impulses. But my sense is that Tawney's radicalism came from the 'deeper mind' that Robinson speaks of.

The lecturer himself understood Tawney as keeping his faith and his socialist politics separate — and perhaps he did, insofar as he didn't express his philosophical positions in religious terms. But in his stance of increased attentiveness, attention to each human being and their 'infinite importance', the deeper mind is at work.

In her own way Robinson too is a radical. She has a powerful sense of the importance of what we hear in our days, of psalms in daily life. So in *Gilead*, a book written in the form of a blessing offered from father to young son, she refers to ordinary life as like a 'ballad they sing in the streets', part of 'the epic of the universe'. She's implying that everyday speech, if not quite epic in itself, can have a ballad-like quality — it tells stories and offers glimpses of things not yet understood, to resurface later alongside other words and verses, fully invested with meaning.

What writers like Robinson convey is that the words we encounter throughout a week, formed into poetry, blessings or psalms, create that space where the deeper mind is opened.

In that deeper mind detachment isn't insisted on — we're not asked to disassociate from thoughts but like the writer, to concentrate, so that 'the intensity of concentration ... comes from accepting the authority of the text, as something that talks back to you'. The deeper mind is a stance of attentiveness that allows the world, and the jumble of words one hears, to 'talk back'.

Towards the end of yoga, after trying to touch my head with my feet, I did this — I let go of detachment and paid attention to the aural landscape of the week: the sounds of yoga class, the bells, the lectures, the voices of the men and women

on the street. And then that psalm I had heard at Evensong, the cedars of Lebanon, returned and through it some lines of Robert Frost:

I have kept hidden in the instep arch

Of an old cedar at the waterside

A broken drinking goblet like the Grail ...
Here are your waters and your watering place.

Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.

Rights and wrongs of ABC spy reports

MEDIA

Walter Hamilton

Commentators especially in the Murdoch press and senior managers at the ABC are at odds over the corporation's decision to publish documents leaked by the former American CIA employee Edward Snowden. Both sides cite the 'public interest' in arguing, respectively, against and for the decision to publish.

The Murdoch side says the ABC acted contrary to the public interest by damaging bilateral relations with Indonesia. The ABC says it upheld the democratic principles of free speech and the public's right to know. Snowden and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange have used the same arguments when challenged about the consequences of their actions; that both are now under the protection of countries criticised for their infringements of free speech points up the hazards of presuming to occupy this particular moral high ground.

This is not the first time that the ABC's reporting of matters related to Indonesia has caused diplomatic ructions. In 1980 the ABC's Jakarta correspondent Warwick Beutler was expelled from Indonesia mainly in retaliation for Radio Australia news broadcasts about the occupation of East Timor. The ban was not lifted until 1991.

In evaluating the Indonesian response to the ABC's report on apparent attempts by the then-named Defence Signals Directorate (DSD) to listen into phone conversations by President Yudhoyono and his wife, this background is relevant and insufficiently acknowledged in recent commentaries.

The Indonesian leadership's sensitivity to insult, particularly involving any perceived interference by an external power in their nation's internal affairs, lies at the heart of the matter — more so than judgments about the Australian 'public interest'.

It is, I would suggest, not so much the fact that the DSD targeted Yudiyono that offends the Indonesian government (after all, it is a commonplace of intelligence gathering that you seek out the highest possible source), as having the fact shoved in their faces. In the lead-up to the presidential election in July, the head of state has been made to look foolish. His ruling party will also be worried that the contents of private conversations might find their way into the hands of domestic opponents.

The strength of Jakarta's retaliatory measures should be assessed in terms of these factors.

The ABC exists primarily for its Australian audience (the services of Radio Australia and Australia Network being the exceptions), and it must reflect the values and serve the needs of Australians. I doubt, however, whether most Australians would consider that they needed to know about this specific DSD

operation or that their system of democracy was weakened by it having occurred.

On the other hand, judging from the recent election results, most do want an effective border protection strategy and understand that Indonesian cooperation is vital to achieving it. If 'the public' were in the editorial chair at the ABC, weighing up these concerns, I wonder whether it would have chosen to 'publish and be damned'.

No journalist worth his salt would sit on an important story simply to avoid upsetting the powers that be. Journalists of good standing, nevertheless, will differ in their opinion of what constitutes a story 'in the public interest'. That a piece of information is likely to cause a strong reaction is, I suggest, not the main criterion for determining its news value. The ABC argues that it is responsible for reporting the news, not for how others react to it, which of course is correct if the report has news value.

So wherein does 'news value' reside? That loaded question has only ever known a loaded answer: it resides in an assessment of whether a piece of information significantly alters the public's understanding of their safety and security, their rights and obligations in society, the functioning of their system of laws and governance, and the conduct of those holding positions of influence or responsibility.

ABC managing director Mark Scott said the DSD story needed to be reported because it fitted into 'a big international debate on intelligence activities in this digital age'. The story, of course, also fitted into another debate — a domestic one — about relations with Indonesia and the Abbott Government's 'stop the boats' initiatives. Few stories have a single context. To acknowledge one and not the other is problematic.

The editorial judgment involved was — for all the certitudes professed on both sides — a delicate one. It was complicated by the way the information came to the ABC: indirectly from Snowden, via the *Guardian*, which if nothing else affected the timing. There was undoubtedly a context of public interest, deriving from the Snowden leaks about US intelligence surveillance of world leaders such as Germany's Angela Merkel. Whether most Australians would have considered it sufficiently important to risk the relationship with Indonesia is less obvious.

But many of the arguments being mounted by the Murdoch and other commentators against the ABC's decision are, in my opinion, self-serving and hypocritical. The ABC does not have a special responsibility to be 'diplomatic' in deciding what to report and what not to report because some foreign power chooses to misconceive the status of the public broadcaster as a government mouthpiece. The ABC does not have an obligation to adjust its news judgments to implicitly support government policies. The ABC even does not have an obligation to weigh up what the majority of the public might think to do in such a situation.

It must only exercise its professional judgment as to 'news value', and be

accountable for it. In reporting the spying operation against the Indonesian leader, in my opinion, it acted responsibly and in the ABC's best traditions.

Churches fight for economic justice

RELIGION

Brian Lawrence

In his recent address to the Yarra Institute about Christian social thinking in Australia, Fr Frank Brennan expressed the view that 'Christian churches are all but absent from the economic debate other than making the occasional, predictable utterance about ensuring that no one is left worse off as the result of new policy measures'.

This seriously understates the public advocacy of the Australian churches and does a disservice to many people and organisations. It is true that many church leaders do not easily engage in economic issues, partly because they are not trained in economics. But this should not be a bar to informed commentary.

The Australian Catholic Bishops, for example, published a major statement in November 2005 detailing their opposition to the then proposed Work Choices legislation, based on established principles of Catholic social teaching, and calling for changes to be made to it. Subsequent events vindicated their position.

Contributions like this are not required every year. But what the bishops do every year is to issue a Social Justice Statement for release on Social Justice Sunday. In the last two years the bishops have addressed issues of economic importance: 'The Gift of Family in Difficult Times: The social and economic challenges facing families today in 2012', and 'Lazarus at our Gate: A critical moment in the fight against world poverty in 2013'. These have been contributions of substance.

While the bishops could be more active on economic issues, the responsibility for research, advocacy and engagement in public debate falls on church organisations that are generally led by the laity.

A wide range of Catholic organisations, either under the umbrella of Catholic Social Services Australia or otherwise, advocate over a range of economic and federal budgetary issues. Across the health and aged care sectors, Catholic providers and organisations have engaged in the economic issues associated with adequate and efficient care for those in need, especially those who rely on the social safety net. The work of Caritas, for example, requires substantial knowledge of a range of economic issues, sometimes contentious, associated with foreign aid.

Much of this social ministry work is found in other Christian churches. The research and advocacy of, for example, Anglicare, UnitingCare and the Salvation Army in regard to economic matters is substantial and cannot be fairly described as 'making the occasional, predictable utterance about ensuring that no one is left worse off as the result of new policy measures', in Fr Brennan's words.

All church organisations that advocate for incomes that will provide

participation, social cohesion, social inclusion and the alleviation of poverty know good economic research and reasoning is an essential part of their advocacy.

My concern about Fr Brennan's address is not only what was said, but what was left unsaid. Fr Brennan's review of Christian social thinking, with particular reference to Catholic teaching, does not deal with thinking or teaching on economic issues.

Catholic social teaching is primarily about economic relations of one form or another. The labour/capital question was the central purpose of *Rerum Novarum*, the seminal document in modern Catholic social teaching. The 'social question' addressed by successive encyclicals has changed, but always involves economic issues and the consideration of economic structures. Catholic social teaching has come to address a wider range of issues, including a number of contemporary human rights issues, but economic issues are at its core.

A major part of this development in Catholic social teaching has been the articulation of economic rights and economic justice, including the right to participate in society. They are part of the Catholic contribution to human rights discourse. The right to participate in society necessarily involves economic participation. To work through the implications of this right, and to give it practical effect for the poor and marginal, requires substantial knowledge of the working of the economic system. Poverty is the absence of economic and social participation.

It is important that those who campaign for the alleviation and elimination of poverty argue that poverty is a human rights issue. Too often discussion in Australia about human rights neglects economic justice and the rights of the poor and marginalised. For their part, human rights activists need to incorporate economic rights into their advocacy and engage in the economic debates that relate to the practical achievement of these rights.

Both groups need to better understand their common ground and their collective capacity to influence debate and public policy for the benefit of the poor and marginalised.

El Salvador suffers Australia's maleficent miners

INTERNATIONAL

Andrew Hamilton

In Australia, as elsewhere, the main business of mining companies is to find and seize opportunities to mine profitably. In order to proceed, they must also persuade governments that their proposals are in the national interest. Here, governments will be interested in the economic benefits of mining, as well as potential social and environmental impacts.

Although these requirements and processes are often lacking in rigour, large mining companies themselves recognise the importance of meeting them. The damage to their reputations caused by taking short cuts and alienating significant sections of the population can be far more costly than the profit made by particular mines.

But what is true of their behavior at home often does not hold true for the overseas operations of Australian mining companies. The recent visit to Australia of Vidalina Morales, who belongs to a community in El Salvador that oppose proposals to mine for gold by a company (Pacific Rim Mining) whose majority shareholder is Australia based miner OceanaGold, shows how the welfare of people is often jeopardised in the quest for profit.

The gold deposits that are to be mined by Pacific Rim are low grade, and so involve processing large quantities of ore. This requires a great deal of water and the use of cyanide to treat the gold. In El Salvador this process has many difficulties.

El Salvador is a small, largely agricultural society with one of the highest population densities in the world. It is mountainous, has five active volcanos and is subject to periodic earthquakes and violent storms. The areas suitable for mining are surrounded by small settlements which already lack a reliable source of water. The River Lempa into which the local rivers drain is the source of water for San Salvador, the capital with over a million inhabitants.

The effects of large scale mining are predictable and catastrophic. The mines will take much of the water from the aquifers and streams on which the local population depends. They will also be affected by the dust from mines. The soil is rich in sulphur, so that when exposed to water it becomes acidic and reacts with other elements to pollute soil and water. Even if the cyanide is held in tailing dams, the geological and climatic risks are high.

Finally, the mountains in which mining is proposed were centres of resistance to military and economic repression in the 1980s. Mining risks reopening social unrest amongst a people who have already suffered so much.

In the face of this reality and sustained community pressure, the El Salvadorean

government in 2009 suspended the approval of mining. Nevertheless overseas companies, mainly Pacific Rim based in Canada, have pressed for permits to mine. They have naturally tried to persuade politicians of the economic benefits of the mines and targeted parties belonging to the political opposition.

Pacific Rim has also placed economic pressure on the government. Under the rules of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) the company is able to sue the El Salvador Government for preventing the mine from going ahead. The case will be heard in the United States. The amount sought is $200 million, a large part of the national education budget.

The experience of Vidalina Morales and the people of El Salvador are similar to those reported through Catholic Church and other humanitarian agencies working with poor rural communities in the Philippines, India and other Latin American nations. The people affected by mining projects led by companies from developed countries have no say in the decisions that will affect their health and livelihood, and the differences between those who will benefit from mining and those who will be harmed by it often lead to civil strife, which mining companies have been accused of instigating or encouraging.

In Australia the environmental impacts, health, welfare and aspirations of people in areas affected by mining are central in the granting of permits to mine. In such cases it is understood that the economy is for people and not people for the economy. A question for us as a community is whether we are willing to accept a lowering of these standards for the overseas operations of Australian companies. Although these operations may appear distant and of no concern to us, it is often our bank investments and superannuation that funds these projects.

Corrupt cop's crack at redemption

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***Filth* (R). Director: Jon S. Baird. Starring: James McAvoy, Shauna Macdonald, Joanne Froggatt. 97 minutes**

The *Breaking Bad* episode titled 'The Fly' offers a perfectly timed insight into the residual humanity of a man on the way to becoming a monster. Chemistry teacher Walter White (Bryan Cranston) was intitially prompted to enter the drug trade as a way to raise enough quick cash to support his family, following a bleak prognosis for lung cancer. Since then, greed, pride and circumstance have led him well down the path of corruption. In this famous episode an emotionally, mentally and morally strained Walter laments that he has missed 'the perfect moment' where he might have achieved his financial aims without straying so seemingly far from the reach of redemption.

Director Jon S. Baird's adaptation of Scottish author Irvine Welsh's 1998 novel *Filth* features an antihero who is similarly well beyond his own 'perfect moment'. Police detective Bruce Robertson (McAvoy) is corrupt, violent, misogynistic, and a drug addict, who for the most part lacks respect or empathy for those around him. He is not entirely inhuman, and the film, a rambunctious and graphic black comedy that is more or less a straight-up character study, spends much frenetic energy trying to map the ghastly inner wounds that bleed greenly into his outer corruption. But he is unerringly cruel, as destructive to those around him as he is to himself.

Baird has his work cut out for him. To be fair, *Filth*'s 97-minute running time doesn't allow him the luxury of the extended series arcs of *Breaking Bad* and its ilk, to build sympathy for his unpalatable antihero. All he can do is hurl the messy pieces against his cinematic canvas and hope they stick in such a way that by the time the credits roll they have formed a cogent, if ugly portrait. That being said, just how do you build sympathy for a character whose near-to-first on-screen act is to sexually assault and cruelly denigrate the underaged girlfriend of a murder suspect? The answer is: slowly, and not all that convincingly.

In addition to investigating the racially motivated beating-death of a Japanese student, Robertson is trying to manipulate his way into a promotion, by impishly playing his colleagues off against each other, in often depraved fashion. The pressure of his Machiavellian games is getting to him though, and a few cracks are starting to appear in his brutal bravado. Infrequently, he sees animal faces (his own is a monstrous pig face) in place of the human faces around him. Such hallucinations are in part a symptom of his heavy drug use, although they also reflect how far he has strayed from the path of human decency, led astray by his mangled moral compass. Now Bruce Robertson is surrounded by monsters, although they dwell most viciously inside his own broken mind.

There is hope for Bruce — there must be, otherwise why would we bother wading so long in his filth? Early in the film he spontaneously, and seemingly uncharacteristically, rushes to the aid of a dying man, and is visibly grieved when he fails to revive him. Subsequently he bonds with the man's adult daughter, Mary (Froggatt) and her young son. There comes a genuinely touching subplot, where the admiration and gratitude in Mary's wide eyes (Bruce was the only person who helped her father amid a street packed with gawkers) seems to reflect to Bruce an image of what he might be, perhaps even what he might want to be, deep down, despite his twisted, libertine ways.

Further hints of Bruce's psychosis lie in the dreamlike images of a stunning blonde woman (Macdonald), presumably Bruce's conspicuously absent wife Carole, that appear at intervals to goad Bruce with promises of sexual favours if he can fulfill his manly duty by obtaining the promotion. These fanciful daydreams intersect precisely with Bruce's eventual, near total unravelling, as the extent of his mental break from reality becomes shockingly apparent. All of which goes some way to explain, but never to excuse Bruce's earlier atrocities (he is clearly mentally ill), depicted unblinkingly by Baird and by McAvoy's bravura performance.

Does Bruce Robertson attain the level of the sympathetic monster epitomised so sublimely by *Breaking Bad*'s Walter White? Not even close. That said, when the promise of redemption does turn its innocent blue-eyed gaze his way in the person of Mary, you may find yourself begging him to gaze unflinchingly back, and accept its profound, liberating promise. But the denial of redemption may yet be Bruce's, and *Filth*'s, ultimate act of cruelty.

Knowing the unknowns of clerical sexual misconduct

RELIGION

Stephen De Weger

Is there an agony in the garden of Catholicism which has yet to be faced — the 'dark figure'* of clerical sexual misconduct involving adults? From initial readings as part of my research into this issue, two aspects have become quickly apparent: that it is a 'known unknown' within Catholic life, and that it is a very complex issue.

That it occurs is not in doubt. This was one of the tangential findings of the John Jay Report : the board was 'repeatedly faced with the problem of sexual relationships of priests with adults' and stated that this issue 'could bring about further trouble in the future'. From my own preliminary readings, discussions and experience within the Catholic Church and connections with religious life, I now suspect that there is not one cleric who does not know of an incident of this form of clerical sexual misconduct.

However, as to the actual statistics, forms and effects of such misconduct, much more academic research is needed. When the unknowns become more known, the issue can be contextualised in psycho-social and/or criminological frameworks and dealt with accordingly. But the research has yet to be done, especially in Australia.

So, what is known? Based on accounts found in literature dealing more generally with clerical sexual misconduct and such sites as Broken Rites and SNAP , clerical sexual misconduct involving adults may include heterosexual and homosexual rapes and assaults against lay adults/older teenagers; priests fathering children; clerical sex holidays overseas; older priests molesting seminarians; male and female religious taking advantage of disabled women and men; sexual harassment, blackmail and bullying, and attempted seductions of unsuspecting and vulnerable people.

What also becomes clear is that sexual misconduct involving clerics results in serious and usually lifelong harm, because the person is a cleric.

One of the issues that invariably arises, when investigating the little research that there is to date on this particular form of clerical sexual misconduct, is that of consent and blame. According to researchers such as Sr Kathryn Byrne and Diana Garland and Christen Argueta , it appears that, more often than not, when clerical sexual misconduct involving adults occurs, it is the victim who is suspected by almost all. This is mainly for reasons of their age, sex and a traditional perception of superiority-in-holiness of the cleric.

A common response can be summarised as follows: 'Surely as an adult they could have stopped the abuse. They must have consented in some way.' Or, the victim is also made out to be the temptress (or tempter) of a godly cleric. (Does this perhaps reflect an embedded 'evil-Eve' mentality?)

These perceptions initially leave victims erroneously believing they must have 'sort of' consented, or tempted the cleric 'in some way'. As such, victims are condemned to years of guilt and shame and held back from disclosing or reporting the misconduct. Who would believe them above a cleric anyway? Meanwhile, the cleric's life progresses, sometimes to high levels within the church, with no one the wiser. And the 'dark figure' lives on.

Furthermore, academics such as Indiana University's professor of sociology Anson Shupe and Loyola Marymount University's professor of law Rabbi Arthur Gross Schaeffer point out that, as in all other 'professional' situations, the responsibility to stop any misconduct from happening lies with the 'professional', the cleric. This is true even in cases where a cleric may be presented with the possibility of a sexual encounter. Because of the enormous power imbalance inherent in cleric/lay-person encounters, as well as an unconscious, psychological transference often accompanying such encounters, authentically free consent cannot be present.

Does this power imbalance always exist in the many varied activities of church life? Does a fiduciary (in good faith) responsibility, expected of other professionals, apply to clerics as well? Does a priest not also have an even greater and permanent positional authority? After all, the church teaches that a man, upon ordination, is ontologically changed. He is given 'sacred' powers via the sacraments, bestowed on him from above through apostolic succession, by Jesus/God Himself. And the laity are dependent upon these priestly 'powers'.

Authors such as Tom Doyle, Richard Sipe and Patrick Wall have no doubt that with this level of personal and institutionalised sacred power, abuse of that power is prone to occur. Also, accompanying the abuses of sacred powers, a collective 'cover-up' culture often results. And for many lay people, at least on a psychological level, these sacred powers of the priesthood permeate, by association, all forms of the consecrated life.

There are many developing theories as to why clerical sexual misconduct involving adults occurs. Stereotypically, liberals tend to blame narcissistic clericalism. This, they believe, is inevitable given the extraordinary level of 'sacred power'. In turn it has given rise to an historical elitism and a monarchical (male) clerical culture, sustained by mandatory, unhealthy, lifelong celibacy. As such, things are bound to and do go terribly wrong.

On the other hand, conservatives suggest it has more to do with an unchecked 1960s 'sexual revolution' approach to celibacy where the 'sexual celibate' progressed to the sexually active celibate. Many also blame an associated back-door permeation of homosexual culture into clerical life.

It is not easy for Catholics with different interpretations of 'church' to see the possibilities within another's theory of anything let alone the causes of clerical sexual misconduct involving adults. But perhaps the answer as to 'why' is a case

of 'both/and' or somewhere in between. Again, more objective research is needed.

**The term 'dark figure' is employed by criminologists and sociologists to describe the known unknowns of crime, the events that go unreported or undetected.*

Monster in the car park

CREATIVE

Prue Gibson

Car park entrances are yawning mouths. The ceiling height is usually signposted, but still it seems so low I shrug down in my seat, hoping the car roof won't get scratched. Then it's the usual drill: press the flashing button on the bollard, take my ticket and drive past the raised boom gate.

The big question is: where do I put my car park ticket? I could tuck it behind the sunshade or on the spare change shelf, pop it in the side pouch of the door or into the back pocket of my jeans. Then there's the risk of the ticket falling out, becoming crumpled, bent in half or lost among the used tissues, expired tubes of sunscreen and chewing gum wrappers. I choose my jacket's breast pocket.

If I wind down my window, I can hear the echoing sounds of various car park life forms. A baby crying out, resisting restraint in its seat; the high-pitched laugh of girls, laden with shopping bags, giddy from retail therapy. There's a raucous sneeze from an older gentleman, followed by his phlegmy cough and a mucus-laden blowing of his nose. I glance at the used tissues in my side door and shudder. We humans are a disgusting species.

I steer towards the next level down, lumbering down the winding turns at low speed. It's here I see the exposed rock walls are sweating with subterranean moisture, even dripping with oozing pus in some parts. As I cruise past a particularly slimy part, I have to do a double-take because a craggy outcrop seems to shift, like a grotesque potkoorok monster, restless in its sleep. It's just an illusion; light moving across the dimly lit curve of the wall.

The car park is a concrete cave, a holding cell, a sarcophagus. From the outside, car parks look like other buildings, but inside, there are darker, deeper modalities. I wind down to sub level four. Here, the lights are sensor-activated, to save energy. I applaud this kind of economical and environmental responsibility and zig-zag across the empty concrete area, dodging square pillars and luxuriating in the fact that there are only half a dozen cars parked on this floor. Free spaces, empty rows: I savour the desolate and bare space.

Is that elevator music I hear? No, it's more mechanical than that. A low doof doof but the beat is not musical. It's only the rhythms of the service and operations area in the far corner. The air conditioning system, the back-up generators, the electricity fuse boxes and the main frame for the car park computer networks. These are sounds made from algorithmic technology, service data accidentally edited into new rhythms.

It sounds to me like a low guttural cry, the moan of an ancient monster. Can you hear the call of Cthulhu? That monstrous fictional character that lures us away from the light? Is there some strange and ancient being emerging from the corner

of the car park?

'Hey you,' shouts someone from up ahead. Not a beast but a man, in well-groomed suit pants with a snappy vest and stripy tie, strides towards me. He has a chastising expression: 'You can't park here,' he says. I glance around at level four. There are almost no cars to be seen, only empty spaces. 'Why not?' I ask. 'Because this is the valet parking level. You have to pay. You can't park on level four unless you have hotel accommodation. $50.'

Forget it. I wave at the neatly-dressed hotel valet guy and accelerate away. I vow to find a park in the street from that moment on. After all, I think I need the endless sky in sight. I need the birds chirping on the wires. I need the rush of wind in my hair. Demons, be gone. Concrete, I abandon you.

The exit is in sight. The ticket bollard approaches. Oh no. Where did I put that ticket? I look in the money shelf, in the glove box. I snap down the sunshades and search in the car door pouch. I pat my jeans. Where did I put it? Just as a car behind begins its predictable honking, I remember the ticket is in the breast pocket of my jacket. Thank goodness. I pop it in the bollard and watch the boom gate rise. And it's the best feeling I've had all day.

What my daughter wrote

CREATIVE

Mark Tredinnick

Father's Day (or a little after)

For Lucy

She said I was fifty-two and weighed sixty-eight kilograms
And stood one-and-a-half metres tall, and some of that is right.
She said my hair was brown and that my brown beard
Prickled her when I kissed her, which she said was often.
She said I was good at writing and drawing and soccer
And not so good at cooking. All true. He likes to ride horses,
She said (though she never saw me). He draws me birds. She said
If I were a superhero, I'd be Superman, and she didn't say why.
She said she loved me because I hugged her all the time (but who
Could not?). And because I was funny. She emphasised that. Then,
Smaller: 'He is busy a **lot**!' But he reads to me and he listens
To me when I read. He loves Mr Todd, and I love Timmy Tiptoes.
But she was sick when Father's Day came, and she forgot
To give me the sheets where she wrote all this in class.
She gave them to me today and didn't want to talk about it
When I got out of the car to catch the train again. He buys me
Toys from Sydney, she had written — as if toys were spices and
Sydney were Tashkent. Later, when she called to say goodbye
Properly, she still couldn't speak. And oh, there is no pain
So pretty as how well a young girl likes to miss her dad.
No heart so easily wronged — or righted again — as hers.
Nor any heart so far gone for good quite so often as his.

Soft bombs

From under the shower I look

Up at jacaranda blossoms, suicide

Bombers in party dresses, fallen over-
Night on the skylight in the rain.

And I think of you, the tender hope-

Ful violence of the sacrifice involved

In loving me, each kiss a pretty body

Part, a broken fall from grace.

Icarus

Everyone forgets that Icarus also flew.

—Jack Gilbert, 'Failing and Flying'

Like some nocturnal Icarus, I dream too close to heaven —

I fly too close to morning — and I wake in pieces. And so

I woke this Wednesday, a child disarmed in sleep and felled

By the gravity of the ancient light he dawns in. But I rose —

A trick Icarus mastered just once, but oh how mastered it — and

I walked straight out into everything, feeling too poor

For the wealth of my days, and wondering what became

Of the currents that buoyed me yesterday.

Driving to work,

Regretting the towers that grow now where horses

Used to run, I passed on the road, a fallen bird. The bird was

Newly dead, an Indian Mynah, pariah of the suburbs, stuck for good now

In the slow lane. A circle of his kind stood a brown mourning around him.
Making sure; ministering his passage. One moved forward to check

His pockets; the others, though, held back,

piecing together a memory of how he flew.

No copping out of abuse blame

RELIGION

Frank Brennan

Australia's quest to uncover the plague of child abuse and put right the failure of government and non-government organisations (including churches) to deal compassionately and justly with victims, and firmly and appropriately with perpetrators, continues. Quite rightly, the Catholic Church remains in the spotlight. In February, retired judge Tony Whitlam QC reported on the 'Father F' Case in Armidale. He highlighted that all the blame did not lie just with the deceased bishop Kennedy. There were systemic failures not just in the Church but also with psychologists, the police and the courts.

This month, the Victorian parliamentary committee's report 'Betrayal Of Trust: Inquiry Into The Handling Of Child Abuse By Religious And Other Non-Government Organisations' was published.

The Catholic Church hierarchy now seems more prepared to admit institutional and personal failures prior to 1996 when Towards Healing and the Melbourne Response were instituted. They are yet to admit the pervasive, closed clericalist culture which infected the Church until at least 1996. But that will come.

Cardinal Pell who had been an auxiliary bishop in the Melbourne Archdiocese from 1987 to 1996 when he then was made Archbishop told the Victorian inquiry:

As an auxiliary bishop to Archbishop Little I did not have the authority to handle these matters and had only some general impressions about the response that was being made at that time, but this was sufficient to make it clear to me that this was an issue which needed urgent attention and that we needed to do much better in our response.

Understandably, this left many people inside and outside the Church wondering, 'If Archbishop Little didn't act between 1987 and 1996, why didn't his auxiliary Bishop Pell try to do something?' and 'If the Archbishop knew during those nine years, why didn't his Auxiliary?'

Welcoming the report, Cardinal Pell said:

The report details some of the serious failures in the way the church dealt with these crimes and responded to victims, especially before the procedural reforms of the mid 1990s. Irreparable damage has been caused. By the standards of common decency and by today's standards, church authorities were not only slow to deal with the abuse, but sometimes did not deal with it in any appropriate way at all. This is indefensible.

This refreshing change of tone and collective acceptance of responsibility makes it possible to get some clearer air in the public domain about noble, principled and professional efforts post-1996 as well as unfortunate continued shortcomings.

Many of those efforts included highly cooperative, though flawed, initiatives involving both Church and police.

If the Church maintains the approach that only deceased individual bishops and superiors were to blame prior to 1996, it will be doing a disservice not only to the victims but also to other members of the Church community hoping and praying that the Church might be the exemplar of faith, hope and love — faith in a just and forgiving God, hope for all, including those whose lives have been wrecked by criminal abuse, and love for all, including the primary and secondary victims, erring clerics, our enemies and biased critics.

During the course of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry, the Victorian police gave evidence and ran a media campaign suggesting they had long been dissatisfied with the Catholic Church's attempt to come to terms with child sexual abuse in its ranks. But the Inquiry found:

The Catholic Church established the Melbourne Response (in 1996) in consultation with Victoria Police and the Victorian Government. Assistant Commissioner Gavan Brown, and the Solicitor-General each approved and signed off on the process.

There was no indication that at anytime before April 2012 Victoria Police told the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne that it had any concerns about the Melbourne Response.

It is clear that Victoria police paid inadequate attention to the fundamental problems of the Melbourne Response arrangements until relatively recently in April 2012 and that, when they did become the subject of public attention, Victoria Police representatives endeavoured quite unfairly to distance the organisation from them.

Let's hope that the Victorian police, like the Church hierarchy, can now move forward admitting past mistakes without manufacturing excuses which do not withstand the contemporary spotlight. It was very disheartening to hear the Victorian Acting Commissioner of Police Graham Ashton on 20 November 2013 trying to explain the police failure to raise any alarm bells before April 2012.

On Melbourne radio, he suggested to Neil Mitchell after release of the parliamentary report that the police might have acted much earlier, even seizing church documents if only they knew where the documents were. He said, 'Neil, that's the thing, you can go in with a search warrant and turn up empty handed, that regularly happens to us. So you need actually good information on where documents are stored, or other materials that, in fact, you're searching for.'

The truth is that the police knew all along where the documents were. There was close, familiar cooperation between Church and police. All relevant documents were in the Archdiocesan offices and in the chambers of the church's independent commissioner Peter O'Callaghan QC. Back in October 1996, the Victorian police

had issued a media release saying:

Police have welcomed the appointment of Peter O'Callaghan QC to the position of Independent Commissioner. They say that they are pleased to see the appointment of the commissioner will not in any way conflict with police investigations or actions in respect to sexual abuse. Police are hopeful that the appointment of the commissioner will assist [to] identify those engaging in sexual abuse and result in them being dealt with by the law.

If thereafter police did not know where necessary documents for an investigation were, all they had to do was ask; from 1996 there had been the closest possible cooperation between the Church and the police. We all have to wear the wrap when inquiries come with the benefit of hindsight saying we can do better.

The next report will be the Cunneen Report which investigated abuse and cover-ups in the Catholic diocese of Maitland and Newcastle. It will be published on 28 February 2014. It will focus on the Church and its relationship with the New South Wales police. There will be big learnings there too, both for the Church and for the police.

Meanwhile, the $434 million federal Royal Commission is gearing up for public hearings into the Catholic Church commencing on 9 December 2013. Justice McClellan has requested an increase in staff from 160 to 260. He says, 'The primary task of the Royal Commission is to listen to the personal stories of sexual abuse' and to 'draw from those stories the lessons which we can report to the Australian community in an endeavour to ensure so far as possible the abuse of children in institutions never happens again'.

This will occur only if police forces and state child welfare departments are subjected to the same scrutiny as the churches because the avoidance of abuse and cover-up is possible only with the highest cooperation and understanding of those state agencies.

If Catholics deny the ongoing adverse effects of clericalism, and if police officers just sit back and play the blame game while media commentators profess the smug assurance of all knowing hindsight, these inquiries will not have dug deep enough for the truth.

The ethics of spying

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

A minor diversion in the disruption of Australia's relations with Indonesia has been the entanglement of political commentators. Many have wriggled on the hook of their conviction that international relations are an ethics free zone in which the only guiding star is national self interest. But that does not stop them from launching a raft of ethical judgments.

Many assert, for example, that because everyone spies on everyone else in their national self interest, it is all right for Australia to do so. And because everybody knows that everyone spies on everyone else, it is not all right for those spied upon to be upset. about it. But they admit that it may be in the national interest, and so all right, to profess anger when it becomes known that you are spied on.

Most assert that it would not be in the national interest, and so would be wrong, for government leaders caught out spying to admit it, to apologise, or to promise not to do it again. (Why apologising and promising would be wrong is a little puzzling. If international relations are an ethics free zone, it would surely be okay in the national interest to make an apology you don't mean and promises you don't intend to keep.)

Almost all commentators agree that it is all right for governments to conceal from their people and parliaments the fact that they are spying on them and on world leaders. This is in the national interest. But it is wrong, treacherous and roguish for people in the know, like Edward Snowden, to let other people know that the government is spying on them. This is not in the national interest. Just why Snowden can be blamed for not acting in the Australian national interest when he is from the United States and living in Russia is left unclear.

All this diverse moralising comment on an ethics free zone sounds gloriously muddled. But it is coherent if you assume that the security state and its disciples create and enforce its own ethics. That position is a little totalitarian, of course, and its weaknesses in practice can be seen in the current spying affair. So it is worth asking whether we might do better to name ethical principles on which international and national politics can rest. Ethics free zones are sown with landmines.

An ethical approach to spying, lying and handling secrets should begin by reflecting on communication. In order to flourish we need to communicate with other human beings to develop relationships, do business, form groups and develop our world. And effective communication depends on a level of trust between the conversation partners.

Lying erodes trust. When someone tells us things they know to be untrue or

makes promises they have no intention to keep we do not trust them. When such behaviour is pervasive in society people withdraw from commerce and society suffers.

Our trust in others is also eroded if they do not trust us. In our business and personal relationships we have no difficulty with people being interested enough in us to learn more by talking about us with mutual friends or by googling and reading about us. But our relationship would end in acrimony if they hired a private detective, bugged our bedroom and rifled our wallet. It would certainly demand an apology. Spying, too, has its ethical boundaries. There is a great difference between listening to and putting together what we hear and see publicly, and tapping government leaders' private phones.

The trust and mutual respect that are essential for communication sometimes demand that we keep what we know and do secret. Sometimes they demand disclosure. If we respect people we do not disclose things they would rather keep hidden, provided that our secrecy does not risk hurt to others. In international relationships, too, negotiations between sworn enemies usually demand secrecy in their early stages. Premature disclosure will destroy the negotiations.

In relationships between the state and the people in a democratic society open and transparent communication is privileged over secrecy. Because the government rules for and represents the people, they must know in general terms what the government is doing in their name. So transparency is in the national interest.

When governments conceal such ethically questionable practices, which neither the people nor parliament have debated or approved, as surveillance of citizens and of foreign leaders, it is the right of a person who knows about these practices to disclose publicly to the people what is being done in their name. So governments should not attribute the harm that follows disclosure to the person who made public the information but to their own betrayal of the trust placed in them by the people.

The ethical conclusions I have reached are open to debate of course, but these ethical questions are ignored by politicians and governments at their peril. President SBY's response to the revelation that he and his wife had been bugged and to the refusal of an apology, after all, were those of a man who believed he had been doubly wronged as a human being. The restoration of relationships broken in this way will not come if other national leaders ask only what is in the national interest. They must also ask whether their initial action was ethically right, and what is the right human response to the person they have wronged.

Spies like us

INTERNATIONAL

Bill Calcutt

Protecting the nation's security is widely acknowledged as the 'first duty of government'. The sovereign state's responsibility to ensure collective security (safety and law and order) is at the heart of the social contract and the individual's reciprocal obligation to eschew resort to force.

In a liberal democracy where the government derives its authority by and is held accountable for representing the will of the people, the balance between state powers and individual rights is defined in law. Because many national security activities are undertaken in secret it has been necessary to establish special oversight arrangements to ensure proper public accountability. Government representatives routinely refuse to publicly comment on security and intelligence matters because of their sensitivity.

Australia's unique national security architecture has its foundations in the foresight of Justice Robert Marsden Hope and various law reform bodies established by the Whitlam Government in the 1970s. Under a Westminster system of checks and balances the equilibrium between national security and citizens' rights has been maintained through structures and processes that deliberately separate advisory and executive functions; information collection and analysis tasks; domestic and foreign intelligence activities; and military/policing/intelligence roles.

Key principles underpinning these arrangements include extensive legal protections for Australian citizens, and a clear distinction between defending against specific threats to national security within Australia and aggressively pursuing our broader national interests overseas. In stark contrast to explicit legal and ethical constraints on defensive security intelligence activities within Australia there are limited controls on offensive foreign intelligence operations overseas. Legislation recognising and regulating Australia's foreign intelligence organisations was only passed in 2001 (the Intelligence Services Act).

The author of the 2011 Independent Review of the Australia Intelligence Community recently highlighted the potential for zealous and expedient action to displace rules-based protocols in critical operational situations. In reality utilitarianism (ends justify the means) is widely assumed to be a defining feature of the foreign intelligence operations of virtually all nations who assert an unqualified right to advance their national interests through any and all clandestine means, irrespective of international law and issues of national sovereignty.

This clearly represents a gap between the principled, civilised and diplomatic

public posture of nations and the reality of expedient and aggressive covert action.

Recent revelations by an NSA contractor have exposed the extent to which this gap has widened, with new technologies apparently providing some advanced countries with virtually unlimited opportunities to monitor and collect electronic communications across the world. While the ostensible justification for the development of ubiquitous electronic surveillance capabilities is counter-terrorism, the greatest beneficiaries may be private business interests gaining a competitive commercial advantage in a global free market.

There are a range of reasons why secrecy blankets national security matters. Obviously operational effectiveness could be compromised through the disclosure of specific activities and capabilities, degrading advantage and negating the benefit of forewarning. But the government also wants to avoid difficult and awkward questions about the legal and ethical dimensions of offensive foreign intelligence operations that have the potential to damage international relations and undermine trust and constructive collaboration between nations.

The recent observation by a close Asian ally that 'spying on friends is amoral' belies an apparently growing gap between the illusion of civility and honesty and the reality of our suspicious relations with 'foreigners'. Responding to the controversy about ubiquitous electronic spying, a representative of the Obama administration recently observed that it is important that 'we don't do it just because we can'.

Are these sorts of intelligence activities consistent with Australian values, and do they enjoy the community's endorsement as legitimate and accountable government functions? It is an indication of the secrecy and sensitivity surrounding national security matters that such questions are characterised as 'unpatriotic' by some. In such an environment it is virtually impossible to have an informed and nuanced public discussion about these important and complex ethical issues.

The government treats the community as naive, but beyond regularly raising the ill-defined spectre of terrorism seems reluctant to openly engage in a public discussion on the rationale for an expansion of the secret state.

Abbott should not punish the ABC

ECONOMICS

Michael Mullins

Prime minister Tony Abbott chose his words carefully when he said in Parliament on Tuesday that he 'sincerely regret[s] any embarrassment that recent media reports have caused' Indonesia's President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

It is always good to express regret in these situations. But did he mean that the media was doing its job and that the embarrassment was collateral damage? Or was he regretting that the media was out of line when it published details of Australian spying on Indonesia?

Some conservative voices have made no secret of the fact that they blame the media for damaging Australia's relations with Indonesia, and they should be punished. Outspoken monarchist Professor David Flint tweeted that the Government should retaliate against the ABC by reviewing the ABC's overseas broadcasting contract.

Significantly, Murdoch commentators Chris Kenny and Rita Panahi berated the ABC and *The Guardian* for what Panahi called their 'callous disregard for the consequences'.

This utilitarian argument of Kenny and Panahi violates the fundamental principle of virtue ethics . Its ideal is that we should give priority to doing good and avoiding evil over consideration of the consequences of our actions. The same can be said for the campaign of vengeance and intimidation that Flint seems to propose, in that it targets the principle for the sake of achieving a particular political and diplomatic outcome for the nation at this time.

At stake we have freedom of the press, and the independence and integrity of the ABC. These should not be given nor taken away on the whim of political or diplomatic expediency. The same can be said for spying itself, which is a potentially justifiable offence against human dignity. As such, it is akin to the just war and cannot be sanctioned lightly.

ABC managing director Mark Scott made the distinction between the national interest and the public interest when he was before a Senate estimates hearing in Canberra on Tuesday. There's no doubt that publication of the Edward Snowden leaks damaged Australia's short-term national interest, but the more fundamental *public* interest is served by keeping intact the democratic principles embodied in the above mentioned principles.

As it happens, Scott had his resolve tested during the week when *The Australian* published a leaked document containing salary figures for key ABC staff members. This publication will cause untold inconvenience and embarrassment for

management, and also damage ABC staff morale. But it will also strengthen respect for these principles if the ABC is dogged by them at the same time as the Government. If the ABC can avoid hypocrisy in its response to the salary leaks, the short-term pain will no doubt lead to long-term gain.

It's also important to note that adherence to these principles is not blind. The ABC's guidelines stipulate that its 'editorial decisions are not [to be] improperly influenced by political, sectional, commercial or personal interests'. 'Proper' influence might involve action to avoid endangering the lives of particular individuals. This was the case in 2010 when western newspapers blacked out the names mentioned in Wikileaks information where publication would have left the individuals vulnerable to retaliation in foreign countries.

Guardian Australia editor Katharine Viner told Crikey that *The Guardian* acted responsibly in Australia this week, in the way it has overseas in the past: 'We liaised carefully with the relevant government agencies, in order to give them the opportunity to contextualise the document and to express any concerns that were genuinely about threats to national security rather than diplomatic embarrassment.'

An important early measure of Tony Abbott's statesmanship will be whether he manages to rise above the present embarrassment, and resists the temptation to punish the ABC, so that media practitioners can serve our democracy for the long term.

JFK and the myth of American innocence

INTERNATIONAL

Ray Cassin

Unlike many other people who were alive at the time, I can't claim to remember precisely where I was or what I was doing when I heard the news of the 20th century's most written-about assassination. I was eight years old on 22 November 1963 (it was 23 November here in Australia, across the international dateline) when Lee Harvey Oswald — and perhaps another — shot dead the then US president, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, in Dallas, Texas. But I vividly recall the global outpouring of grief that ensued, and in which my parents, my older brother and I shared.

Oswald — and perhaps another, too. I say this because it is not possible to avoid acknowledging the swamp of conspiracy theories that the world's media has so assiduously dredged by way of marking the 50th anniversary of Kennedy's assassination. And also to announce that in what follows I shall not wade into the swamp.

This is not because I have any wish to defend the Warren commission's conclusion that Oswald acted alone. I have no idea who 'really' killed JFK. It is because for me the most interesting thing about his death is not the elusive answer to the question, 'Whodunit?', but the particular quality of grief that the assassination elicited.

It was not only a matter of mourning the violent death of a world leader who, at the time, was much admired. It was also a sense that something uniquely precious had been irreparably lost. That sense has withered under reassessments of Kennedy's character and record in office but it has never been extinguished entirely. If it had, the 50th anniversary of his death would be getting scarcely any attention at all.

It was in the aftermath of the assassination that I first heard some television pundit use the phrase 'loss of innocence' to describe the popular mood in the US. It was a silly notion even then. Were we supposed to believe that Americans had somehow retained their innocence — whatever may be meant by that — during three previous presidential assassinations, including the first, that of Abraham Lincoln, which was the tragic culmination of a catastrophic civil war? Loss of innocence, as much for Americans as for anyone else on the planet, goes with the human condition. Innocence is what you're already starting to lose when you're eight years old.

Nonetheless the notion stuck that something called innocence had been lost because of what had happened in Dallas. Nor was this diagnosis plucked from pop sociology confined to the US. Other nations under the political and cultural sway of the US, including Australia, lapped it up and applied it to themselves as the '60s

unfolded and eight-year-olds eventually turned into teenagers.

Virtually all the social and political discontents of the time, from dissension over the Vietnam War to confusion over what was described as a sexual revolution, were deemed to reflect a loss of innocence. It was a plastic notion that could be invoked with convenient imprecision by adherents of left and right, by peace activists and cold warriors, by advocates of a new morality and by those who inveighed against the crumbling of the old one.

And when another Kennedy was assassinated, at the height of the decade's upheavals in 1968, it seemed to many to confirm the notion that the world, especially the West and above all the US, had been in a downward spiral since the death of his older brother five years earlier in Dallas.

By the time Sirhan Sirhan shot Robert Francis Kennedy in the ballroom of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, memories of what had been dubbed Camelot — the JFK years in the White House — had become an unspoken but always present element in his campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination.

This is one of the many ironies in the Kennedy family saga, since RFK was running on an anti-Vietnam War platform, whereas JFK's chief Vietnam legacy was his administration's complicity in the coup that deposed President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam. Diem's rule had been brutally repressive, but that of the frequently corrupt succession of generals who followed him was hardly any better.

Any apparent conflicts between the actions of the Kennedy White House and the goals of the younger Kennedy's presidential campaign were eclipsed, however, by the widespread belief that escalation of the war was essentially the responsibility of President Lyndon Johnson, and that JFK had in fact been looking for what would now be called an exit strategy. The evidence for this latter contention has always been thin and dubious, but it, too, persists as part of the golden legend of Camelot.

So does the belief that JFK was a bold, assertive champion of civil rights; there is certainly rhetorical evidence for this view, but the legislation that actually changed the lives of blacks and other minorities in the US was pushed through Congress by the Johnson administration. Yet RFK's immersion in civil-rights causes — I can still see him as we did on the nightly television news, singing 'We Shall Overcome' with Latino farm workers or congregations in black churches — was portrayed as a mission to complete what his brother began but had since been interrupted.

Lost innocence. Camelot. What keeps alive the belief that something special was lost on 22 November 1963? It certainly isn't the evidence. Some attribute phrases like 'lost innocence' to a peculiarly American propensity to conceive of the drama of politics through the puritan imagery of grace and redemption. Maybe, but the lure of Camelot extended far beyond American shores and still does. Even curmudgeonly, unpuritanical Antipodean hacks like me might admit in our more

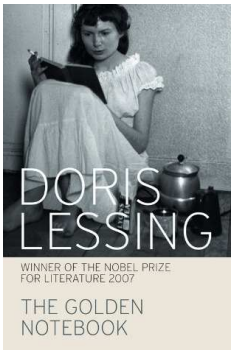
honest moments that we are susceptible to it, however much we might know better. The eight-year-old boy has not entirely vanished, though his innocence has.

Are the flickerings of yearning for Camelot such a bad thing? Insofar as they reflect an all too human desire for a politics that subordinates the wielding of power to some noble purpose, probably not. But the greater lesson of JFK's Camelot lies in the tarnishing of the golden legend itself: noble purposes can deceive when they come clothed in the trappings of power.

Would Crikey pay Doris Lessing?

MEDIA

Ellena Savage



British writer and Nobel laureate Doris Lessing died this week at the age of 94. Although I didn't always agree with her, Lessing has been an important figure in my reading life. It's not just her writing I love. The way she lived her life could not be disentangled from how and what she wrote.

As a young woman in South Africa, Lessing abandoned her family, knowing she was not capable of lifelong domesticity. She ran away and engaged in Communist and anti-Apartheid activism, and wrote more than 50 novels. In *The Golden Notebook*, she wrote 'you simply don't get to be wise, mature, etc., unless you've been a raving cannibal for 30 years or so', which seems to accurately represent Lessing's lifestyle. When she won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007, the Swedish Academy described Lessing as 'that epicist of the female experience, who with scepticism, fire and visionary power has subjected a divided civilisation to scrutiny'.

With the awareness of how many choices, and how many risks, people like Lessing take to make the work that they do, I wonder how the value of a life's work could be reduced to the objects they produce. There is a lifetime of human experience that goes into every expression, and this is true of all artists and commentators.

I think about this when considering the issue of whether writers should be paid for their work. Last week a letter circulated among freelance writers that called out *Crikey*'s new online arts daily, *The Daily Review*, which despite being a commercial, advertising-driven enterprise, initially proposed no budget for its freelance contributors. The letter articulated that its authors would not contribute their work to the site without payment, and encouraged other writers to do the same.

I was happy to sign, in support of an industrial action which very simply articulated the contractual nature of a market exchange: if work is good enough to sell to advertisers, it's good enough to pay authors for.

The connection between Lessing's death and the *Crikey* letter is not obvious. It's just that Lessing's life speaks to the profound seriousness with which writers approach their work, the kinds of risks writers take. This seriousness causes a problem when cultural work is undervalued, or not valued at all.

As the object of literary production has slipped into an immaterial sphere (the internet), its value has become ever more difficult to discern. Books and magazines, as material objects, do not constitute the bulk of literature today (the

internet does), which will mean interesting and possibly radical things for intellectual property in the future.

But for now, writers and other creative workers have become the ultimate neoliberal workers: not only do they accept precarious working conditions (including work without pay), there is no workplace to picket when conditions aren't met by employers, and because they are in fierce competition with one another, they are required to trade on their name as a truly individuated entity. Unionisation goes against the nature of this individuated labour.

An article, like any creative or critical work, is the accumulation of a writer's lived experiences. This is true of all professional labour, yet for creatives, the risk of investing one's life promises very little monetary reward. Their labour is not easily commodified within a market economy.

Beyond the workplace ethics of compensating labourers for their profitable work is a deeper issue: how can the sometimes immaterial outcomes of creative and intellectual labour find a value in the economy? Good work is in abundance, such that it holds little monetary value. Yet we still need it. Who, after all, would prefer to live in the world without the creative and intellectual labour they consume daily?

Creative labour requires dedicated and specified learning, and also taking risks that propel original imagination and deeper insight. Such a life doesn't necessarily entail abandoning one's family and moving in with the Communists; it can be lived from the pleather couches of a municipal library, or from within the careful interrogations of ethical and spiritual lives. Lessing writes that 'writing can't be a way of life, the important part of writing is living. You have to live in such a way that your writing emerges from it.'

Sad life of a serial killer whale

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***Blackfish* (M). Director: Gabriela Cowperthwaite. 79 minutes**

In his seminal 1975 publication *Animal Liberation*, the Australian moral philosopher Peter Singer laid the groundwork for animal rights theory. He argued that it is the capacity of all animals to experience suffering — and not their relative intelligence — which should dictate the standards by which society treats them. Non-human animals, he argued, have rights, insofar as these rights are derived from their capacity to suffer.

Singer's utilitarian argument pertained particularly to the suffering endured by animals bred for the purposes of human consumption. Whatever you make of the argument in this context, how much more potent does it seem when considered in light of animals held for the purpose of mere entertainment. As such the documentary *Blackfish* finds much ground for moral outrage in its consideration of the suffering endured by performing orcas.

It is not merely a work of environmental activism, although it certainly contains elements of that. The film centres on Tilikum, a seven-metre, 5400kg bull orca, a star attraction at Orlando's SeaWorld theme park for decades, who is also responsible for the deaths of three people.

From its portrayal of the grief experienced by mother orcas when separated from their babies, whether in captivity or while still in the wild, to its revelations about the inherently tortuous environments in which the orcas are held, *Blackfish* argues that whales are creatures of intelligence and innate dignity, whose capacity for emotional and psychological as well as physical suffering renders such treatment repugnant.

It draws a straight line between Tilikum's violent streak and the traumatic days of his early life in captivity (at the now closed Sealand of the Pacific in British Columbia), where he was bullied and repeatedly savaged by two dominant females in the dark, cramped enclosure in which they were stored at night.

This doesn't merely evoke the difficulty of domesticising a wild animal. It is a picture of a living creature that has been permanently, psychologically damanged by its cruel treatment by humans.

Orcas are beautiful, majestic creatures, and *Blackfish* contains plenty of cute moments, of trainers embracing the animals or exchanging kisses through glass, as well as dramatic footage of the performing orcas in full flight. But even for those who are untouched by the *Free Willy* effect, *Blackfish* has a case to make. Director Cowperthwaite prods her subject deftly from a variety of fronts.

Tilikum's victims include 20-year-old marine biology student and competitive

swimmer Keltie Byrne, and 40-year-old Dawn Brancheau, an experienced trainer. They are the human faces of the tragedy, and Cowperthwaite renders their stories sensitively and movingly, through old footage and the recollections of colleagues.

Blackfish sets these specific human stories against a broader issue of workplace safety. The documentary is framed around a court action by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which sought to compel the park to cease the practice of directly exposing trainers to the potentially dangerous animals. *Blackfish* presents a compelling case for this as a serious workplace safety issue, with sometimes graphic footage and eyewitness accounts from park employees of colleagues who experienced real peril due to their proximity to the animals.

I watched this emotive documentary in the open plan Jesuit Communications office, and was grateful that I had my back to my colleagues. My tears were occasionally due to sadness, but just as often they were a result of outrage. Consider the park's practice of deliberately and dramatically misrepresenting facts (such as the reduced life span of orcas in captivity) to the public. Or the vision of a SeaWorld spin-doctor standing in front of a news camera and fallaciously, unjustly, placing the blame for Dawn Brancheau's death on Dawn herself.

In the end *Blackfish* stands as an impassioned riposte to a commercial model in which death and suffering, human and cetacean alike, are merely the byproducts of profit. Singer would approve.

Imaginative connections between Haiyan and climate change

ENVIRONMENT

Andrew Hamilton

The confluence of the Climate Conference in Warsaw and the devastation caused by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines has been confronting. If they are treated separately there is little problem in finding words and symbolic gestures to recognise the importance or lack of it placed on each. The Australian Government has done so by contributing an initial $30 million to the relief effort in the Philippines and by sending a public servant, not the minister, to the Climate Conference.

That example shows how difficult it is to find words to hold together climate change and the death of so many people in natural catastrophes, let alone to act as if they might be related.

When the typhoon and climate change are brought together in conversation and in postings on articles like this one, the discussion almost always becomes didactic, rebarbative and abstract. It seems impossible to focus on the persons whose lives have been lost and to explore with open minds and hearts the connections between their fate and the ways in which we handle the natural world.

The discomfort at exploring connections may arise from a more general unease at being led out of questions of demonstrable fact into questions of value. To reflect on the connections invites us to ask how much weight we place on the lives of poor Filipinos, on our own comfort and on the maintenance of an economic order that has served many people well.

To countenance the possibility that human ways of using and relating to the material world may have an effect, a lethal effect, on the lives of human beings elsewhere compels us to reflect on what matters most to us.

One of the reasons why passion to defend the natural environment creates such controversy is that it constantly raises questions of values that cannot be reduced to monetary terms. It sees the world and people as interconnected, so that human flourishing depends on the flourishing of the natural world. It demands that we respect the relationships that connect us to one another and to the natural world. To do this requires an attention that goes beyond economic considerations to questions of value.

That explains why it is difficult to explore the connections between Typhoon Haiyan and the environment. It also explains why other questions connected with human ecology are so difficult to resolve. For example, discussions about whether and under what conditions mining should take place are often a dialogue of the deaf.

We need to decide what relative weight we put on such values as private profit, on raising revenue to fund public commitments, on the sacredness of the land to traditional owners or to farmers and their families, on the history of a region, on the maintenance of particular lifestyles, on the importance of the countryside for contemplation, on food production, on the wellbeing of future generations.

To arbitrate between these different values we need to be able imaginatively to put full weight on them, and especially the impact on people — to imagine the effect on the poorer members of the Australian community if power prices rise uncontrollably because we may not extract gas, to imagine the effects of tornados on people trapped by shore because of poverty overseas, to imagine the effect on the spirit of seeing a once beautiful landscape scarred by evidence of mining, to imagine people and landscape in 50 years time.

This naming of value requires a range of different ways of looking at the world, including economic analysis, but it requires above all the capacity to imagine generously and realistically the effects of our priorities on the lives of human beings within the human ecology that sustains them. It asks that we are able to give full imaginative weight to what we contemplate, however confronting, without recoiling from it. And it means finally naming what is most important to us, while acknowledging fully the consequences of that naming for human lives.

This kind of reflection and conversation have been particularly difficult in the case of Haiyan and climate change, because the cost in terms of human lives and wellbeing has been so high. But our shared humanity and own integrity demand no less of us.

Abbott's spy games

INTERNATIONAL

Tony Kevin

Edward Snowden's revelations of systematic and routinised five-power (US, UK, Canada, Australia, NZ) electronic spying on friendly government leaders and politicians create a new policy environment in which 'neither confirm nor deny' no longer works as a policy response.

President Obama's initially hesitant responses to Angela Merkel's outraged public response to *The Guardian*'s revelations of US eavesdropping on her phone damaged US-German relations, but Obama quickly corrected his error. The sincerity and appropriate language of his subsequent apologies to Merkel safely limited the damage.

Now Australian-Indonesian relations are going through a similarly testing experience.

Tony Abbott's reply in Parliament to Adam Bandt may have seemed a balanced, well-crafted answer but it was way too clever. Indonesian anger against Australia continues to grow. These events will harden already strong views in Jakarta of Australia as a false friend to Indonesia, as a nation whose only true affinities are with its four fellow members of the five-power Anglo-Saxon club.

It is Australia's Indonesian friends in politics who are hurt most politically, and most wounded personally, by the Snowden revelations: SBY, Natalegawa, and their current ambassador in Canberra.

Of course, it is no accident that our spies are keen to spy on persons who are our best political friends. It is the nuances of these persons' ongoing views about day-by-day ups and downs in the bilateral relationship that are of most interest. We know or can predict what our enemies think of us. We are less interested in spying on them.

Spies have the technology to spy, so they do it. They have no self-denying ordinances or protocols except those imposed by their political masters. They cannot be expected to modulate their targeting by considerations of interstate protocols or interpersonal good manners between heads of state. It is not their job to make these judgements. A watchdog's job and instinct is to bark at intruders, a spy's job and instinct is to spy on others.

It falls to the wisdom and discretion of presidents and prime ministers to set limits, to instruct our intelligence agencies that they will not eavesdrop on the private telephone conversations of our best friends except at rare moments when major national interests are decided to be at stake. Those should be political decisions.

Both Obama initially with Merkel, and now Abbott with SBY's family, signally

failed to rise to this challenge. Both Washington and Canberra let the dogs loose.

The adverse consequences will only mount for Abbott. Forget about meaningful cooperation now on stopping the boats. Probably more will now come.

There are enough sensitivities and historic faultlines already in Australian-Indonesian relations that this incident will not blow over soon, especially with a new Indonesian president in the offing.

It is no small matter, and cynical jocularities that everybody spies on everybody else and everybody knows this can only make matters worse.

Bob Carr is right. This is now a time when only a prompt, simple and sincere public apology by Abbott to SBY might begin to heal the wounds. There are people in DFAT who can draft the appropriate words. The audience is in Indonesia, not Australia.

Timing is of the essence. I hope by the time this article is published, our Prime Minister in the national interest will have already said the right things. No ifs, no buts, just, 'Sorry, SBY, for our national disrespect to you.'

NDIS helps the common good

AUSTRALIA

Moira Byrne Garton

Last week, *Eureka Street* editor Michael Mullins commented on the Prime Minister's Business Advisory Council chairman's address to the Committee for Economic Development of Australia, and cautioned the Government against listening to certain interests at the expense of the common good.

Indeed, Dr Maurice Newman's criticism of the former Government for establishing and funding programs such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme reveals an upsetting indifference toward those who shoulder the true cost of disability in Australia. Newman described the decision to commit to the NDIS as 'reckless' and implied a preference to implement a scheme such as the NDIS during a more prosperous era.

Paradoxically, those to whom Newman eventually gave his political support, the Coalition, had an opportunity during years of economic growth but chose instead to spend money elsewhere. Whatever its reasons and motivations, when the former Labor Government took on disability reform, people with disability and caregivers across the nation were relieved that their issues were finally acknowledged and addressed.

Waiting for a putative golden opportunity — which, in any case, may not have materialised — would not have addressed the problems, but would only have further entrenched the difficulties of those affected by disability.

At the moment, a small number of Australians disproportionately bear the cost of disability support. Working opportunities and income is foregone when workplaces are not inclusive, accommodating or flexible, both for people with disability and those who care for them. Therapies and equipment are frequently paid for by those with a disability and their families, when they might have preferred to spend money on other goods and services many others take for granted.

There are health costs for people not receiving the right equipment or early intervention services which may prevent problems later, and for the mental and physical health of unsupported caregivers. There are economic costs in the significantly higher marriage breakdown rates for parents of children with disability. There is personal detriment when the rights of people with disability to participate in society are overlooked. Opportunity costs for individuals with disability and caregivers are manifold.

Australia is also paying, in foregone revenue from taxes of those currently prevented from working and subsequent increased social security support expenses, as well as lost participation and productivity in the workforce and the economy. In addition, Australia assumes a reputational loss and Australians bear

personal and opportunity costs the longer it takes to become a more inclusive community.

One of the most compelling reasons for the bipartisan support of the NDIS was the argument that disability support would be prioritised and properly funded if our society's legislation and economy were being initiated today. Few would argue against providing a safety net for people whose disability may stymie or prevent efforts to participate fully in the workforce or in society.

In *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls explains the concept of 'original position': in a scenario where the rules of a society are a blank slate, those offered the opportunity to create rules for that society who do not know their own status in that society (the 'veil of ignorance') are likely to develop justice principles on which to base laws and the economy. This hypothetical situation requires the 'veil of ignorance' to operate, otherwise those who are more assertive or capable may choose laws which dominate and disadvantage those who may be incapacitated.

Instead of complaining about policies aimed at addressing disadvantage and building productivity in the long-term, Newman could have proposed other ideas which would have supported these objectives and had benefits for the wider community and the economy. Workplace plasticity, alternative education and training pathways, micro businesses, and micro finance are all initiatives which seek to improve disability and education, but which also have benefits for business and the economic growth.

Perhaps these could be considered for a future speech which recognises that addressing social disadvantage need not require policies which are burdensome to the economy, and does not infer that beneficiaries of such policies should have to continue to tolerate a broken policy environment.

Aboriginal victims of Tennant Creek's addiction

AUSTRALIA

Mike Bowden

Last Monday as I passed through Tennant Creek on my way to Alice Springs, I tuned into ABC local radio and heard Jordan Jenkins, owner of the Tennant Creek Hotel, let the cat out of the bag: Tennant Creek is addicted. 'I mean, we are not going to go bankrupt so police can present stats to people,' he said. And so the liquor licensees of the town are pulling out of an alliance with police designed to reduce alcohol related harm.

The statistics Jenkins referred to are police records of deaths, injuries, assaults, domestic violence, break-ins, motor vehicle crashes, drink driver apprehensions etc. — all markers of alcohol abuse, all heavily concentrated in the Aboriginal population of the town. The police have been ordered by the commissioner to reduce them as quickly as possible. But Tennant Creek liquor retailers argue that they have no choice but to resist the measures.

Jenkins' concern about going bankrupt seems reasonable. In our free entreprise economy entrepreneurs are entitled to operate businesses as long as they are legal and safe. And operating any sort of retail business in the middle of the Australian desert is always marginal, given the huge transport costs and a flakey tourist industry. No-one wants to see any family forced into bankruptcy.

Founded as a 'repeater station' on the Overland Telegraph in the 1870s, Tennant Creek achieved brief brilliance in the late 1920s when the discovery of gold led to a rush of fortune hunters. Today there are both successful and prospective gold mining and other mineral operations, and the Commonwealth Government hopes controversially to establish a nuclear waste dump 100km to the north, which will provide some economic benefits. These provide a fragile economic base to the region. They are all marginal.

The main reason Tennant exists today is as home for the Warramunga and other Aboriginal people of the Barkly tablelands region. Aboriginal people make up about 40 per cent of the 3000-strong population. And many of them drink a lot of alcohol. Whitefellas drink a great deal too, but usually frequent the membership clubs rather than the local pub. Alcohol retailing has become a basic industry.

For 30 years Aboriginal agencies, other non-Indigenous welfare bodies and the Northern Territory government have been trying to establish policies that will reduce the extreme levels of alcohol related injury and harm — which is also giving Tennant a bad name and so reducing the attractiveness of future business investment.

Numerous policies have been attempted over the years. The Aboriginal Controlled Health Centre campaigned effectively against topless barmaids and strip shows which were discontinued in the late 1980s and '90s. For many years

Tennant operated a grog free day on Centrelink pay day to allow families to focus their weekly spending on food and other essentials before turning their attention to alcohol. This became less effective when Centrelink payments were freed from a set day each week.

In September 2013 Tennant's liquor licensees entered into a voluntary agreement to reduce harm by banning sales of wine for two hours each evening, and selling only mid-strength beer on Mondays. Police have been playing a complementary role by presenting a visible presence at local venues in an effort to deter antisocial behaviour. But the licensees are not happy. It seems the police are doing their job too well. Alcohol sales are declining. Profits are at risk. A high profile police presence is bad for business. Some retailers fear that their business is doomed.

In 1988 I began working in the Ntyarlke Unit, an Aboriginal education program at the Catholic high school in Alice Springs, with students from the local Town Camps — children from families very similar to those living in the Tennant Creek town camps. One of the events I remember best from those years was a ritualised grog-spilling down the drain on Gap Road organised by the Central Australian Aboriginal Health Centre. It was inspiring to watch Aboriginal, men, women and children tipping litres of beer, whiskey, wine and spirits down the drain.

In Tennant Creek the government has no alternative. If it wants to satisfy the needs of all of its constituents it must provide a viable 'out' for selected alcohol retailers, and purchase their licences (and symbolically tip them 'down the drain'), thus saving them from bankruptcy. It must simultaneously work to reduce the rivers of alcoholic ruin that threaten this marginal community at the heart of our nation.

On death and preservation

CREATIVE

Lorraine McGuigan

Bathroom at 4am

Falling into the mirror
so many pieces
showering her nakedness
with light.
Fragments creating
a sharper truth
her ruined face
a Picasso construction
flung between walls
in a windowless room.
The hour before dawn
words unspoken
on the brink
of becoming.
She considers
the quality of darkness
past and present
briefly one.
Then picks up
the pieces
begins brushing
glass from her hair.

Looking for Sarah — Box Hill Cemetery

For my grandmother

Years later I'm following paths

that your daughter trod before me.
She fled to this place nightly,
like a homeless ghost you said.
Just fifteen, talking to stone angels
to shut out the voices in her head.
By the time the men in white coats
took her away, locked her up,
she had absorbed the moon, seen
her belly grow. *Moon child* she told
the nurses. *See it glows from within*.
But there was never a baby. At last
I find you, Sarah, a cross on a map.
No marker, not even a shrub, no
roots taking in the goodness of you.
Shadowed by elaborate memorials
I push away disappointment. Perhaps
a farmer's daughter wanted only this.
You were found by a neighbour, gone
to your God as you had wished,
just stepped out of the bath as if
from the womb,
long hair free of its pins
warming your skin.

The copper stick — 1941

I knew its touch on my skin so well,
hard, unforgiving. On Mondays I dipped
it into the soupy swirl, hooked a barley
sugar twist of sheets bubbling out of
the copper and hoisted this steaming
mass into concrete troughs for rinsing,

then through the wringer, its rubber rollers

perished and possessive. I would unscrew,
lift, release and re-assemble, as mother

had instructed. It was wartime, even

children had to do their bit for victory.

All the while I sang the songs my dad

and I had sung before he sailed to war.

Mother got a job as a cook and when

we left for Tasmania the copper stick

travelled too, although someone else
did the hotel washing. Sometimes

on the maid's day off mother took me

to the basement laundry. If she thought

it about time. The stick was used once too

often. She could not find a replacement.

The Beauty of Xiaohe* — a photograph

Laid out with care this woman lifted

from a dry river-bed. Here is death

but also preservation: turned-up

nose, high cheekbones, long lashes

fringing her sunken eyes. Her hair

even after 4000 years a springy

mass of foxy brown, spilling over

one shoulder. I imagine her maid

brushing its length, the crackle of

electricity as the woman smiled,

her mouth wide, generous, made

for smiling. Guarding her scalp

a lambskin bonnet tied with a bow.

She is swaddled in a woven cloak,

fur-lined boots protect her feet.
Beside her a child staring, close
to tears, hands bunched into fists.
Someone lifts a camera, frames
the moment: a six-year-old girl
and this ageless beauty. Rising
between them the dust of centuries.

**This mummy is known as the Beauty of Xiaohe —*
The Secrets of The Silk Road, Penn. Museum, PA

Change tax tack to take power back

ECONOMICS

Jean-Paul Gagnon

A person's usual engagement with taxes is that you pay them. You might do this through sales (goods and services) tax, your personal income tax, the capital gains tax, property taxes, or excise taxes. There are others. Most people also experience tax through that happy 'eofys' (end of fiscal year sale) moment when tax returns are usually due. You might even get some money back — more if you don't have a HECS debt. For others, usually the less lucky, there is a third way of engaging taxes. And that's through the audit.

These are the standard ways that citizens engage the public finances of Australia. Money gets paid, some of it might come back, but most of it is held in the treasuries of state and federal governments and then spent. But is this the best or only way that taxation should work?

Enter the TaxTrack idea. I'm currently working on this and first brought it up in my book *Evolutionary Basic Democracy*. The idea comes in two parts.

The first is that you would be able to log in to a website online and see exactly where every cent of your tax money is currently held. You would be able to see when and where it's spent and, importantly, who spent it (e.g. a ministry, public service office, or member of parliament). You might like to contact someone about this spending and you would be able to have a reliable contact method to reach someone in the right office.

The second part of the idea— and this is where things get saucy — is that you would be able to choose what your tax money will and won't be spent on.

It's not inconceivable that individual citizens be given the chance to fill out a preference form online as part of their own personal, digital tax portal. You could choose to pick 'below the line' and individually choose what your tax money can and can't be spent on. For example, you might like to only spend on funding public schools, the bullet train, hospital supplies and museums. You might choose not to spend on nuclear power plants, weapons development, or the automotive industry subsidy.

If you can't be bothered choosing individual items you can instead tick pre-packaged spending options: a socially-conscious spending option, an environmentally-friendly option, or a security-oriented one. It would be like choosing broadly where you want your superannuation to be invested.

For TaxTrack to work you would need to have every cent of your tax money uniquely serialised according to your tax file number. You might even want to

sport around a 'tax card' where you can 'touch on' before making a purchase at the shop to record your GST. Otherwise, if you can be bothered, you would have to hold on to the receipt. And there would also need to be an easy to use, but complicated to make, website.

The tax portal website is intriguing in itself. You could conceivably access recommendations from independent third party specialists if you are unsure what you'd like to fund, or would like to be more informed before deciding. Specialists from economics departments in Australian universities might recommend you spend on economic stimulus in order to avert an economic slowdown in bad global financial times. Or that you should fund research and development in renewable energy technologies to help the economy stay competitive.

TaxTrack raises some problems. Should you, and other citizens, be able to control what your tax money can and can't be spent on? Is TaxTrack really something that can allow you to reengage the public finances of your country? These are conversations I think citizens should be having.

Some people would be nervous about this type of change. Australians might not be able to agree to fund a stimulus package in time to save the economy. Some areas that need public funding might slip because not enough people want to fund them. Some people might start demanding the right to have a say about whether Australia can double its debt-ceiling — it wouldn't be hard to build this type of survey into the tax portal website.

Nonetheless there surely is much to be said for providing individuals with the means to easily see where their money is held and what it's doing, and the right to choose what their tax money can and can't be used for.

Business voices competing for Tony Abbott's ear

ECONOMICS

Michael Mullins

Prime minister Tony Abbott's post-election declaration that Australia was 'open for business' needed fleshing out. Possibly it got that on Monday evening in a strident landmark address given by the chairman of the Prime Minister's Business Advisory Council Dr Maurice Newman. Newman said the economy was 'running on empty' and needed radical reform and fiscal discipline to avoid 'the prospect of growth with a zero in front of it'.

He criticised Labor for 'five long years of reckless spending, economic waste, class warfare particularly aimed at business, the mindless destruction of Australia's international competitiveness and the reintroduction of workplace rigidities'. He was referring to 'common good' policies such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the Gonski school funding reforms, which he believes are a waste of money (implicitly he discounts the role of education in boosting economic productivity).

Newman regretted that the Coalition had 'limited its options' by making 'hasty' election promises to avoid necessary cuts to such reforms. He also urged measures to shift the balance of power from ordinary Australians towards big business. These include the easing of competition laws to give big companies the 'necessary critical mass in a small domestic market' to become 'national champions'. Is he talking about going soft on any collusion between Coles and Woolworths, or perhaps even allowing a merger?

At his media conference on Tuesday, Abbott denied that Newman holds sway over government policy. But Newman has been meeting with Abbott at least weekly since the election, and it's said that Newman's speech was prepared after close consultation with Abbott.

It's Newman's job to lobby for big business against, as it happens, the common good. But even among some of his peers in the business world, he is regarded as arrogant and aloof, particularly on his unwillingness to accept the need for a reduction in carbon emissions. The *Financial Review's* Chanticleer observed that 'his strident position on climate change was contrasted with the balanced views taken by Santos chief executive David Knox and NestlÃ© Australia director Elizabeth Proust on *Q&A* on ABC later the same night'.

It's to be hoped that Knox and Proust are among the 'range of voices that the Government takes very seriously', which Abbott alluded to in his media conference while trying to hose down suggestions that Newman is writing his government's business policy.

Another voice that merits a hearing is that of ANU economics Professor Ross Garnaut, who talks about 'policy making in the public interest' in his new book *Dog*

Days: Australia After the Boom. Garnaut is one with Newman in advocating the need for fiscal restraint, but is critical of Newman's wish to 'put all the adjustment burden on vulnerable Australians when that's neither economically rational nor politically feasible'. Instead Garnaut wants what he calls 'shared sacrifice'.

Newman argues for tax reform that will shift the burden away from business towards workers, and does not mention a key concern of Garnaut's, which is the cost to our productivity of Australia's high rates of executive remuneration when compared with similar economies.

We can only hope that Abbott is in fact true to his word when he tried to assure journalists that he listens to a range of voices on how to sustain the wellbeing of all Australians, and not just big business people.