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From Hanson to Hanson
What a difference 20 years makes

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A meditation on societal trends by

Professor Martin Krygier

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(Watch this as a video | Listen here | Bio)

About the talk:

Twenty years ago Martin Krygier gave the 1997 Boyer Lecture Series on the constants and the variables in Australian politics and society.

Having seen how the country has developed over the last two decades, and the return of Pauline Hanson to the Australian political fray, he has returned to the topic to see what's changed and what's stayed constant in the field of human values.

If you're looking for an explanation of how we got to where we are now, Professor Krygier is well placed to deliver.

Martin Krygier

It's usually hard to live up to an introduction, and Denis made it triply hard, so forgive me if I don't. I actually had not met Denis until half an hour ago, but some months ago he got in touch with me and told me what he was doing, what Our Community does, and what he had in mind for this conference, and I was charmed by that – so much so, that I'm here today. Which is no small thing, because what I should be doing – what I was doing just a day ago – is eating goose liver in Budapest. I'm delighted to have met Denis, and I'm delighted to meet you, but I should begin with a couple of warnings (and, perhaps, apologies).

First – and this is not so much a warning as a source of relief – I'm not going to sing, because we've just heard something lovely from Christina and Hayley and I couldn't guarantee living up to that. Secondly, I might fall asleep during the talk, even before you do – and if so, please bear with me. I almost didn't get here, because while I dutifully set my alarm clock when I arrived in Melbourne last night I forgot to reset it from Warsaw time. Which is, at the moment, 3:30am.

Finally, and perhaps more seriously, I've just arrived from an intense period in eastern Europe (and, before that, in the United States) that was both fascinating and alarming, for the same reasons. My head is still back there, much of it, and while what I do say will, I hope, relate to Australian affairs, it won't be directly about matters here. And I'd do it this way even if I hadn't just got off the plane, because it seems to me that if one's looking back over 20 years or trying to look to the future – which, of course, none of us can do effectively – many of the things which most are likely to affect us for the next little while don't depend on us. It's sometimes hard, in this provincial paradise that we live in, to keep that in mind, but I think it's true. It's unfortunate, perhaps, but the fact that it might be sad doesn't mean it won't happen.

On that sombre note, let me begin.

Denis has asked me to revisit some of the themes of my 1997 Boyer lectures, called "Between Fear and Hope – Hybrid Thoughts on Public Values".

Then, too, I had just come back from a year in central Europe, and again had come in my wishy-washy way to a decision that while I loved Australia and was very grateful that my parents had ended up here, my focus – what I would write on– would be the extraordinary unprecedented developments of the post-communist east of Europe.

Those areas fascinated me, they drew me, they moved me. I had great hopes for them, and I wouldn't, I thought, write about Australia. I got back here at the end of '96, and early in '97 I got the invitation to give the Boyer lectures, which was at the same time delightful and alarming. That's not just polite talk. My wife immediately told me, "This is ridiculous. You can't do it. You're too young," – which was a stretch even at that time. Even after that backhanded compliment, anyway, I thought "Well, I still want to do it." I wanted to do it, but I had no idea what I would talk about. I thought that while I myself found the developments in court arrangements in Bratislava, Budapest, Warsaw, and Bucharest fascinating, even that small and elite group of Australians who might spend six successive Sunday afternoons listening to the Boyer lectures was unlikely to be entranced with those things.

So I really had no clue what to talk about, and the ABC, in its delicate way, didn't want to help. They were terrific about how you should talk on radio – chattily, a few stories, slowly with pauses – but as for a topic, no, not for them. Then I was helped by the fortuitous fact that in 1997 an unusual range of events started to happen in Australia. First was the *Bringing Them Home* report on the taking of Aboriginal children from their families over a long, long period of time, which had an extraordinary impact. I don't know, maybe you remember other 700-pages-long poorly-bound government reports telling out in two weeks, but it hadn't been part of my lived experience, and it happened with the *Bringing Them Home* report. Then, in April of that year, came the birth of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party. I thought it was extraordinary that these things happened and that they had such a response.

And of course, there were major issues of what I call political morality, of values in public life that came to grip the country at that time.

I thought well, if that's the case, I should try to learn something about them and try to say something about them, and that's what I tried to do in those lectures. I wasn't trying to answer problems — I'm nobody's policy adviser, I don't know any facts. But, even if you knew the facts, controversies about migration, about refugees, et cetera, aren't primarily about what the facts are.

We can come to work out what the facts are. There'll be disagreements, sure, but those aren't the main point of dispute. We have to work out what we think those facts mean, how to evaluate them, how to respond to them, and what to do about them. And these aren't just matters you can look up in an encyclopaedia. There are no experts on matters of value. I'm not an expert either, but I've thought about it a bit, and I tried to frame some values which seemed to me important and worth bringing into the discussion, and that's what those lectures sought to do.

I'm not going to go into the particular issues that I discussed then. They change. Some of them have ceased to be issues. Some of them have been submerged. When did you last hear avid debate about stolen children? Somehow the debate disappeared. But the issues didn't disappear. And there are new issues, of course, and I'll say something about those at the end.

What I'll try to do, if you don't mind, is kind of a public autobiography. They used to complain that Bertrand Russell used to conduct his education in public, he wrote so many books – well, he had many wives and children to keep afloat. I don't have so many wives, but as I was asked to revisit the theme, perhaps I'll try to frame some of those themes. What were the values which seemed to be worth thinking about then and still seem to be worth thinking about now, and what may have changed in our world to reflect on them in a different light?

And after 20 years … 20 years doesn't seem so long for a guy my age (I guess if you're 20 it seems quite a long time) but a lot happened in those 20 years. Even so, I'm still attached to these particular values, and I'll say why.

The conference program refers to the Conservative Liberal Republican, Communitarian Socialist Democratic International, of which I am the founding father (I don't yet have a spouse for this).

I'm a little irritated, I should confess, by the program's claim that the membership of my International hovers around one. It's not true. It's recently increased by 100%, and there are now two of us. It's not quite an international, true, because the other guy's in Canberra, and it's not quite a party, because we had to negotiate terms and he only signed up to a few of my terms and added some of his, so his is the Republican Communitarian Socialist Capitalist International, but we decided we had enough in common for us to form a coalition. It's not international yet, I've got to admit that, but it's on the way. And that's not just a joke. It may not even be a joke at all. An important insight is buried in that mass movement.

Looking back over these 20 years on what I was trying to say then, I realise now – better than I did then – that I was fuelled or driven as much by allergies as by affinities. First I'll say something about allergies to the way we talk in public life (not you personally, common talk). First the allergies, then the affinities, and then how some things look to me 20 years later.

First the allergies. I have seven. Actually, I have asthma as well but I won't talk about that. These are ideological allergies, allergies to ways we talk about matters of public morality in our debates (or what we call debates because a lot of times we're not debating, we're just shouting, but let's imagine that they're debates). What are some of the things which get up my nose (appropriately, for allergies)?

The first one is what I call "taking your values off the shelf". That's what most of us do. And we often need to do it. We take a lot of our knowledge off the shelf. We take our values off the shelf. We may have been born yesterday but the world wasn't and, as one great philosopher, Sir Karl Popper, once said, "If we simply rely on what we've worked out in the course of our lives, then when we die we'll be about where Adam was when he died." So, of course, we take a great deal of knowledge, of information, of our sense of loyalties, of our attachments, of our values, from other people. We go with our tribe, with our country, with our religion – and that's all well and good. In fact, it's indispensable. We couldn't do without it. But there are matters of controversy where we should try to. It's not easy, and it's not always successful — we don't always end up in the right place – but we should sometimes try to re-examine the values that matter to us.

Sometimes issues – the stolen children report, for example — spawn re-examinations. Sometimes changes in social patterns and values do. Think of feminism. Lots of people lived honest and honourable lives for generations before feminism caused many people to think again about things which had been just taken for granted. The gay movement is like that too. At the moment, reflecting about our treatment of refugees has the capacity to push us into thinking again about the values that we typically take off the shelf, and I think that's a good thing. In moments of serious public controversy over matters of public value our default position is going to be just to think the way we've always thought, or the way the people around us think, and we should force ourselves to be open to new ideas.

The second allergy is to hunting in packs. That goes along with off-the-shelf values. It's very common in Australia, but it's also striking all round the world – in America, in Poland where I've just been, in Hungary where communities are profoundly polarised, into us and them. We know what our tribe thinks – what our country, our party, our religion thinks – and we think that way too, and we're confident about it. We know what our enemies are like, and we know what to think about them. "Enemies" is actually not an inappropriate word for that condition of thought. We don't have "opponents", or "people we might disagree with on issues", we have "enemies". And that, it seems to me, is an unhealthy way to begin.

Now, there are enemies in the world, so we should take the possibility seriously, but we shouldn't start off that way. Somebody has defined a nation as "a society united by a delusion about its ancestry and by a common hatred of its neighbours", which is a kind of macro definition of example of hunting in packs. Many people do it. We might, after thinking it through, come to think our pack got it right, We shouldn't resist that thought, if it is our thought, but we should reflect on whether what we think – what we're passionate about – comes from our reflection on it or comes simply because that's the way we do things here.

Thirdly, there's what I call the fork in the road problem. My lectures were much inspired by the American baseball coach and great aphorist, Yogi Berra. You'll know one or other of his aphorisms: "The future ain't what it used to be", "It's hard to make predictions, especially about the future", "It ain't over till it's over." He's a profound thinker. But the thought of his which inspired my third allergy is: "When you reach a fork in the road, take it."

It seems to me deep and wise advice which we often avoid. We reach the fork in the road, we reach a choice – between ethnic loyalty and civic engagement, or between realism and idealism, or between shame and ... actually, I don't know where that one's going. Anyway, we come to a choice between alternatives, and we often feel we're forced into false choices. We're reluctant to combine insights from one place to another place.

I was so impressed by that, and it so infused those lectures, that eight years later when Black Inc. published a book of my essays and we were looking for a title, Chris Feik, the editor (now the publisher) seriously suggested that the book be called *The Forking Road*. Really. And I said "I don't know what your friends are like, but my friends would give that about three seconds before they tweaked the adjective slightly and I'd be in the mud, so the book didn't become that. But it was about that.

Eventually it was called *Civil Passions*, something which matters to me because it must sound to a lot of people as though people who are passionate about civility don't have much to be passionate about. It seems to me, though, that a society where relations are civil rather than hostile or suspicious or threatening, is not an altogether common social experience. It's not an actual fact, it's an achievement which needs social support, institutional support, cultural support. When you get it, you should be passionate about it, and if you don't have it you should be passionate about trying to get it. It seems to me these two apparent opposites actually go well together.

More generally, I think we're often asked to choose between two things both of which we might find congenial except that we're told "Well, this one is the opposite of that one." Conservative-liberal. Socialist-liberal. Democratic - well, democratic-nondemocratic. That's a real fork. Don't choose that one. Just choose one side.

But often we should think a little harder about how things which might both seem to us attractive but to point in different directions might be combined. So I echo Yogi Berra's wise advice; "When you reach a fork in the road, you should think about whether to take it."

My next allergy is demonisation. It's common in hot political fights to demonise your opponent. There are demons in the world, but you shouldn't start with that presumption. You shouldn't start by assuming that you're on the side of the angels and they're on the side of the demons. That sort of assumption gives people Dutch courage for a fight. If you think that way it might help you to get supporters — as it does help Donald Trump, whose name, I understand, has not been absent in the discussions at this conference. Because, who wants to be with demons, who wants not to be with angels? But I think we should be reluctant to come to that conclusion. We should worry about whether people who we disagree with might have something valuable to say, and we should be open to that possibility.

And the second-last allergy is depersonalisation. It's a common trick. It's easier to ignore or to reject other people if you don't quite see them as people like you. Peter Dutton knows all about it, but even though he practises the policy he may not be able to articulate the principle. Depersonalisation is not seeing the humanity in another person. If you saw that the other person whose interests you reject, or ignore, or don't take into account, is a person like you, you would have to pause to concern yourself with their condition. That's something that a lot of the time other groups find easier to do if they depersonalise them.

Now, depersonalising is a very common phenomenon, but it's not easy to analyse it. I mean, Peter Dutton doesn't think that refugees are horses or gazelles.

He knows they're people in some sense, but there is also a sense in which it's easier for him not to acknowledge the full significance of that fact. Avishai Margalit, an Israeli philosopher who has much influenced me, wrote a book called *The Decent Society* which is, for him, one whose institutions don't humiliate people dependent upon them.

Margalit says:

It is exceptional to see human beings as non-human, yet it's easy to avoid seeing a person at all. Overlooking the presence of the other is a recurrent theme in the anti-colonialist literature of humiliation.

The humiliation of the native is expressed in perceptual terms as seeing through the native as if he were transparent rather than seeing him. What does it mean to see through someone?

One important sense is connected with seeing as normal what it's morally wrong to see as such. Seeing something as normal means seeing it as something that can be taken for granted.

It means seeing things as all right, as secure and stable. It's mixed up in our consciousness with the view that this is the way things are supposed to be.

The normal allows us not to pay attention to details and to see our surroundings as familiar scenery that doesn't demand special examination, since it's assumed that things are the way they're supposed to be.

Now, given that we're a country of immigrants and refugees, it's amazing that we can so easily speak so scathingly about the motivations of people who get here and want something. It doesn't mean that the problem is an easy one to solve, but it seems to me a significant fact that it's made easier by the sort of seeing through that we commonly do.

Which leads me to my last allergy, of a different sort, what I call sentimentalisation. Often it's very well motivated, but it has the result that when we see a group of victims we idealise them and we demonise their opponents so the issues again seem to us easy. There's no problem with individual refugees. There is actually a serious problem — in some respects a practical problem, in many respects a deep moral problem — of knowing what to do about the fact that there are so many million refugees in the world.

These are wicked problems, problems for which we don't have any immediate solution. Sentimentalisation, even if well motivated, seems to me an inadequate response to the depth, the seriousness, and the moral importance of some of the great problems which face us.

Now, as I was on the plane last night, I realised that these seven allergies were actually one big allergy, and that is an allergy to polarisation. Again and again – in the United States, or Hungary, or Poland – I saw the same thing. In Poland I asked, "Look, I want to watch as much TV and radio as I can. Can you tell me what's a station that will give this point of view, and what's a station that will give that point of view?" The person I was talking to just took out a piece of paper at the table and she wrote on one side 10 radio and television stations.

She said: "You'll get nothing but the government's propaganda from that side, which is reminiscent of communist propaganda though it's now politically from the opposite side, and on this side you'll get nothing but opposition to the government." I said: "God, I can't think of a country, certainly not my country, where you could make such a list so easily," and the fact that you can make such a list so easily, is a sad fact about political relations in Poland at the moment. It breaks up families, it breaks up old friendships, including some of my own.

In the United States we've seen the same. In Hungary it's the same. In Turkey it's the same, plus blood and jail. In Russia it's been the same for a very long time. It's pretty well always the same in Russia.

So these are the allergies, or that's the allergy. What about the affinities?

Now I'm proud to recruit you to the Conservative Liberal Republican Communitarian Socialist Democratic International. I think there's somebody set up here to take membership applications. The price is high, but the value is much, much higher.

Still, it sounds an odd thing to do. I mean, we have conservatives here and liberals here. We don't want to know about republicans because philosophically that's a rather arcane little-known movement. Communitarians we can guess at. Why would anyone try to put this melange together? In Poland, they used to say you can make fish soup out of an aquarium but you can't make an aquarium out of fish soup.

So why should I have tried to mangle up all these things? Because it seems to me that each of these represent the fruits of significant traditions of thinking about public affairs, and in each of those there are deeply pondered and valuable reflections to be taken out. So why reject this one just because you're in that camp? This is the hunting-in-packs phenomenon. Why do that? Why not think "Well, maybe they've got something to tell us."

We are carried on the wave of our own group, and we sometimes reject on principle whatever might be got somewhere else.

The inspiration for CLRCSDI movement comes from a short 1970 essay by Leszek Kolakowski, a great man and great philosopher, who wrote a short credo for Conservative Liberal Socialism. His argument was that in each of these traditions, there are riches to be garnered, and we shouldn't avoid them simply because we identify ourselves with some other branch. Many people think one should stop where he did, but I'm more ambitious, and so there's this array.

So first of all, conservative. Nowadays conservative has become a boo word which we associate with strange creatures like Cory Bernardi or Janet Albrechtsen, but there are in fact long and strong traditions of conservative reflection, particularly in times of tumult and great change. The greatest conservative response to revolution was Edmund Burke's reflections on the revolution in France at the end of the eighteenth century.

If I can condense several hundred years of conservative thought without remainder, it's that: Society is complex. Things are hard. Life is hard. You're not that smart. Be careful.

That's pretty well all of it. But it's important. Conservatives remind people that, even if your intentions are pure, life is full of unintended consequences. When you do something which seems to you obviously the good thing to do, somehow you might try to think that it may be trailing things that you didn't expect, so take care.

There's some deep truth in this. In our modern time, where for a long period of optimism we thought we could do anything – everything – it's worth getting the conservative reminder. That approach is, however, not enough on its own, for at least two reasons. Conservatives are people who say, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." But very often they're not in a particularly strong position to work out whether it's broke or not, because conservatives very often have a kind of natural, intuitive respect for the traditions they're brought up in – a good thing to have in many cases, but it doesn't give you much critical purchase on times of change.

Conservatism works when their traditions are nice, but conservatives aren't always the best people to tell you whether traditions are nice or nasty, because they just like them, because they're in them.

Which leads me to liberalism. Liberals have, I think, two specific characteristics which conservatives don't always have and that could be worthwhile to enter into the mix. One of the great early liberals, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, wrote a short essay called, "What is Enlightenment?" in which he said, "What is enlightenment? Dare to think". Don't assume that truths are there simply to be taken from authorities like churches, schools, village elders and so on. Dare to think. And so liberals have been on the bandwagon of saying: "Whatever the arrangement, even if you think it's a wonderful arrangement, first think about it. Be prepared to subject it to critical scrutiny."

But then liberals, of course, are devoted to substantive values, and one of their central values is liberty. That's what they're about.

They think it's a good thing. I think it's a good thing. I think many people here think liberty's a good thing. We don't think it's appropriate to be pushed around by somebody who says he knows how things ought to be, but there are many countries in the world who suffer under exactly that sort of regime. Billions of people around the world suffer under those regimes, so I think liberalism stands for a great value.

Nowadays, liberalism is often confused with what is called "neoliberalism". It's a complicated story, but it seems to me that neoliberalism — which is an economic doctrine about the centre of economic action, about trying to push back the state — is a kind of travesty or caricature of the particular liberal value which seems to be so precious in public affairs – liberty.

It goes along with other values like tolerance, which not everybody has liked. It's not simply hypocrisy to be intolerant. In many cultures, for many centuries, tolerance was thought to be pointless. "We know the truth. It's the truth of God. Why should we listen to these pagans or heretics or apostates?"

So to argue for liberty and for tolerance is to argue something. These aren't just natural things, and they don't just flourish naturally, so it seems to me that liberalism is important. It's important, too, because it's focused on what conditions, and in particular what institutions, do you need for that? A central value for liberals, about which I've spent 30 years trying to work out the meaning, is the rule of law. If anybody has questions about that, I'm happy to give an answer for about an hour-a-half, but now I won't, and I'll move on.

Liberalism thinks that we're better off when we're not interfered with against our will or without our permission by powerful others. Republicans think that too, but they push liberty a bit deeper. They say that if an authority is not interfering with you, but is able to interfere with you whenever they like, then you're not yet free.

You're still under domination. If a husband chooses not, out of his kindness, to beat his wife, then a republican says she's not free so long as he is in a position where he can beat his wife.

If a slave owner treats his slaves nicely, a slave is still unfree until the situation is one where there aren't slaves and there aren't slave owners.

I think that's a deep deepening of a liberal value. I think it goes along with the value which is celebrated in the book by Margalit I mentioned; non-humiliation. When I was trying, for the Boyer lectures, to come to terms with what the dispossession of Aborigines meant, I had to mug up on it. It wasn't something I was an expert on. Well, obviously we know land was taken, people were forced into situations unlike any that they had known before, et cetera, but one thing which occurred to me from Margalit's book, quite apart from the material, tangible indignities and harms they faced, was the harm of humiliation. You couldn't see it, you couldn't pick it up, but you were not living in your own world, in a world where you were seen as a person. At least that's how I imagined it, and that's why Margalit's book had such an impact on me, and why I'm open to the republican tradition.

Now the republicans are already moving us towards taking care of the conditions around us, and those conditions include healthy communities. It's right to value individual liberty, but liberalism is often attacked for taking seriously only individuals and their concerns. Communitarians are the ones who say: "Look, we live in families. We need them. We have communities. We need them. We also owe responsibilities to our parents, to our children." How can you have a serious attempt to understand public values if you don't give any space or place to the significance of healthy communities?

I agree with that. It seems to be very important. It's a significant addition to liberalism, maybe a critique of liberalism, and that's why my International includes communitarianism. But they should be liberal communities — that is, they should be communities which respect the liberty of individuals. Sometimes you can have too much community of the wrong sort. Nazis stressed communitarian values, "the people". They had no space for liberal values. In a more benign but still tragic way, Romeo and Juliet both belonged to strong communities, different communities. If you were a Capulet you couldn't marry a Montague, and that was the tragedy. In these communities they had no liberty.

Communitarians in the International are first valued because we need communities, we need to strengthen communities, communities don't just happen. Syria has very few communities, except those that are being shelled at the moment. Syria is not a community in any sense, nor is Afghanistan. There may be small communities in Syria but many of those communities, if you can find them, are not liberal communities, so the International advocates this pairing as well.

Now, communitarians stress the conditions of a good life and, at its best, so does the socialist tradition. What seems to me the germ of wisdom in socialism was the insight and the insistence that while for some people life is a breeze, for other people it's a gale, and it's not always dependent on the person which of those it is. Some people are born into situations which privilege them. Think if you were Jared Kushner, born to a certain level of wealth. Even his father going to jail didn't seem to put him off course. But not everybody is born in privilege, and one's life course is going to be different if one's not.

That's fundamental to the socialist tradition. It was fundamental in thinking about industrial work in the nineteenth century. It's fundamental now in thinking about the millions worldwide who are in some way disoriented, displaced, and disconnected by the changes stemming from globalisation and a whole range of post-industrial changes. I don't have any clever answers to these problems but they are problems, and one can gain some insight into their significance from the socialist tradition.

Some of the worst regimes in the world have been socialist regimes. Communist regimes not only allowed no democracy within them, they killed millions and millions of their citizens, again and again, in country after country. The name Nazism came from National Socialism. So, while I've insisted that the socialist tradition has key insights, it has key dangers, too, and it needs to be allied to democracy. Social democracy is the only sort of socialism which seems to me acceptable, because democracy first of all is due to people, people who have a possibility of participating in the affairs of their country, and it protects people when they exercise that possibility.

No-one is so smart that they can be relied on to do well if left to themselves. That's why we think of democracy. That's why we think of the rule of law. That's why we think of ways of channelling and tempering the exercise of power so it doesn't depend on one guy – Trump, for example. Just imagine that. Without some obscure court in Seattle – according to Donald Trump, a "so-called" court – how might politics be developing in the United States? How might things still develop?

Okay, here's the present. How do these values, which I still believe in, look to me now? I can't give you a balance sheet. It varies from country to country, stage to stage, and I think that, in many respects, Australia is privileged both by its distance from the world and by certain virtues which are institutionalised in this country. Nonetheless, we're subject to a range of threats of a sort which I certainly didn't predict.

The program has flattered me by saying that back in 1997 I could see where Australia was pointing. There couldn't be, with great respect, anything further from the truth. I'll read this part, because I only wrote it on the plane last night and it's not in my head yet.

I warned of dangers, but I didn't know what was likely to happen. I certainly had no idea that the geopolitical frame of the world would be turned around by September 11 and its aftermath. I didn't know the Middle East and much of the rest of the world would be roiled by what turned out to be tragically ill-advised and ill-prepared, ill-planned US-led wars, nor that the economic security of much of the world would be threatened by the great financial crisis; that the whole world would come to face unprecedented disenchantment and fatigue with democracy; that virtually every country in the world would need to confront the wicked problem - wicked as much morally as practically - of what to do about refugees; that the European Project, so hopeful in 1997 when I wrote the lectures, so newly and optimistically expanded in 2004 when 10 new countries were added to the EU, would now seem like some aged, incontinent invalid with a glorious past and a future threatened on every side; that what seemed to be a fruitful engagement between Russia and the west would fall into Cold War-style rivalry between an old-style Russian gangster and an ignorant narcissistic screwball as the two major contestants; that China, for all its economic successes, would become extremely repressive at home and ambitious abroad; that the experiments in developing democracy in the rule of the law in the part of the world that I'm particularly focused on - post-communist Europe - would pretty soon begin to founder and is foundering as we speak; that populism would threaten to trump civilised politics in country after country.

Trump is an apt word here and not a happy one. In fact, I think these are terrible threats to all the values I commended, and I didn't see them coming. I was also slow on climate change, just as another incidental. So my score card as a prophet is zero. Nevertheless, let me prophesy – no, I won't prophesy, but I will try to suggest that the price of every value that I have subscribed to so far is eternal vigilance. Let me just mention where some of the threats that seem to me around might come from.

First, conservatives. A lot of the people around the world who call themselves conservative aren't, in at least two senses. First of all, they don't have brakes. Conservatism was a doctrine which said brakes are important.

Your intentions are important, but having brakes, having some institutionalised ways of stopping the train moving, is enormously important. Many of these new conservatives, as they're called, in Hungary (where I was yesterday) and Warsaw (where I was a few days before that), in Russia (where I am all the time), in Turkey, and, if Trump is given his way, in the United States, and institutionally also in China, don't recognise the need for brakes on power, so they're not conservative in that sense.

There's also a difference between conservatism and reaction. Conservatives want to conserve the good in what they have around them. Reactionaries demand that we go back to what is usually a mythical state before the rot set in, which they're going to lead us back to, and a lot of populists are exactly like that. That's centralised populism. Our lives have been taken over by elites, they say. It's been decomposed by globalisation, et cetera. We've got to get back to the America, (or the Australia, the Hungary, the Poland) as they were and should be. These are threatening moves, and they're not conservative moves, whatever label they come under.

Liberalism, similarly is hugely under threat in many countries in the world. There was a famous article some years ago by an American journalist which noted that democracies were flourishing all over the world, in the sense that nowadays almost all governments are elected, but they were illiberal democracies, in that as soon as they were elected the governments went after the press, went after the courts, and went after independent organisations. That's happening in lots of places. I don't think it's right to call these states democracies, but they represent illiberal tendencies which are huge in the world.

Once upon a time Europe was a centre of liberal opposition, and we've had some relief in the last few months. In France it wasn't the populist who won. In Holland it wasn't the populist who won. We're hoping, or I'm hoping, that in Germany shortly it won't be the populist who wins.

But 50% of the French electorate didn't vote for anyone who's going to be in power. That doesn't promise an easy ride. So liberalism is under some threat.

The freedom from domination asked for by republicans is not something that sounds fresh in the ears of the people who are fermenting political, religious and ethnic rivalries in many parts of the world, including going to wars.

You know more about community than I do, and I think one thing to keep in mind is how, quite apart from whatever it is that you find valuable in communities, communities are all-important against these sorts of tendencies. There is a kind of derailing or uncoupling now of political leadership from a lot of where people live. People are disconnected from each other. They're disconnected from the political caravan – it goes its way and they go their way – and this is an enormously unhealthy state of affairs which a lot of politicians have no interest in changing. People should have an interest in changing it.

I hopped on the plane because I was so taken with Denis's account of what it is that you do and what Our Community does. I think it's enormously important. A lot of people — not in Australia, because we have compulsory voting, but in a lot of parts of the world — are so disenchanted they simply don't vote, which again plays into the hands of those people who can bring out the vote of their loyal subjects. I think that this is a major issue, but communities have a choice. They have many choices.

One choice is whether they're going to be inclusive and civil in their recruitment, or exclusive, ethnic, religious, tribal, and political in their recruitment. That is a choice, and people make it differently all over the world. I would advocate, because it's the only thing which will get you into the International which you're about to join, that it be a liberal inclusive community rather than an exclusive us-against-them one.

The socialist ideal has not done well recently. It came as a shock to many people when the French economist, Thomas Piketty, published his book on inequality in the last couple of years to discover what a huge proportion of people were now, in terms of equality, in a much worse position than they had been, that the fates of many millions of people in the United States, in Europe, in many parts of the world are not going to be as healthy as that of their parents, so on.

This is a great difficulty that we face.

And, finally, democracy. A lot of people don't much like liberal democracy. A lot of people who get elected as populists are hostile to it. But it also has its own crises, which I really don't understand; and one of the most worrying things, it seems to me, about this litany of woes that I'm pouring out is that I don't know who does understand it.

In '97 we had stable political parties, we had strong economic growth. Communism had collapsed. That was nice for people of my sort. And now - my parents had been refugees in the thirties and forties, and so a sort of frame for a lot of what I've thought about over my life has been that period. I'm not that old, but it was there in my memory. I never thought of it, as I do now, as there in my present.

I never thought that we might come to a period in world history which had so many analogies to the 1930s. Nobody knows quite what the crises of democracies are about, or why they're happening now. Nobody knows why upstart nobodies have suddenly come into power in many countries in the world, and nobody knows what to do about this sort of economic derailing. And no-one predicted it. The people who know were wise five minutes after the event, but no-one was very clever before the event.

Now, the good news in that is just as we couldn't predict the bad things, we may be equally bad at predicting the good things. I hope that's true. I don't mean this as it must sound (but after all I'm jetlagged), to be a kind of cancelling out of the sadness and despair. I don't mean that at all. Still, people have been frequently surprised in a very good way by things they didn't see coming. The end of communism in Europe was one such thing. There was no-one who was smart about that till it happened.

So perhaps there are good things awaiting us but I don't see them.

Thank you very much. | ENDS