The Luck of Fools

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I want to start with where we are at the moment, that magnificent continent where we sit today. It dominates this part of the world.

I remember Alexander Downer always used to have the maps with Australia right at the centre, but as you can see, there's a chance that it can progressively get smaller and smaller and smaller and the actual caption there at the bottom says "Lostralia." "Lostralia." What have we lost?

Well, it begins with understanding something of what we once were. I know that the history of Australia, certainly since the time of European settlement, has been a very chequered one. There have been some quite disgraceful things that have been done in our name over the centuries, particularly to indigenous people and to other vulnerable people, but we also need to remember that what Australia used to be known for was not just the size of its land mass or its comparative wealth. This was a country once of extraordinary social innovation.

South Australia was the first place in the world to bring into existence full political rights for everybody. The votes for women had happened earlier in New Zealand, but not only could you vote if you were a woman (in fact, irrespective of what group you belonged to, everybody had equal political rights back at the last part of the nineteenth century), you could also be elected to parliament. It was the first place in the world in which that was done. The introduction of secret ballots – we take them for granted now in elections, yet it used to be known internationally as the "Australian ballot." All sorts of social innovations grew out: the campaign that started overseas for the eight-hour day, the rise of trade unions. Australia was as much known, as was New Zealand, for its progressive social policies, as it was for anything else, and yet, although we may have many other exceptional achievements which the world might look to in the future, I get a sense, as many do at the moment, that that place that we used to occupy on the map has been shrinking and getting smaller with every passing year.

Now, it may be that my little animation there is far too extreme. Perhaps we'll never shrink to the point where no one regards us well for our practice of social innovation, but what I want to do is talk about the risks that we might face that that could happen and what we might do about it, and I want to talk in particular about folly and the role of the fool in countering that. But before I do, I want to start with something which was touched upon in the early addresses. Something so obvious that it's an entirely unremarkable thing in most of our lives, yet it's of critical significance, and it's to do with the importance of choice, the role that choice plays, because everything that we see around us, everything, other than the laws of nature themselves, are a product of human choice.

On this planet, the things we build could always have been different. This [refers to PowerPoint slide] could have been a cube rather than a pyramid. It could have been that. Instead of having a neoclassical building of this kind built in Greece, it could have been some different kind of structure, just as this one from Sydney, it might have been like the one before, a neoclassical building. The fashions that we have, now I would not personally choose to wear something like this, but somebody might find it attractive. The technologies that we employ, the symbols we bring to bear on things like currency, even the way that we decorate our bodies with make-up, with piercings, all of these things could be different and all are a product of choice.

Most of those things I've shown you, of course, are benign. Some of them have actually aided human prosperity and development over the years, but our choices are not limited just to the benign. We're also capable of choosing this, and this, and this. Everything we make is a product of choice.

Now, understanding that anatomy of choice and the implications for our society here at home and abroad is one of the things that we dedicate our time to doing at the Ethics Centre. That's what we're effectively dealing with day in and day out – how do we assist people and build their capacity to make better choices?

To understand that, it means that you need to get some sense of the anatomy of folly. There's a wonderful book written by an American historian called Barbara Tuchman, the title of which is "The March of Folly." What she looks at are four cases, not this one, but here's one that impacts upon us still today, of course, the folly of sub-prime lending and the global financial crisis that so many people have had to contend with, and, as always, it's the people in the poorest and most marginal conditions who bear the greatest cost.

The four cases that she looked at, the first of them this one [refers to PowerPoint slide]. You all recognise this, it's the Greek horse left by Odysseus outside the gates of Troy. In they come, the Trojans lift the lintel over their gate and, of course, we know what happens after that. The second case that Barbara Tuchman looks at involves this man. You may not recognise him but that's Martin Luther, whose decision to nail his thesis on the cathedral at Wittenberg starts the protestant reformation, and the Roman Catholic Church, which has had spiritual and temporal hegemony over western Europe for centuries, is suddenly bought to its knees, and hundreds of years of warfare over doctrinal differences within the Christian church of the west begin to be fought.

This [refers to PowerPoint slide] is a picture of British soldiers firing upon their North American colonists, a revolution which led Britain to lose the majority of its North American colonies. The final case she looks at is that of Vietnam, where a military superpower, the United States, actually loses a war. Despite the fact that it has superiority of arms, it loses a war because eventually it loses moral authority at home, in particular, and abroad.

Barbara Tuchman wants to know how do these things happen? By any measurement for those concerned, these have got to have been really bad decisions – not a great idea to bring in the Greek horse, not a great idea to let Luther loose on the world, not a great idea to sort of pay no heed to the legitimate claims of your North American colonists when you're in London, and of course the way the war was prosecuted. A terrible idea, and still a watch word, if you like, for military failure.

Now, what Barbara Tuchman does is she doesn't apply the usual tests of historians. She doesn't do this thing where you say, "Well, look, let's take all the assembled evidence and see what we can discover now and with the benefit of hindsight, show them where they went wrong." Instead, the fascinating thing in this book is that she applies three tests.

Firstly, did they, at the time they were making the decision, recognise the risk that they faced?

Secondly, did they, at the time they made the decision, have available to them viable alternatives? There are things that they could have done other than those that they subsequently chose to do.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, did they, at the time of the decision, have people saying out loud, "Don't do it, this is really dangerous, there are better alternatives, let's do something else"?

What Tuchman shows, using the evidence that she's assembled, is that in each and every one of those cases, those conditions were satisfied. They did recognise the risk, they did have viable alternatives, and yet they still did it. Why? Well, she comes out with a series of possibilities. The first thing she asks is, "Is it possible that there were circumstances which led us to believe that we are just foolish creatures?" That we're just stupid, that we cannot help ourselves. You may know that quotation from Voltaire, that history never

repeats itself, man always does. It's as if – it's a terribly depressing thought, isn't it? – that either we refuse to learn from history, or, in fact we're incapable of it. I sometimes think that we might be like one of these rats on a wheel going round and round, there's a stick that comes back and hits us in the head each time, but we just go faster and we get hit harder and harder.

That's one thing she looks at. She says, "No, actually, you know it's an attractive idea in some senses, but in fact, that's not true. There's plenty of evidence to show that human beings can learn from history."

So the second thing that she looks at is that maybe there are just a few rotten apples who are in key positions at the time that the decisions are being made, and if only you got rid of those, then everything would be fine, and she says, "No, that's not true, either." In fact, what she finds is that in each and every one of these cases, there's a distributed network of leadership, all participating in the decisions, which give rise to these acts of folly. So let's see how this can happen, because of course, this hasn't stopped. We still face them now.

One of the ways to realise this is by looking at pictures like this [refers to PowerPoint]. Now, you might think this is a strange thing to be doing at this conference, but you've probably all seen this image before. If you have, you'll know that there are two images there. There's the image of an old woman, and an image of a young woman. Okay, now this is usually a little test of candour. How many people cannot see the old woman? Okay, there's usually a few, it's interesting, in groups as small of about seven, there's usually someone who can't see the old woman. People can see the younger woman with much greater ease. So I'll just describe to you how to see them in case it's a bit hard. So the young woman is looking back over her right shoulder, she's got a choker around her neck, very delicate little snub of a nose, you can just see an eyelash there, and she's wearing some kind of a big hair with a headdress and a feather out of the top. So that's the young woman. The old woman, on the other hand, has got

her bony chin, so it's almost like out of a children's fairy tale, like an old witch, but she's got this bony chin tucked into her chest very tight, like this, she's got a wart on her nose, a little beady eye which she looks down, and a thin slit of a mouth, no lips to speak of at all, she's looking down, and you can just see that. Can everybody see her now? Yes, maybe not everybody can, that's okay though. So the question is, look, when we get these situations, these sorts of images, what is it that makes us so that we can or can't see? See, I haven't changed anything, have I? I haven't added any lines, I haven't taken anything away, I've just simply reframed it for you so you can see it.

Well, of course, here's another one of these act of follies where people may or may not have seen what was going on. For an earlier one, there was a guy call Steven Pearlstein, and the only thing you need to know, just in this quotation, is what's in red there. This notion of 'wilful blindness'. This is the idea that people can actually see what they're doing and they know that it's wrong, but they do it anyway, and there's no doubt that a certain proportion of the time, this is what happens. I know I've done it myself. I've done some things I shouldn't have done and I've known perfectly well what I was doing at the time, and I just conveniently turned a blind eye so that I wouldn't be confronted with it, but it turns out that this may not actually be the most significant cause of these acts of folly.

Here's another image, which you probably haven't seen before. I'm assuming most people can see there what looks like a man with a beard. He's got oak leaves or some kind of vines around his hair. I mean, without framing it too much, it could almost have been a Greco-Roman sculpture that you might have found on a temple at some time in the ancient past.

Now, what I'd like you to do is to have a look at this image, and can anybody tell me if there's something else there to see? Yes, what is it? A couple kissing, absolutely, gosh, that was quick. Have you seen it before? No, what does that tell us, I wonder? No, it's definitely a couple kissing. Now, the way to see it, they're underneath an archway. He's got a cloak that comes down there, there their arms cross, just there, and it's underneath the archway. If you don't see it, there's a very simple explanation for this. What I've presented to you with the image, before I've told you to look anywhere else, is one of the most powerful images you will ever see. It's a human face, and if you think about our survival, our capacity to flourish from the time we're born, one of the critical capacities we need to develop is to recognise other human faces and particularly to interpret them as they change with emotion and things like that. So when you're shown something like a face, we see them in clouds, we see them in stains on bathroom floors, that's how powerful it is. You just see faces everywhere once you let your mind move in that direction.

So I want to show you another image now. It's a monkey screaming. Okay, can everybody see a monkey screaming? Have a look, can you see anything else? Yes, it's got bolts in it, yes. Have a look to see if you can see another image. Look carefully. In fact, there is nothing else there. That is just a picture of a monkey screaming, and you can imagine that if I made it even more graphically realistic, it might be a photograph of a monkey being experimented on, or it could be even a film. You'd say, "Well there it is, it's obvious." So now, this is where it becomes really extraordinary, because there are some people who will not see it. They won't see a monkey screaming, here's what they see. The monkeys on which he worked became research subjects, the electric shocks he gave them were called negative reinforcement and their vain efforts to escape were classified as avoidance behaviour. So here is a research subject receiving negative reinforcement while engaging in avoidance behaviour, not a screaming monkey. In fact, there are people who come to this position where if you show

them this kind of image in the lab or whatever, that's what they will see, and you just think about how it is that our language can so fundamentally change things from what we know basically to be the case.

Weasel words were mentioned in the last session, and the way that they work. The concept of collateral damage does the same thing. What is collateral damage? What it really is, is the broken bodies of usually old men, women and children left on the battlefield, innocents who've been injured in the course of war. Change the language, change the concepts and what you stop seeing are things as graphically obvious as this.

In fact, what you find is the greatest challenge that we face is from conditioned blindness. It's in circumstances where people do not actually see things for what they really are.

Now, we're used to this concept of the elephant in the room, where everybody knows what's there but they won't name them. For me, the elephant in the room is not the dangerous thing. Yes, they can be uncomfortable and a nuisance, and they might be a bit dangerous, but the more dangerous one is the one up in the top left-hand corner of that image [refers to PowerPoint slide]. It's the tiger in the room.

Now, this doesn't quite do justice to the phenomenon. I first came across this when I was taking my children to Taronga Park Zoo in Sydney and in the tiger enclosure, they had a piece of Perspex about this big, and when you looked through the Perspex, you couldn't see in colour, because all of us being human are blessed with the capacity to see in colour. Animals, for the most part, only see in black and white and the tigers in this cage would move, and you could see them there. You know, bamboo and things, bright orange stripes, and they'd go into that part of the view where it was obscured by this screen, and they'd disappear. They'd just disappear.

Now, I've seen Indian tigers in the wild and it's pretty hard to see with colour vision. It's almost impossible to see them when you don't have coloured vision. This is one of the things that we need to deal with as a challenge for our society. It's very easy for people to become conditioned so that they can see every shade of green in the jungle. They can see light green, they can see dark green, they can see all of the greens, but they can't see orange, and as such, they do not see what is really happening in the world in which they operate.

In fact, even good people, and we all know this phenomenon in our lives where, you know, good people who've done bad things, you ask them about it, and you say, "Did you see at the time what you were doing?" They didn't see it. They're not making it up, they're not trying simply to excuse behaviour that should never have been entertained in the first place. They are telling you the truth, that they didn't see it. Why did they not see it? Because they'd been conditioned in a way only to see a small spectrum of the world.

Now, some of those people that I meet with from business, a lot of them, are my age or older, and they're men, and when you tell them that there is a tiger in the room, this is how they respond [places hands over eyes]. If any of you have had small children, you might remember that extraordinary moment when they come up to you and they say, "You can't see me." There are so many grown-ups in positions of power who do that. You tell them that there is a tiger, and unless it's a legal tiger, which they've been trained to see, or an accounting tiger, or a conservative tiger, or a whatever kind of political tiger, unless it's something which they can see because they've already mastered their capacity, their response to this is to say, "It can't see me, because I won't look for it. I won't reveal myself not to have mastered that part of the spectrum which will allow me to see this."

You must find this day in, day out, talking to some people, where you try to explain to them the tiger that's in the room and they just won't look. Not only

will they not see, but they will not look, and of course, nature, in general, refuses to be tamed by our ignorance of it. When somebody walks into its jungle, and doesn't look for the tiger, or can't see it, it doesn't say, "Oh well, I'll let them go." It's just an easy lunch. The risks we face as a society, or the risks that organisations face, lie in this phenomenon. It's what happens when these magnificent strategic risks – the tigers in the room – these things are not seen or are simply ignored.

So one of the questions is, how do we see them? How do we get our society to see the tigers in the room that are presented when social justice is laid waste, when communities become divided, when the sense of hope and aspiration for whole sections of the people are muted because they have no realistic prospect? How do you get people to see this?

There are two great enemies of ethics. I describe them both by two true stories – one involving another former Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam. Gough Whitlam actually confirmed this to me as a true story, otherwise I perhaps would have been thinking it merely apocryphal, but he was invited, while Prime Minister of Australia, to give a speech in London on Australia's economic prospects. He was preparing for this speech, and it was going to be to a gathering like this, full of the good and the great, though from the financial centre of London, and his host on this occasion was the Lord Mayor of London, who was an arch-conservative.

Whitlam, thinking of himself as a reforming Labor Prime Minister, thought that he and the conservative Lord Mayor would have nothing in common, except that he noticed on a briefing sheet provided by a protocol officer that there was one important biographical fact about this person. The Lord Mayor of London had been an oarsmen, he'd rowed through school, rowed for his university, I think he'd gone on and rowed for Great Britain. So Gough Whitlam stood up and said, "Your worships, my lords, ladies and gentlemen, I came here this evening thinking that his worship and I have absolutely nothing in common, but now I

see that we are united by one thing, because as you know, he is a distinguished oarsmen and I am a politician, and the thing that unites us is that we both look one way, and go the other."

Of course, it's a sad joke today. It is actually a really sad joke that we're living at a time in our democracy when you can say one thing and do something so completely different and assume that we don't care. That's what I find so insulting about this. They assume that we don't care, that as long as there's some prospect of prosperity, we'll just set it all aside, that the character of a person and their words means nothing. I don't know whether they trust us as citizens to be able to rise to whatever challenge we might face if we're actually told the truth, but I also have to acknowledge this notion of saying one thing and doing something else is not confined just to politics. We see it in all manner of institutions which betray their central purpose.

I think we're at this period which I would call a long age of forgetting, in which institutions that were established for great reasons when they were first brought into existence, have lost sight of that. They've forgotten the purposes for which they were established, which they were meant to serve, and a corrupted form of them, so entranced by their external format, takes root and then they betray themselves.

I'll give you one example. A lot of people cheered when the Royal Commission looking into the institutional treatment of children was mentioned. Here's an example of the sort of thing I mean. For over 2000 years, the Christian Church taught that love was more important than law, that people are more important than property, that you should stand up and face the truth about yourself and your place in the world. Yet, those men who were running the churches, when confronted with allegations to do with sexual abuse of children and other vulnerable people, they responded by putting the law before love, by putting their property before people, by protecting their backs rather than facing the

truth. That was part of the devastation of this. The horrors of the original abuse were compounded by an institution which betrayed the very things that it said that it believed in, and you can look at it now in universities, corporations, parliament – time and time again, institutions which were established with good, even noble purposes, they betray their central purpose.

Now, is that because archbishops, prime ministers, corporation heads, whatever, do they wake up in the morning and say, "My task for today is to see how much cynicism I can generate by lunch time. I want to engage in as much hypocrisy as I can today so that there's a fountain of cynicism flowing through our society"? Because it is like an acid. It does eat away at the bonds of community when people become not merely sceptical, but cynical. The truth is they don't wake up like that. That's not how they wake up. What happens is something different, obvious, but extraordinary.

I was sitting in a taxi cab just after I came back from Cambridge a long time ago and there was a royal commission into the building industry being conducted in New South Wales. Those of you who come from other states, you might know that we have royal commissions into one form of corruption or another in New South Wales with a fair degree of frequency. Anyway, this one had been going on and I was talking to the taxi driver about his life and times, and he was telling me his life story, which they sometimes do, and he said to me, he said, "Mate, I haven't been driving cabs all that long." I said, "Oh yes, what did you used to do?" He said, "I used to be a concrete truck driver." So I thought, "Oh, that's pretty interesting." Here we've got a royal commission looking into allegations of corruption in the building industry, and a guy who's actually been working in it, and only recently left. So I said to him, "Well, you've read all this stuff, I suppose. What's the truth, what's it like?" He goes, "Oh mate, mate, mate" he said, "Mate, no you'd be building a hospital for the nuns out at St Mary's and one of the bosses or one his mates wants to have an extension to his house or a

swimming pool put in so we divert truck loads of concrete, and before you know it, there's the extension, there's the swimming pool." I said, "Oh, that's pretty bad." He said, "Oh no mate, no, something worse than that was happening, that's why I got out, something worse than that." I'm thinking to myself, naively, perhaps, "What's worse that stealing from nuns?" That struck me as bad. So I'm imagining whole buildings being relocated in the dead of night. Anyway, I'm on the edge of my seat and this guy says, "No mate, no, had to get out mate." He said, "Somebody stole $20 from the lockers in the workshop where I used to get changed, wasn't going to have a bar of that."

So now I've got a sense of the proportions. For him, the fact that somebody had stolen $20 from **his** locker was far worse than all the rest of it. I thought, well this is, if nothing else, is a good opportunity to talk about the Ethics Centre and the work that we do and so I began to tell him about our prospects, and as I did, this guy's face changed. He lit up, this great big smiley face. He had one hand on the steering wheel, and he's got the other hand going "bang" on the steering wheel, and he says, "Mate, mate, that's what we need, an ethics centre, mate, an ethics centre." I'm thinking now that this man has been convinced by the creation of this ethics centre to think that now no one's going to steal from the nuns and the money will be safe in the lockers and all things will be alright. So I thought, early on in my career in this work, this was fantastic, I'd managed to connect with this man. So we arrive at the airport, and I ask for a receipt for my taxi fare, he says, "Yes, mate, how much do you want it for?" True. So maybe I should have packed up then and stopped. It was such an extraordinary thing for him to say.

I sat there, sort of stunned, I actually told him the right answer (I once joked about that to a group of engineers, all of whom had had an irony bypass, and they got very annoyed with me), so I gave him the right amount, he wrote it down, and then I asked him, "Look, don't you think it's a little bit odd, you know,

we've just had this conversation about things and after all that, you've asked, in effect, how would I like to rip off an ethics centre?" His face changed. He didn't get angry, he wasn't angry, he was just slightly – like a blank, really, but he said to me, "But mate, everybody does it. That's just the way we do things around here."

This gave me this insight into what was going on. I'd ask you to reflect on this, even in your own organisations. It doesn't have to be something like ripping off the ethics centre, it might be just day-to-day conduct, but just ask, "Why do we do this?" – or "Because that's just the way it's always been done, because everybody does it". I've been into so many different types of organisations, here, abroad, whatever, and you ask people to explain, and what typically most people don't do, is they don't say, "Oh well, we do this because here is our defining purpose. These are our values and principles."Instead, for ease and convenience, what happens is that more often than not, people are doing things because that's just the way it's always been done. That's what everybody does.

Now, this turns out to be one of the great sources of trouble in the world – when you find people in those situations where they don't think, they don't attach it to purpose, to their values or principles. In fact, Barbara Tuchman, the historian I mentioned, who wondered how those four things had happened, when she had excluded all other possibilities, what she discovered was the prevalence of what she called "wooden-headedness" or what I would call "unthinking custom and practice" – the inclination to do things simply because, that's what everybody does.

Now, that's whole industries you can find this in, whole parts of society which uncritically accept that this is just the way it is. Until something goes wrong. Then, when something's gone wrong, people look back and say, "How could it possibly have been the case that we were doing this or that?"

Now, there is an antidote to this, but it's a troubling one and it's for all of us to consider, particularly in these times. The antidote is in a particular model of leadership as opposed to management. The world needs wonderful managers who are able to keep things running as they ought to run. I think of organisations, sometimes, like corks in a stream, and sitting on the corks, are managers who can pull the levers when they need to be pulled, press the buttons when they need to be pressed, keep the whole thing operating as it ought, but then there are the leaders. What leaders refuse, ever, to do, is simply to be taken just where the stream happens to be flowing. What leaders engage in are acts of constructive subversion.

That's what I think leadership is. It's constructive subversion. What do you subvert as a leader? You subvert unthinking custom and practice. A leader never, ever accepts that something is done simply because it's always been done this way or because everybody does it. They constantly call an organisation back to its purpose, back to its related values and principles and ask, "Why not do it this way?" And they're constructive because their task is not to destroy the organisation, nor to impose upon it their own idiosyncratic view of how it ought to be. Their job is to help each organisation to become more like the thing that it says it wants to be. But to do this requires vast reserves of moral courage, because almost no one wants you to do it. There will be people who report to you in a leadership position and say, "Why ask all these questions? Don't you trust us? Don't you know that we're just going to get on with it? You're just making life more difficult." You've got peers who'll say, "Can't you just shut up? You know, you're making us look bad. All these questions! Goody two-shoes, smarty-pants." And you've got superiors, those who say – "above your pay grade, don't ask".

Don't think of this just in terms of organisational structures. Think about it in terms of societies – what it means to challenge the prevailing norms of a society

embedded within its political class, embedded within institutional arrangements. That's where the moral courage is required to speak out.

Of course, you might have been wondering when you saw the title of the address today, "The Luck of Fools," who are the fools? It's us. It's not just the fool of the kind that Barbara Tuchman speaks of, but it's the fool of Shakespeare's King Lear – the fool, the person authorised or with the courage to speak truth to power. That's what we need today. We need a movement of people who are prepared to lead in the terms I've tried to describe. All of us fools, willing to speak truth to power. Whether it's about social justice, the basic needs of a community that aims to flourish, whatever area where you see the power seeks to dominate and silence and to misrepresent the fundamental truth of the world in which we live, that is where the fools are.

Australia has had its share of luck, some of it made, some of it bestowed. People who were born here certainly have no claim upon that luck, it's pure accident. Any one of us who was lucky enough to be born here could have been born in conditions of penury or oppression in some other part of the world. There is absolutely nothing we do to deserve the bounty that we have in this land. What we can do, though, is earn some measure of it by the way in which we choose to respond, the way we speak truth to power. Part of that means challenging some of the dominant ways we think and talk about the world.

For example, have you noticed that virtually every single issue that comes before us as a nation now can only be resolved by an appeal to economic utility That's the clinching argument, and we've bought into it.

I'll give you three examples. When the first debates about petrol sniffing in central Australia were introduced, everybody knew that there was a solution, which was to introduce Opal Fuel which doesn't have the volatiles that cause the terrible illness and sometimes death of people who sniff petrol. We knew

what to do, but how did they manage to do it? Well, it was only after a report by Access Economics was commissioned to show that it would cost less in healthcare and other things that we said, “Oh, it’s okay then, we can introduce Opal Fuel.”

The environmental movement, in the height of the debate about global warming, latched onto a report by Sir Nicholas (now Lord Nicholas) Stern, who had been at the World Bank, to say that if we didn’t act, it would cost too much. The environmental movement says, “Oh, okay, well then we’ll drop all of our language about intergenerational equity, our duty to the future, a duty of stewardship, not only to other generations but to other species.” No, if we don’t do anything, it will cost too much.

In 2008, 2009, two charities which had actually been established to combat child abuse went to Access Economics to get a report to show that child abuse costs too much. Now, what does that say about us as a society? Where have we come to, when we think that the way we nail an argument about child abuse is that it costs too much? Can you imagine just over 200 years ago, when William Wilberforce stood before the dispatch box in the House of Commons, giving his great speech to do with the abolition of slavery, talking about the fundamental rights of human beings not to be enslaved, not to be the property of others, can you imagine him standing before the House of Commons and saying as his closing remarks, “And finally, I have a report from Access Economics to show that it costs too much.” Of course he didn’t. He had confidence in a language, an ethical language, he could quote, knowing that his own society would respond to this, that he would not be reduced, as we are today, to the idea that everything has its value only measured in economic terms. That is such a dominant idea, that even those who might naturally be opposed to it feel required to collude with, but you need the fool who’s willing to speak truth to power.

So for me, the central issue is this: We saw Australia once not literally as a great land mass, but as a place which had the confidence, the language, the concepts by which it was going to actually stand for something and be brave in its experimentation, in its pursuit of justice, in a way that the world could marvel at. We've seen glimpses of this from time to time.

My argument to you today is that we've come to a point where we've lost confidence in it, where we have a political class that seems unable to understand or to embrace these things. That requires a new form of leadership. Not from those who are charged formally with the duty to lead, but by all of us, by all of us in this room, the community. This is not a task for any particular individual because they've been nominated or awarded a certain role. It's for us, but for all of us in the room. It's going to require that extraordinary moral courage in order to play the part of the fool. Thank you.