

The 1995 Boyer Lectures

A TRULY CIVIL SOCIETY

By Eva Cox

Lecture 1:

BROADENING THE VIEWS

(Broadcast: Tuesday, 7th November 1995, 8.30am (Rpt. 8.00pm) on Radio National.)

Introduction

Diana Gribble:

Welcome to the 1995 Boyer Lectures. I'm Diana Gribble, Deputy Chair of the ABC Board. This series of radio lectures began in 1959 as the ABC Lectures. They were renamed in 1961 in honour of the late Sir Richard Boyer, during whose chairmanship of the ABC, the lectures were conceived. This year's speaker is Eva Cox, a forthright commentator on social policy. Her critique has influenced policy debate in the areas of social security, superannuation, economics, child care, migration, education, family law and women's affairs.

In these Boyer lectures, which she has called A TRULY CIVIL SOCIETY, Eva Cox will take a radical look at the collection of somewhat forgotten values - such as trust, co-operation and goodwill - that hold society together. She argues that we are losing that important social glue and that current debates about citizenship are narrowly focussed on citizens as competitive individuals rather than as social beings.

Eva Cox's adult life has been focussed on making a difference. She was a founder of the Women's Electoral Lobby in New South Wales in 1972, and co-founder of the Women's Economic Think Tank in 1990. Over the past 20 years, she has held senior positions in government and the community sector. She has been a Director of the NSW Council of Social Services, has worked on the staff of Federal and State politicians as well as in both public services and as a private consultant. She now teaches in Social Sciences at the University of Technology, Sydney and was recognised this year with an AO for her service to disadvantaged groups. In keeping with her themes of co-operation and connection, Eva Cox will deliver her lectures in the presence of a small audience - whose reactions you may hear. The company includes those who have been part of the Boyer process: ABC people, and the friends and colleagues of our speaker who have fed in ideas as the lectures developed. So, I'm pleased to introduce now the first lecture in this series with Eva Cox,

Broadening the Views

Eva Cox:

When Margaret Thatcher said 'There's no such thing as society', she lost the plot! Society is the myriad of ways people connect, linked by some common interests or characteristics. Over the next six weeks, I want to explore what holds society together, what may cause us to come apart and what constitutes a truly civil society in which we trust each other and face our futures optimistically.

In a civil society, we need to recognise the supreme importance of social connections which include plenty of robust goodwill to sustain difference and debate. This possibility exists within Australia today, but we risk squandering it in our search for illusory economic development. I want to question some too common assumptions, challenge many beliefs seen as truths, and recast some old ideas which have fallen out of fashion. I want to persuade those in high places to recognise that we are social beings.

I want to contribute to a new century optimism that will allow us to move co-operatively and not competitively towards a more civilised future. Part of this task involves looking for the missing links which connect the spheres of public and private; part involves raising questions and encouraging your participation in finding the answers.

If we are social beings rather than economic beings, then society is threatened by the presence of Economically Rational Man in public policy. This homo non sapiens is a constructed individual (not a social being), who maximises the short term advantage in most economic models. If he takes over, he will destroy society because social connections have no place in a world full of self-interested, competing individuals.

I want to talk about what binds us: the ties that we call society and community; the links which define how we see ourselves and how we act towards each other. Why these links are omitted from public debate raises the question of who sets the public policy agenda.

Maybe a clue can be found in past Boyer lectures. This series must sound different from most of the others because I am only the fourth woman in 37 years to deliver the whole six. The absence of women illustrates one of my core points: the public agenda is too narrow when it represents only those male voices which are seen as authoritative.

The previous lecturers had gravitas, prominent Australians all. Over half were professors, and there were two writers, two judges and some scientists. Most were Anglo-Celtic, and no women appeared until the Boyers were in their 17th year. I am not critical of individual male lecturers because I agree with many of their ideas. Deeply, Tom Fitzgerald, Nugget Coombs and John Passmore and I disagreed with Helen Hughes who lectured in 1985.

So, I recognise that just adding the voices of a few women is not enough to change the agenda. Only a wide variety of voices can do this. To quote Virginia Woolf :

"It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men... for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the variety and vastness of the world, how should we manage with one only? For if an explorer should come back with words of other sexes looking through the branches of other trees at other skies, nothing should be of greater service to humanity."

I agree with her. We need new perspectives from many 'sexes'. We need many points from which to view the world if we want to re-create, to look at new ways of moving into the next millennium.

Women will bring different perspectives not because we're more warm and caring than men, naturally, but because we have different life experiences.

Women are more likely still to be allocated the roles of domestic managers and keepers of the social and emotional relationships and therefore we bring different points of view to setting the public agenda.

An advantage of being outside the power group is that you may learn more ways of seeing, both by choice and necessity. I remember an Aboriginal woman in a group in Adelaide explaining how she put on her 'white' persona somewhere between home and the office. Her description reminded me of how women learn to see through mens' eyes what they see as important but we also see what is left out. It must be confusing for those men who see only their own reflections in the mirror.

This series is not about woman, any more than the other Boyers were about man. What I am offering is a feminist view of how we can broaden the public agenda to the benefit of all. We need the widest trawl of views to make the best decisions; the issue is not so much equity but effective public policy making.

For instance, we should look at quality of life and life satisfaction indicators, rather than economic indicators. If we did this, we would see that we are in trouble. The polls suggest that there are widespread anxieties in many industrialised countries, and this is not just because of economic problems. There are real concerns about loss of social cohesion and loss of faith in the possibilities of solving social problems.

Writing these lectures made me optimistic because I could see ways forward in my quest for understanding. They are political lectures with a small p because they are about change and about action. I believe that debating and exploring our differences raises the ante and being responsible for what happens increases our humanity.

I have serious concerns about the current dominant fashion of macho, competition-driven 'progress' and the intensity with which these economic frameworks are promoted. These frameworks are particularly dangerous because alternate views are denied, ridiculed or ignored. The 'social' has been relegated to such a low priority that it's almost completely off the agenda.

The dominant ideas of competition and deregulation of markets, and the attacks on the redistributive roles of government are not only dysfunctional but positively dangerous. They are part of an oversimplified dogma which can destroy a truly civil society in pursuit of the cashed-up individual.

It behoves me, therefore, as a passionate reformer, to use this gift of time to put forward some alternative frameworks; other ways of seeing the future which differ from the public loop of policy debates. Some of my keywords are trust, reciprocity, mutuality, co-operation, time, social fabric and social capital.

Preparing these lectures was a case in point. Many women gave me their time and support. Their enthusiasm reassured me in moments of doubt, helped me with some dilemmas and generated some lively debates and differences. Through this mutual trust and involvement, I experienced what a truly civil society could offer; an affirmation of self that comes from working with others in a group, the collective exploration of new ideas and the reworking of old ones. As I canvassed the possibilities of social trust and reciprocity in words, I experienced them in deeds.

Let me put my values on the table: I believe we are responsible for each other, as well as ourselves. I act for others so I can live with myself. This position runs counter to some of the prattling on about the politics of difference by postmodernists who seem to deny that we can identify injustice, or that we can act to prevent it. I believe it is up to us, all of us, to make up our minds about the world we want and to take some responsibility to make this world happen.

I am a product of my age and time. Born in Vienna, just before Hitler annexed Austria in 1938, I became a non person by Nazi decree because of my Jewish 'blood' before I was even weaned! My background is one of the causes of my constant quest for better ways of running the world. From this comes my questioning and need to understand why things happen the way they do and how we come to be the way we are. From this experience comes my passion for political betterment.

Over time, I have realised that many of the grand theories I studied as a sociologist fail to deal with the complexities of everyday living. Private lives are merely defined as 'family' - a mythic undergrowth which is used to justify much of what happens in the public sphere. Private lives are rarely at the centre of policies. We miss the social in pursuit of the economic. When was trust last an item in the Federal budget?

The makers of current political agendas focus on markets which exclude the social. This omission leaves space for the peddlers of social snake oil, like Newt Gingrich's 'Contract with America', who offer easy solutions to the emerging social problems .

Neither the communist push for central control nor the laissez-faire of market forces, can work on their own. Both these models fail because they are dramatically incomplete, one-eyed, and do not recognise that society is more than the public sphere and economics. We cannot do without some forms of collectivity. Nor can we run an entire society by use of the collective will, but competing marketeers in head-on battle actually destroy society.

The limits of most grand theories is they leave out most of the social and private aspects because these are deemed to be women's spheres. A recent reviewer of Tom Paine's biography for instance said Paine had written on the Rights of Man and the only virtues he had recognised were manly ones.

There are relatively few grand theories by women. But one woman to whom I often return, is Hannah Arendt, a German Jewish philosopher who also fled Hitler. Her dissenting views, including those on the human condition were often ignored because they were different from the prevalent male writings of that time.

The metaphor of birth - and this is one of Arendt's key concepts - is about the possibility of finding new beginnings. In the possibility of change lies 'hope', the final figure from Pandora's box of troubles. Without 'hope', we are discouraged from trying.

Hannah Arendt's version of being fully human involves three types of human action. She sees family life and paid work as only two of three parts of the Human Condition. Part three is the *vita activa*, public life, in which we collectively create civil spheres. This makes us uniquely human as only human beings have the capacity for thought and collective debate and action. Loss of any of the three parts of the human condition or the overemphasis on any one, creates problems.

Do we live to work, or work to live? How do we allocate our time and other resources? If we take on board Arendt's three aspects of the human condition, including the *vita activa*, then we need to find time.

If we need time for public life, as well as family and work, then we need to look at public policies, social commitments and personal choices. Time relates to hours of work and the values we place on paid and unpaid work. This raises the issue of whether the present pressures on work and family militate against an active civil society.

Civil societies are also civic societies, that is, we as citizens must take some responsibility for changing what we do not like. There is a wide debate about citizenship underway. The term is being thrown around fairly indiscriminately by groups across the political spectrum. Much of what is written involves claims about the rights of individuals and even groups. But what happens when those rights conflict? Have we forgotten the inevitable tensions between rights and responsibilities and the search for individual freedoms? Can we retain social cohesion and the possibility of individual autonomy? These questions can only be answered by all of us as active participants in a civil society.

Starting with the proposition that our society is becoming increasingly uncivil, these lectures will trace the often forgotten but powerful forces that connect us as social beings. These forces - trust, reciprocity and mutuality - survive in our everyday lives but are not reflected in public policy and therefore are losing ground.

What drives me on and has overcome my self doubt in exposing my ideas so widely, is my anger at what I see around me. The constant news of warring groups and the break up of societies, the way we seem to move from optimism to pessimism.

There are too many of us who feel pessimistic about the future, who feel society, is gradually coming apart. The idea of the social is losing ground to the concepts of competition, and the money markets are replacing governments. The social aspects of humanity have somehow disappeared and we are left with a more atomised image of individuals competing in an endless process of distrust.

We have always lived in times of change. In the past, there was a sense that change was good - there was an optimism we were moving into better times. There are now signs of a widespread anxiety that we are moving backwards, and what we leave to our children may be no better than what we inherited from our parents. I hope this need not be so. Trust is essential for our social wellbeing. Without trusting the goodwill of others, we retreat into bureaucracy, rules and demands for more law and order. Trust is based on positive experiences with other people and it grows with use. We need to trust that others are going to be basically reasonable human beings. Trust leads to co-operation. I have a tea towel which shows a cartoon strip of individuals trying to climb out of a deep hole. Only when they do it together can they find their way out. We know that working together is preferable to working alone and yet the ethos of competition over-rides an ethic of care. The media are now full of tales of fresh disasters. Fear of crime is a major issue, even though the statistics report relatively few actual changes. We worry about our health and pollution, and suspect the water and food supplies. We demand that we be protected against almost every type of risk. Litigation is soaring. More and more people are locking themselves into their homes for fear of the outside world. Distrust starts from the top as well as the bottom. I have collected some survey results which show that trust in government and big business is low and probably reducing. A compilation of academic surveys from the ANU, showed half the population trusted government to do the right thing in 1969, but the proportion had dropped to one third by 1993.

The AMR Quantum Social Monitor's 1993 poll showed three quarters agreed that business is too concerned with profits; and over 90% agreed that without Government regulation, business would take advantage of consumers.

The same survey showed almost all respondents still think Australia is a fair country and it looks after those people who are not doing well. However the respondents felt equally strongly that they have to rely on their own skills to get ahead and to take control of their own lives.

In another survey, two economists, Glen Withers and David Throsby, find that we may even be prepared to pay more taxes to pay for the more civilised society.

There's a lack of consistency in these responses which can be explained by widespread cynicism. While Australians have always had a long tradition of larrikin responses to authority, now the framework has changed. Now it is governments themselves who seem to be cynical about their ability to merit our trust. Some seem actively hell-bent on confirming our levels of distrust and suggesting business can offer better services than can the public sector.

The rhetoric of distrusting government spending is common to all our current political parties, but some parties really mean it. Those politicians who believe in imported theories of market forces want us to trust business more and government less. If part of our sense of wellbeing is our faith in governments, the denigration of public services by governments themselves reduces our sense of comfort and trust. And the polls show that people do not trust business either.

Australia's social development has, from our convict beginnings, been closely linked with governments. Collective action created the working man's paradise, and our belief in egalitarian structures. So telling us not to trust government, spills into not trusting our neighbours or even not trusting ourselves.

We lose trust when we enter parliament house and most of our public institutions through security entrances, and we see private guards protecting public places. We lose trust when we are too scared to use public transport, to walk the streets, or talk to strangers.

We need to build a store of trust and goodwill as part of our social capital - a collective term for the ties that bind us and I'll flesh that out in the next lecture. Distrust can stress and fracture our bonding. An accumulation of social capital enhances our quality of life and provides the base for the development of financial and human capital. With an adequate level of social capital we can enjoy the benefits of a truly civil society.

Trust is also an prerequisite for healthy risk taking. This is not bungee jumping or drunk driving, but the confidence to suggest new ideas, to offer proposals outside the current loops. Sticking your neck out requires a level of social trust. The proponents must feel they are taken seriously and that there's an openness to good ideas. In an environment of distrust, people do not risk putting up new ideas unless there are exceptional rewards.

We need to encourage new ideas, dissident views, debates and critics. What we have had is a 'convergence' of views and a desire for the false certainty of consensus. Even those who argued, had to speak the same language and work from similar sets of assumptions to those in power. You can debate the government on the level of poverty but you're not heard if you question inequality.

Too many critics have been co-opted.

I am agnostic in politics and religion and deeply suspicious of simple solutions whether touted by academics or by fundamentalists. In Hannah Arendt's terms I am a pariah who chooses to stay on the outside because only from the margins can you see the whole field. This is not just a feminist position but one shared by others who by choice or circumstance become the outsider commentators, the ones who see the unclad emperors.

I have no recipe for a future magic pudding. The complexity of human society, I suspect, defies the easy answers. What I am looking for is a better process rather than a particular outcome.

I was struck some years ago with a concept promoted by Robert Lindblom, an American academic who described his theories of social change as 'Muddling Through'. Lindblom was promoting a gradual, small-steps approach because he recognised complex societies bred complex problems. He suggested small branch changes were more likely to be well informed and therefore to work than major root change.

If small steps fail, they don't do much damage, and you can have another go. If they succeed you can move on quickly. This small-steps approach has echoes of Fabius Cunctator - or Fabius the delayer - the Roman General who avoided pitched battles and wore down the enemy by engaging in smaller skirmishes. This was the model for the Fabian society, a 19th century British socialist movement which saw small eclectic social changes as being more effective than revolution.

So come ride with me through these lectures and hear some dissident views which don't fit the current fashions. I'll revisit some old ideas of civil society, and offer new ways of seeing the once separated spheres of public and private. I will explore whether Governments have reached a use by date, or whether we need to recast them. And I'll look at what we do and should do to grow children into citizens for a truly civil society.

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By Eva Cox

Lecture 2:
RAISING SOCIAL CAPITAL
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Introduction

Diana Gribble:

Welcome to the 1995 Boyer Lectures. I'm Diana Gribble.

As Deputy Chair of the ABC Board, it's my pleasure to introduce this year's Boyer lecturer, well known social policy commentator and activist, Eva Cox.

In the series, which she has named A TRULY CIVIL SOCIETY, Eva Cox argues for a radical re-thinking of our definition of citizenship. She argues that the citizenship debate is too narrow because it's dominated by the notion that citizens are competitive individuals when in fact, people are fundamentally social beings.

Last week in her first lecture 'Broadening the Views', Eva Cox described how the social had disappeared from debates on public policy. She made a passionate argument for broadening our views beyond the economic frameworks that dominate political debate.

In today's lecture called 'Raising Social Capital', Eva Cox outlines her ideas for increasing our stores of social capital, which she suggests may well be the pre-requisite for economic growth.

Raising Social Capital

Eva Cox:

We invented money and, from the coins of precious metal, we created a convenient fiction called finance. This fiction has unfortunately become the ultimate public record of human connections - what we now call transactions.

Journalists, treasurers and business lobbies use financial data as pressure points to influence public decisions. We worry constantly whether our ill defined Gross Domestic Product is growing too fast or not fast enough, even though it measures only part of our production and wealth.

Finance capital movements determine exchange and interest rates and usurp the roles of the sovereign state. Electronic pulses are invested with so much meaning that they have the power to destroy governments and increase the private affluence of a privileged few.

What is meant by wealth? Wealth has become a very disputed term, particularly with the recent World Bank claims that Australia is the wealthiest country in the world. Marilyn Waring, a New Zealand writer, described the faults in measures of national production in her ground breaking book 'Counting for Nothing'. Crime is counted, traffic accidents because of potholes are not but car repairs are. Plantation trees are counted, self sown saplings are not. If we sell sex, cooking and child care they are counted, but unpaid housework is not. Growth in GDP, the Gross Domestic Product may come from oil spills, bushfires, wars, epidemics or the destruction of wilderness. GDP is actually reduced by lowering the road accident rate and by fewer heart attacks.

The public finance system does not debit financial capital with the destruction of physical capital such as the uncounted wealth of clean air, water resources, trees and the rest of the natural world. So aspects of daily living, such as unpaid production and gifts of time are not even counted as part of the wealth of nations.

There are four major capital measures, one of which takes up far too much policy time and space at present. This is Financial capital. Physical capital makes it onto the agenda because of the environmental movement. So there are fierce debates on trees, water, coal and what constitutes sustainable development. Some types of physical capital and financial capital deplete with overuse, or become scarce or too expensive. We occasionally mention human capital - the total of our skills and knowledge - but rarely count its loss in unemployment.

There has been too little attention paid to social capital - the last of the four horseriders of another apocalypse. Social capital refers to the processes between people which establish networks, norms, social trust and facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit. These processes are also known as social fabric or glue, but I am deliberately using the term 'capital' because it invests the concept with the reflected status from other forms of capital. Social capital is also appropriate because it can be measured and quantified so we can distribute its benefits and avoid its losses.

We increase social capital by working together voluntarily in egalitarian organisations. Learning some of the rough and tumble of group processes also has the advantages of connecting us with others. We gossip, relate and create the warmth that comes from trusting. Accumulated social trust allows groups and organisations, and even nations, to develop the tolerance sometimes needed to deal with conflicts and differing interests.

Therefore we must put a high priority on growing social capital by offering opportunities for trust and co-operation. The social institutions which govern and influence us must operate in ways which value diversity and belonging. They must also be able to withstand debate and questioning.

If the social system isolates people, discourages informal and formal contact, or just fails to offer the time and space needed for social contact, then social capital is under threat. Lack of time is an increasing problem as time becomes commodified through ever longer hours of paid work. We spend time in cars in isolation and there are increasing options for individual working and leisure which intrude upon our once informal meeting times.

We rarely have time to walk, we often avoid public transport because it takes too long, we shop hurriedly and use technology to provide home based entertainment and work. We need to make time for social interactions and the development of trust relationships. What once happened by accident needs to be recognised and encouraged. We need to examine how we can use technology to enhance social capital, and we must look at lifestyles and life cycles to make sure there is space and time .

Social capital should be the pre-eminent and most valued form of any capital as it provides the basis on which we build a truly civil society. Without our social bases we cannot be fully human. Social capital is as vital as language for human society. We become vulnerable to social bankruptcy when our social connections fail. If most of our experiences enhance our sense of trust and mutuality, allowing us to feel valued and to value others,

then social capital increases. That is why I want to use the concept of social capital as a major thread in these lectures.

In a recent article called *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*, American political scientist, Robert Putnam, describes the need for a strong active civil society to make democracy work. He quotes many studies that show a correlation between high levels of civic culture, comfortable lifestyles and positive economic outcomes.

Putnam claims that the interactions which create social capital are most likely to occur in egalitarian communities where people voluntarily contribute time and effort and receive positive reinforcement. Experiences which engender trust and a recognition of common ground, allow people to move comfortably from the defensive 'I' to the mutual 'we'. A sense of reciprocity, he claims, is more than just a utilitarian trading relationship. It creates complex social relationships.

So spending time together, working co-operatively and enjoying each others company create social capital. This seems to be heresy indeed. In an age where competition is the only solution on offer, social capital theory suggests another option: that humans achieve more by co-operating. Indeed much of what we have, as a society, achieved has been by co-operation. If co-operation works so well, we should be very, very wary of accepting competition policies.

Putnam's work in regional Italy offers statistical evidence that co-operation pays off socially, bureaucratically and economically. High levels of social capital bring co-operation and the norms which may be called civic virtues. These virtues in turn are the basis of truly civil societies where the law rests lightly. If we trust others as we trust ourselves, prosperity and economic growth tend to follow.

Social capital is the social glue, the weft and warp of the social fabric which comprises a myriad of interactions that make up our public and private lives - our *vita activa*. Distrust, loss of social cohesion and short term self interest breed conflict and social isolation, demands for law and order and a contempt for power and authority.

So how do we develop social capital? Putnam suggests it is the trust we develop through active relationships with each other. Accumulated trust is based, at least in part, on working together in 'civic' groups. These are the familiar community groups: non-profit organisations such as P&Cs, local environment groups, Rotary, craft groups, neighbourhood centres, local sporting groups, ethnic and religious groups, reading groups, fund raising organisations, playgroups and others which have an egalitarian voluntaristic structure. Such groups are generally run democratically: people participate because they want to and their processes involve members working together on tasks, developing trust and mutually rewarding relationships.

Trust should be defined as inexhaustible because it is increased, rather than depleted by positive use. The more we work together with others in environments which encourage co-operation the more likely we are to trust others, and the occasional failures of trust will be less damaging. Social capital is therefore increased by use. It can be depleted by widespread lack of trust or by our own failure to trust others. Without trust we avoid contact with others because we fear betrayal. This is the core component of social connections.

When people meet to clean up a city, a suburb or a local park, they are amassing social capital. Indeed we amass social capital when we work on the school fete, talk to our neighbours about the street plants, drop off some soup to a sick friend, meet a regular group at tennis or bowls, join a local choir, commit ourselves to making uniforms for the junior sports group, arrange theatre parties, or whatever we do with friends and sometimes strangers.

Even in paid work we may often want to give more than the minimum. There is pleasure in providing a better service. It is a small gift to help, to smile and to satisfy another. We do this not just for commercial reasons but because as the shop assistant, nurse or car detailer we like the customer and want to give them something extra.

Competing against each other leaves little space for reciprocity and the growth of social capital. Running against another in a race may benefit our speed, but jointly organising the sports day produces co-operation and trust. There are many more situations where co-operation and reciprocity are more effective than competition. Civic virtues come from building on what we have in common rather than by using our differences to create in-groups, out-groups and fear driven competition.

The value of belonging to voluntary organisations is often misinterpreted by those on the political right who use Putnam's work to claim that we should replace governments with voluntary organisations. This ignores Putnam's point that it is not the auspice of the organisation that counts, but the way it operates. Many of these groups on the Right are authoritarian in structure and their organisations want to impose their norms on others.

As Putnam says, and I quote: *'On the demand side, citizens in civic communities expect and get better government... they are prepared to act collectively to achieve shared goals. ...Most fundamental to the civic community is the social ability to collaborate for shared interests. Generalised reciprocity... generates high social capital. ...A conception of one's role and obligations as a citizen, coupled with a commitment to political equality, is the cultural cement of the civic community.'*

Without norms of social reciprocity and networks of social engagement, the Hobbesian outcome of the Mezzogiorno (southern Italy) - amoral familism, clientelism, lawlessness, ineffective Government and economic stagnation - seems likelier than successful democratisation and economic development. Palermo may represent the future of Moscow.'

Putnam's work shows that community groups, workplaces or other organisations which are authoritarian and paternalistic do not create trust and civic virtue. They distribute favours to the chosen and compliant, or demand blind loyalty. The consequences are competitive and suspicious interactions. Unity is created by identifying an outside enemy and closing ranks. Mafia style patronage breeds competition - not cohesion.

What Putnam's data suggests is that the removal of Government - destroying the legitimacy of its laws - may create gangs and militias as is occurring in the USA. We need to remember that there is nothing naturally virtuous in communal organisations nor anything inherently wrong with government.

I was excited when I found Putnam's work because it offered a framework for pulling together many of my diverse concerns. The idea of social capital as a measure of the social health or otherwise of communities, societies or nations has a certain unifying elegance.

However, I think his viewpoints are still too narrow. He focuses on definable organisations which work formally in the public arena but he does not include many informal groups. His limited view reflects the usual masculinist assumptions about the separation of the public and private spheres.

I want to extend the social capital concept to include the household and informal sectors which can also create social trust relationships and forms of civic wellbeing. I would include certain extended household operations, neighbourliness and community support, all of which informally link people. These informal help and support measures are functional as well as creating recognition and identity.

Social capital accumulators work best as open systems which allow entry for newcomers who may be different. Informal networks may cluster around a formal institution such as a school or community centre, or less visible locations like the house where people gather, a local shopping centre, coffee shop, or places in parks.

These informal networks fit Putnam's model of democratic, egalitarian web-like structures which offer shared positive experiences through collaboration. These experiences provide a comfort zone for recognising our communalities and choosing to look for collective rather than individual benefits.

There is another related area of possible accumulation of social capital which struck me on reading Putnam.

What he describes as civic culture is very similar to what is increasingly being recognised as workplace culture. Again, the rules and formal structures of workplaces may be similar, but the actual cultures of staff relationships within workplaces may affect the way the organisation works as well as how productive it is.

Some workplace cultures model open and relatively egalitarian relationships. Others are closed and authoritarian, immune to change or to the entry of outsiders. A level of collegiality and trust between workers creates workplaces where authority is worn lightly but responsibly and productivity is high. Where the workplace is redolent with distrust and suspicion, the rule book grows in size because everything has to be documented. Disputes are always bubbling, and there are likely to be complaints of harassment and discrimination.

It is interesting to note that at the same time as there is a Government policy of imposing competition between firms, there is a recognition that the best working teams are based on co-operation..

Indeed competition would seem to militate against the levels of trust and co-operation that are emerging in studies of best practice. We need consider whether the loss of social capital through workplace competition may also prove in the not-so-long-run to reduce productivity and profits.

What are the elements of social systems which increase social capital? They are mainly based on interactions. They involve space, time, opportunities, precedent and the valuing of process.

We need the opportunities to interact with a reasonably broad spread of people, and to build up a level of trust through positive rather than negative experiences. We need the time to engage in satisfactory processes of discussion, to acknowledge the input of others, and to develop outcomes which reflect their inputs.

Public life and activities take time, and time is an ever decreasing 'commodity' for many people. Full time work often extends well past the eight hour day, yet time is available in excess to those who have no paid work. This is one of the dis-eases of our present community. There is a constant trade off between time and money.

If we decide to value all aspects of the *vita activa*, we should be able to spend time in paid work earning money, using our skills and contributing to the workplace community.

We should also be able to spend time on interpersonal relationships and the daily tasks of care for self and others, including the rearing of children.

And we should also be able to spend time in the public sphere producing ideas, running small communal groups or large institutions and involving ourselves in making decisions that affect the way we live, and even involved in our own government or the big institutions.

We must validate the social, and re-member that humans were never disconnected individuals. We have always been social. Our human ability to reason has never removed us from our interdependence. In fact, it is through our ability to co-operate, as well as compete, that we have developed what passes for civilisation.

I want to reclaim the concept of civic virtue as a collective rather than an individual manifestation of a truly civil society. The types of civic structures which develop social capital are not created by removing the underpinnings of the state, but by giving people time, skills, encouragement and resources.

What happens when we run down our social capital? This raises the issue of whether we live in communities or nations which offer sufficient possibilities for experiencing social trust. Are there societies with an adequate level of social capital? Is there a social plimsoll line, a marker which once passed, reduces the levels of civic virtue to the point of no return?

If our communities are already low in social capital, or maybe even in deficit, their re-construction will be slow.

Putnam talks of the problems of countries where communism wiped out much of the civic culture or the others where centuries of top down feudalism was never been replaced by any form of democratic structure. The process of replenishing or developing social capital takes a long time. The Italian examples Putnam quotes are the results of centuries of civic cultures. Losing social capital should therefore be identified as a serious problem. The question Putnam asks of the USA, and that I am raising here, is: are we running our social capital down and even out? We have a different political culture from the United States of America. The American colonies had a much stronger emphasis on free enterprise and individualism than on Government. Our colonies were started by Government fiat and we continue to have a closer relationship to the public sector than our American peers. Trust in government I suspect, is one of our social capital indicators.

In Australia, opinion polls over time suggest there is increasing cynicism about Government and politicians. There are diminished levels of trust in public utilities, particularly when they corporatise and treat us as customers not citizens. These days, our utilities delivering phones, gas, water and electricity behave just like any other big business. Yet when they are sold, the public feels a loss of common property.

I have a strong sense that we are unravelling and tearing the social fabric, replacing it with a safety net that catches some of the poor and leaves the rest of us to flounder. We are losing some of the sense of belonging, of the common wealth that is part of our public selves. We are left to retreat into the presumed safety of the private world.

We need to recognise that a loss of social capital may cost us dearly. For instance, an increased fear of crime, when the crime rate is not rising, is a more significant measure of social distrust than an actual increase in crime. The unreasoned fear of other people's criminal intent signals a major decline in social capital.

It is this unwarranted fear that leads to the demand for more Government spending on crime prevention measures, gaols and other forms of social control. The last New South Wales state election was a case in point, when the then Government and Opposition tried to out do each other in their promises to punish criminals. Yet there was no real evidence that crime was on the increase, nor that the proposed measures would curb it.

Expenditure in this area was seen as politically necessary but was unlikely to be effective because it failed to address the real problem. In fact more law and order measures would probably exacerbate the problem because they would lift the levels of anxiety but do nothing to reduce the level of crime.

It is an interesting contradiction that increased rates of imprisonment and policing under conservative governments leads to the higher spending they claim to be against. And expenditure on social control often exceeds the cost of those government services which increase social capital - for instance more jobs in the community services sector. It is obviously a waste of money in more ways than one.

We are left with the contradiction that a government's failure to spend on enhancing social capital, will actually reduce the level of financial capital. Indeed, high social capital may well be the prerequisite for economic growth, not the other way round. This week, I've looked at community and social capital, but next week I want to look at the other side, the dark side of community and family - the tribalism that can break down social capital.

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The 1995 Boyer Lectures

A TRULY CIVIL SOCIETY

By Eva Cox

Lecture 3:
THE DARK SIDE OF THE WARM INNER GLOW: FAMILY AND COMMUNITARIANS

(Broadcast: Tuesday, 21st November 1995, 8.30am (Rpt. 8.00pm) on Radio National.)

Introduction

Diana Gribble:

Welcome to the 1995 Boyer Lectures series. I'm Diana Gribble.

On behalf of the ABC Board, it's my pleasure to introduce this year's Boyer lecturer, well known activist and social commentator, Eva Cox.

*Today you'll hear the third in a series of six lectures, which Eva has titled *A TRULY CIVIL SOCIETY*, and in which she argues for a radical re-thinking of our concept of citizenship.*

In the second lecture Eva discussed the concept of social capital, the social glue which binds us together as a society.

Today in her lecture titled 'The Dark Side of the Warm Inner Glow', Eva Cox looks at the tribalism that can break down social capital.

The dark side of the warm inner glow: family and communitarians

Eva Cox:

Last week I outlined why we needed to store social capital and needed opportunities to increase its production. Social capital is the sum of our social connections and the levels of trust we need to maintain a civil society. We hear a lot about financial, physical and human capital but until now little about the base of social capital on which economic growth depends. We need to draw on social capital for co-operative and mutually satisfying interactions. Even conservative commentators such as Francis Fukuyama agree that without this store of trust called social capital, wealth creation is a real problem.

So there's little debate about the need for social capital development from a wide range of political views, but considerable differences about how we achieve growth. The merchants of simple solutions are at it again. They

claim if we want a truly civil society, rich in social capital, all we need to do is increase the morality in communities and the power of families, and Eureka! The problem is solved.

Social capital is often produced in voluntary associations, so their false conclusion is often that government and legislation destroy social capital. Conservative social commentators have therefore developed similar concerns to some radical ones. They too can see there are serious problems with a political framework built on the assumption that people are primarily self-interested.

Unlike the neo-liberals, conservatives do believe that order and control create civil societies and unfettered freedoms create chaos.

Some conservative writers are calling for a return to a mythical past of local community and family independence. They see the imposition of norms and values as the necessary social control over self-interested individuals, but these conservatives misread the origins of social capital.

The danger in promoting simple solutions is that people warm to the fuzzy words of community and family without acknowledging their darker side. So I want to look at how we can misuse belonging to groups and the many problems faced by the ever smaller and more vulnerable families.

I want to look at some of the contradictions involved in separating society into smaller units. How we can extend the problems of competing individual self-interest to group competition and conflict. Communities or families can operate to create isolation and outgroups if they are not part of a broader society.

There are widespread assumptions that communities and families automatically enrich society by providing models of 'good' relationships and civic virtues. So we should understand how such structures can either enhance or deplete social capital by incorporating certain types of civic cultures and norms.

The effects of changes in social structures over the last century and those we can already see coming, affect both what we can do now and what we can do in the future, as neither community nor family is a static institution.

Trust, mutuality and reciprocity are the basic components of a truly civil society. They are some of the nuts and bolts, or maybe in less masculine terms, the social threads which make and pattern the social fabric. Tearing the social fabric is a common metaphor used to express dark images of chaos and disorder.

Creating social cohesion has a bad and good side. The good side recognises the firm links of communality among people and extends a welcome to the new and the different. Participants in open and inclusive communities learn about their common attributes through positive contact. The bad side creates cohesion by evoking perceived threats from outsiders - that is, the Other. The good side produces a store of social trust rather than antipathy and distrust of outsiders.

There have always been debates about community, what it is and how we identify with it, but there are signs of a new communitarian movement in the USA and UK. The concept of community appeared briefly at a recent Queensland election. And we can expect it to surface at the national level. So, I want to clarify how community is used in political debates.

In the public policy sphere, there are problems created by the frequent assumption that identity is stable, that is, we belong to one community and identify ourselves with that sole identifier.

People are assumed to belong to various social movements and therefore have expectations thrust upon them. We acquire attributed views consonant with our presumed political affiliation, religion, ethnicity, gender, feminist or locality based identity. This is a misreading of the way many of us shift identities.

We carry links of various depths and intensities with multiple communities. Some links may involve formal meetings and activities; others may be brief encounters, even phone contacts to organise car pools. My research on the use of telephones identified the threads of community links. Some are a single thread, some are intertwined like ropes.

These threads tie us to a multitude of other people and create the web that is society. Some are friendships and informal, others are very formal and minimise the personal. Some can be measured and identified and come to light as part of civil society, others remain part of the undergrowth. These multiple threads create rich sources of relationships and add to our sense of who we are and who we might be.

Our multiple links create, at best, robust societies where people can see themselves through the eyes of many others. We recognise our communalities in the diversity of humanity. Membership of multiple communities breeds civic confidence and civic virtue and provides a basis for trust of strangers, enabling us to work together to create social capital.

If groups make rejection of multiple identity a condition of membership, then the result can be closure or even intercommunal violence. Such groups can vary in size range from the millions that make up a nation to small sects or even the family unit.

People who fear the Other, the different, seek out those whom they can define as like themselves - 'people like us' who seem familiar and therefore safe. This familiarity may be based on shared race, class, religion or other clearly definable characteristics. It enables the frightened to join others to protect a 'way of life', to save beliefs from the threat of the unbeliever, or from the parvenu who does not really belong.

Family and intimate social relationships may limit our world view if they fail to offer us contact with strangers. Recognising that many other people are indeed familiar to us often eludes those who have only a few close relationships and no others. Focussing exclusively on intimate relationships denies us the benefits of broader less intense collaboration.

Robert Putnam, the American political scientist whose work has informed much of my thinking, claims the development of trust, translated into social capital, works best in relatively superficial relationships. This is because civic relationships are essentially formed in public view through task oriented, friendly, co-operative activities.

Putnam's work confirms my view that deep and intimate relationships, often experienced within families, may not equip us with adequate skills in sociability. We need early experiences of less visceral but more collegial contacts such as group activities with other children and adults to help us to learn to trust those outside our intimate circles.

Is the Family the smallest democracy, as was claimed in the International Year of the Family slogan? Is there something inherently needy in modern families? Families should be hooked into the broader community, or even multiple communities, to avoid the problems of power and abuse on the one hand, and loneliness and limitations on the other. There are obviously a squillion forms of family relationships and these range from the very good to the very bad. My comments on families will relate to public images and policy expectations only.

The family that once was, is no more! Instead we have the word and warm, fuzzy feelings. Yet there are inappropriate expectations that these small, fragile units can deliver a wide range of services through their limited personal resources.

Some families can provide good experiences.. Many offer love and nurture but others may damage us for life. Often it is in families that we learn about power and hierarchy, and, sometimes, violence and fear. The more private and disconnected families are, the more difficult it is to identify signs of abuse, or even inadequate levels of care. We need families to continue as the first level of custodianship of the child. But rearing children

into socially competent adults requires more skills and resources than most families can offer. Parenthood is often seen as the rights of parents to choose what they want for their child, as if they owned them. This view is different from a concept of custodianship where parents or carers are presumed to be responsible to the broader community for the welfare of the child, as in Aboriginal customary law. If trust and mutuality are learned responses, we must have the opportunity to learn them. Few parents on their own have the capacity to train their children in sociability, particularly if they have not learned these skills themselves.

Experiencing other adults and children from a relatively early age in dependable and quality child care settings may need to be part of all normal child rearing. It is already possible that we are producing under-socialised children who are less likely to have the social skills needed for good trust relationships.

We should create a culture of child rearing which expects children to be aware of the needs of others, to be co-operative and able to work in groups. This form of child rearing does not mean children lose their ability to think and act as autonomous individuals.

The idea of universal child care services runs against the supposedly 'intuitive' sense that children are better off with their mothers. However this is a relatively recent 'tradition' with few mothers fifty years ago, ever being alone with one or two children.

Of course, there are mothers who want to experience child bearing and rearing as a continuous ecstatic experience. The question is whether this close 'bonding' creates a competent adult who can operate in a truly civil society. I suspect over bonding is more likely to create more self interested individuals in search of personal gratification.

So our experiences in families need to be linked to our experiences in the broader community. And these communities must open outwards and not restrict differing views and viewpoints. Isolation and limited social contact is a good recipe for the loss of social capital

Communities which reduce social capital share certain characteristics. They turn inwards, form cliques, resist change and exclude those who criticise. The structures of such groups are usually top down, though the power may be informally held. Too often, allocation of rewards is based on patronage - on favours exchanged, factions and block votes. This encourages compliance and distrust of anyone outside the in-group.

These communities may include organisations such as local groups, elite clubs, professional associations, political factions, and fundamentalist groups, religious or otherwise. They do not build social capital because they fail to allow members to develop voluntaristic, egalitarian relationships through which social trust and civic virtues can be acquired.

Yet it is interesting to note that these are just the types of organisations most often touted by conservatives as their model of community. They are authoritarian in structure, seeking to impose views, laws and sanctions. This is their way of creating a more moral community by enforcing so-called traditional family values and calling on the past to justify their present.

Here I want introduce the idea of an expanding social system, which I will be continue in the next lecture when I look at the roles of Government. Imagine a spiral in which each circle unfolds into wider circles. This is a metaphor for a society which expands into ever broader social circles so all can be part of the whole.

When I was a child we filled in book labels with our names and addresses which included the continent, the world and the universe. I grew up in a time when we talked about cosmopolitan futures, about forms of internationalism which we hoped would replace the nationalism we saw as causing the Second World War. Yet this approach is now lost in a welter of cries for self determination and Balkanisation.

This is the darker side of community: the way groups use the processes of belonging to create outgroups and

conflict. Nationalism, tribalism and racism are used to invoke an Other who is a threat. These movements may be reactions to the uncertainties of globalised economies because unemployment, falling living standards and insecurities leave many people seeking familiar groups to belong to because they no longer feel part of the broader community.

For some communitarians, the loss of power of central governments is seen as a sign of a new beginning. Control can be returned to local people, and we can live face to face in some post-industrial feudal state. For others, with a techno bent, the advent of the Internet creates possibilities for virtual communities where face to face contact is not as necessary.

Communitarianism is likely to create more inequalities as the 'haves' seek to contain their resources rather than share them. There is also the problem of how to maintain an overall sense of belonging. Some groups will become increasingly isolated and others will defend their territory.

Communitarianism therefore may only be a shift from competition between individuals to competition between groups. Rather than living up to the rhetoric of inclusive communities, the new communitarians seem likely to practice selectivity.

Belonging is not always a plus, particularly when the gain of one is a loss for another. There are obvious costs when diversity is introduced to a homogeneous group. Therefore many communities, if they have the power, choose to select only those they see as fitting in. This always leaves some people outside as unwelcome remainders.

Robert Putnam comments on the dangers of sentimentalising the past and the village. He points out that there is more civil society and social capital in cities like Bologna than in the villages of Southern Italy. He notes that even today, in the USA, there is less overt racism, and more tolerance than in the so called heyday of flourishing civic societies, whose membership was limited to white Christians.

These days, there are many walled and gated communities built with the intention of excluding those who do not have the desirable characteristics. These affluent ghettos may well be self-supporting, but they contribute nothing towards those areas which have fewer resources. In the United States, where local taxes pay for many public services, the well off can fund their own schools and police, but they take no responsibility for others.

The new communitarian movements in the USA come from a long tradition of self reliance and individualism. At their best, they offer a place of safety for those deemed to be good citizens, who can pay their way with money, skills or labour. This is, however, the same social culture that breeds urban gangs and militias in the hills. These groups feel that they too are grabbing their share of the American dream and defend their right to do so.

The gangs and militias are uncivil societies. We need to remember this when the conservative right calls for less central government in favour of self managed communities. Look at what is happening in the USA and the UK where the philosophies of reduced Government take hold. The poor on the fringes of society, some with jobs but still homeless, can only inhabit the badlands where there is no power to exclude the unwanted.

What we can learn, we can unlearn, and that includes fear and distrust. One of the more irritating responses one hears about communal conflict is that it is either human nature, or so embedded in our history that there is nothing we can do about it. The philosopher, Alasdair McIntyre says, *'History is neither a prison, nor a museum, nor is it a set of materials for self congratulation'*. (History of Ethics p4).

So, prejudice, bias and racism are all learned responses and we can unlearn them. Social learning is a constant process. We must assume that we need to continue to mix with others, and not only those within our existing networks. We need to maintain the ability to make and develop new links and trust relationships and build social capital.

Distrust, along with fear and suspicion of the motives of others, are evident in communities where there are few available or created opportunities for learning to work with others. Those unpracticed in collegiality, in friendships or in developing relationships of trust with strangers, may be anxious about those outside their inner circles.

Most academic and policy work on communities assumes a level of face to face interaction. Telephones have offered links over distance for many decades but with little recognition of their social function. As telephone technology is developed to allow for more varied communication, many more people will form and join electronic primary communities. Faxes, internet and other modes of communication, reduce our need for face to face contacts.

This shift to information based and service jobs and the network economy, means that the separation of work and living space is no longer physically necessary. The concept of community had its origins in pre industrial societies where communities were both production and consumption sites. The grand urbanisations that were a response to industry and commerce saw places of living and work necessarily separated during the era of factory production. But do we need to maintain the urbs or suburbs as the new electronic network economy emerges?

Work places are downsizing, services are outsourced and more people are working from home in full or in part. Hot desking, contracting out and other arrangements which reduce attendance in the workplace, will affect those who choose to go to work as a means of getting out of the house.

I want therefore to have a brief look at the somewhat intimidating electronic futures we are being offered. Without wanting to be a Luddite, there may be problems with the loss of inter-personal contacts: work from home, shop from home, talk to people on the world wide web, share information, become part of wired communities where town meetings are held from home. This opens up a world of possibilities but reduces the necessity for face to face relationships.

Drawing on my own personal experience, I can see the advantages of working at home. There are fewer interruptions, more time to concentrate, and more contact with others at your convenience and choice. It is surprising, however, to notice how self centred we can become. Leaving the house becomes a major exercise and the sharing of resources like copiers, bathrooms and even ideas becomes much more problematic.

We miss out on the informal affirmations of self: the salutations, the gossip, the small conversations and the ideas that slide out of brief chats. Even the Silicon Valley techies have indicated that their best work is collaborative and in person, despite their comfort with technology.

The more we work alone, the less practice we have in dealing with others, and accommodating differing demands. The less time we spend in organisations, the more we lose our management skills. If we fail to practice our social skills, will they remain or will contact become an anxiety producing ordeal? Are we breeding a society of agora-phobes?

If we extrapolate on the effects of isolation which may arise from more home based paid work, we may find that this could affect the store of social capital, as I have defined it. Increasing options for working at home, and therefore the ability to combine child rearing and family care with paid work, may well reduce our social networks as well as our work contacts.

Working from home means there may be less need for work-related child care. This begs the question of the social needs of children. And with fewer opportunities for shopping and other excursions, people may reduce some of their informal face-to-face networks. Are there ways in which we can use electronic networking to create social capital? There are, for instance, Telecottages and Telecafes where those working in distance mode can gather at a central point.

The question is also whether we will make the deliberate effort to meet with friends and colleagues, or will we just depend on accident or other-purpose meetings to provide us with social interactions? If such meetings fail to happen, will we gradually lose the skills of sociability? Will we then also lose the recognition of our commonalities and become more fearful of the stranger?

What we need to establish is whether we can connect these new ways of net-working and living with the possibilities of generating social capital, civil society and further involvement in public life.

So we need communities but not those which exclude. This raises the issue of how society fits the various elements together, spiralling upwards into ever widening circles.

So, next week I will look at the vexed issue of the roles of government in generating social capital.

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The 1995 Boyer Lectures

A TRULY CIVIL SOCIETY

By Eva Cox

Lecture 4:
THE COMPANIONABLE STATE
 (Broadcast: Tuesday, 28th November 1995, 8.30am (Rpt. 8.00pm) on Radio National.)

Introduction

Diana Gribble:

Welcome to the 1995 Boyer Lectures series entitled titled A TRULY CIVIL SOCIETY.

I'm Diana Gribble. Deputy Chair of the ABC Board. It's my great pleasure to introduce you to Eva Cox, who will be familiar to many of you as a formidable social activist and commentator.

During the past three weeks Eva Cox has argued passionately for a radical re-thinking of our concept of citizenship.

She argues that at a time when the polls are showing a growing anxiety in the Australian population and the gap between rich and poor is widening, there is a danger that we will retreat from participating in public life, preferring the comfort of small closed communities.

Today in her fourth lecture, The Companionable State, Eva Cox discusses the pivotal place of central government in building a civil society.

The companionable state

Eva Cox:

I was haunted by a line of poetry which expressed my fears of what might happen to our world as we know it. I found the line in Yeats and here is the verse:

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity...*

Interestingly, this poem - 'The Second Coming' - has touched enough writers to be constantly quoted in tomes across the political spectrum. Like Yeats, I need a centre which holds. My need is an odd one in some ways, because I also need to make sure the centre is accountable and represents the will of the people. Why would I support a political centre which so often represents other interests?

I am all too aware of the perils, as well as the advantages of the state. I acknowledge that too often the state has represented the interests of capital, colonialism and masculinity. But the alternative of no state is worse.

I want to defend government, the role of the state, the concept of elected officers and their public servants as our servants. I do this at the same time as I acknowledge the problems of public bureaucracies. I have worked directly for ministers, and in the public service. So, I have a healthy scepticism about the way governments work.

We have seen, heard and read a zillion vituperative critiques of central government and state intervention. Arguments against the state have been used by the new right to destroy some of the infrastructure I believe we desperately still need. I want to put the other side and argue that we need to reform rather than discard the interventionist state.

Debates on the relative merits of state intervention versus individual freedom almost always result in more power for the powerful. So those with least power cannot use their 'freedoms'. But the power gap is neither the whole story, nor the most important issue.

Market forces, and the notion of providing for customers rather than citizens, will not improve the relative power positions one whit. The need to mitigate power is why the modern state came into being. It was a product of colonial trade and the industrial revolution in Europe.

The growth of trade, industrial cities and manufacturing outside the home/farm base required the regulation of commercial transactions. Later, in the nineteenth century, social legislation was introduced, often against considerable opposition.

These reforms in factories, education and public health may have been because of a need for more skilled and productive workers. Or they may have been a direct response to the inhumanity of uncontrolled market forces, greed and self interest. None of the reforms resulted from governments plotting to undermine the autonomy of families or communities. It was the condition of the people which required urgent attention.

The state assumed responsibility for some social services, the regulation of some social behaviour and limited power to redistribute resources. Government therefore became significant in developing social cohesion through providing citizens with public education, health care and other public services. Universal access replaced the many scattered and often inadequate informal service provisions.

Education, health care, working conditions, child welfare, pensions, child care, divorce and other forms of social legislation have increasingly become part of the public agenda. We can thank the 'votes for women' campaigns for initiating some of the changes. While some of their proposals were moral policing of the 'lower orders', others provided the base for more recent feminist demands.

Some ill informed, nostalgia merchants claim that the care offered in families and communities was undermined by government. This fiction ignores the fact that care only existed as part of reciprocal feudal and familial obligations. This system was dependent on rural land ownership and was terminally weakened by urbanisation.

The mass of strangers in factories in the new cities did not have reciprocal bonds and mutual obligations. So the State reluctantly became the provider of services and support. These social services then became essential to maintain people's sense of belonging and helped to enforce the obligations of citizenship. They were part of social harmony and cohesion.

Giving to those we care for is easy because we recognise our common humanity. Giving to those who we do not know with the same willingness is harder because it requires our acknowledgment that strangers are like us and entitled to our care. This was the policy view of English sociologist Richard Titmus, and his justification for the welfare state in the post war period. Titmus' comments were made at a time when the roles for the public sector and aspects of state intervention, went well beyond the simple regulation of transactions and the protection of property in the minimal state.

The stimulus for the establishment of the modern welfare state was the rise of fascism and communism in the depression of the 1930s. Europe, America and Australia had shown signs of social disintegration as the veterans from the war joined private armies to protest against unemployment and poverty.

The seeds of fascism fell on some very fertile ground. While Germany stands out as the worst example of totalitarianism, there were fascist-type militias and parties in many countries.

What Nazism showed, in a particularly brutal way, was the banality of evil and the ordinariness of the people involved. The holocaust/shoah was a systematic destruction on the basis of race only, and was supported by many ordinary people who believed the propaganda.

The lessons learned from the rise of Nazism and its control over the people, made the victors of the Second World War concerned not to repeat the errors of the twenties and thirties. The welfare state, Western Governments believed, would prevent 'it' ever happening again.

The peace plans after the Second World War were not just there because of the lobbying of reformers, but because the power brokers saw sense in providing both a welfare state and Keynesian counter cyclical government spending to avoid unemployment.

Yet by the 1970s the welfare state was being questioned and much of the eighties saw it being undermined by radical right wing reform. The Anglophone countries led the debate on limiting the role of the state, and shifting services from the public to the market sector. The UK and USA have unbundled some of the more 'civilised' aspects of the modern state and replaced them with competitive tooth and claw.

Was the post war concept of the state and public sector flawed? Has the welfare state passed its use-by date? Or has it been undermined quite deliberately by certain self interested groups, including media magnates, who want to cut state spending to reduce their possible tax obligations?

What is happening now, fifty years later, offers some uncomfortable similarities to the politics of the 30s. Nationalism, tribalism, and other elements of communal conflict are increasing. So we need to look at how intervention can be used to underscore our common humanity and the idiocy of civil conflict.

Why is the interventionist approach relevant today? For one, it worked. Those countries which had good welfare systems have also had relatively peaceful and cohesive years of post war growth.

If we do not learn from history, we are compelled to repeat the errors. If we continue to undermine the role of government as a benign and universal provider - however inefficient - then we are asking for trouble.

The changes I hope to see would involve the productive interplay of state and community, because it is in this interplay that we can create a truly civil society. The state needs to be part of creating tolerable social structures which are capable of reinventing themselves as open, egalitarian and democratic. Therefore, logically, we need to establish the political frameworks which encourage good citizenship but do not impose them by fiat or by leaving a vacuum.

Central governments and the public sector have had, without significant participation by women, a considerable, albeit sometimes reluctant role, in creating social programs . Carole Pateman, a political

philosopher, claims the modern state was initially a sexual contract to protect masculine power and property.

The state's social roles, which could be seen as the more feminised interests, have gradually increased over the past 200 years and have delivered benefits to many of the less powerful, as well as the more powerful.

The advantages of central action are illustrated by the Equal Pay case in Australia. A court set up unequal minimum pay rates, but changed these to equal rates over half a century later. Our centralised wage fixing system has closed the gaps between high and low income earners while collective bargaining in other countries has seen more unequal wage outcomes. These advantages are now under threat.

Feminists have influenced, and can continue to, influence the state. Even though I am more optimistic than Pateman, I recognise that all is not rosy with governments and their concerns. I would be the first to claim there is still too wide a public private split, which means that many of the concerns of women are still not seen as legitimate or serious. These concerns involve men but are, for some obscure reason, left to women to raise, for example male violence and maintenance of children.

However, there have been sufficient reforms over the past decades for us to see that the state is the best hope for positive change. If we can use the power of state structures to contain the powerful, then we can develop the trust levels that comes from a just society. The taxation literature on compliance indicates that the willing payment of taxes depends on taxes being seen as fair - rather than on the actual rates.

Any discussion on the institutions of government must include the dimensions of power, as well as its use and abuse. I realise that there are problems with top down duress, as well as bottom up parochialism, but it is democratic centralised power that gives the outgroups their best chances of ensuring their needs are not overlooked.

The experiences of feminism over the last few decades has shown us that it is only when government acts, that issues such as discrimination, violence in the home and child care services move into the areas of public concern, rather than just being seen as sectional interests.

There would be limited assistance for sole parents, had there not been a Federal Government prepared to act. Even when one state has been innovative, such as with child endowment and widow's pensions, it has only been when the Commonwealth took over, that residents in other states have received payments as well. Human rights laws and Federal legislation have given powers to Aboriginal groups that the states have denied them.

I have been involved in the long fight for child care. This program has required a constant move from Federal to State and vice versa as community groups sought to put children on the agenda. Finally a Federal program has been established and expanded.

We have examples of State governments showing themselves to be limited in their views such as the Tasmanian laws on homosexuality. Changing these laws involved both the Commonwealth Government and the United Nations.

There are many other examples of when the Commonwealth has been more enlightened because distance from local prejudice has sometimes allowed it to pick up the new and the possibly controversial. Feminists and other lobbyists play off the different levels of Government to gain advantage for the less powerful.

The success of these tactics confirms my belief that once the local process has been exhausted, and the problem still remains, we need to be able to go further up and out to seek support. Issues of equity and rights can be escalated past the local level which may be bogged down by the familiar, and so the problems cannot be dealt with at a conceptual distance. Attitudes on race in small towns is a clear example of this. I suspect that being further from the coalface may sometimes make the less politically popular decisions easier.

There are claims in Australia that we are over-governed and that we place too much reliance on Government. There are those who want to abolish the States and those who are always suspicious of the Commonwealth. However, as an activist over the past two decades, I am happy to see what we have remain and even if it stays a little confused and overlapping.

The demonising of state and public power ignores the possibilities of using these powers to mediate and control the powerful. So I am implacably opposed to recreating government as a minimalist option which operates only as a provider of last resort, caring only for those who cannot care for themselves.

A smaller government puts at risk all those areas of concern which do not lend themselves to market solutions. There has never been much business interest in providing help or services to those who have little ability to pay, or in protecting those who cannot afford to buy their own safety.

There is increasing evidence that the more competition takes over from intervention, the more inequalities increase. It is inequality rather than poverty that destroys the social capital, because unfairness creates crises of belief in political systems.

These crises are double edged. The poor who are excluded resent those they see as gaining unfair advantage because of their resources. The well off who pay taxes are likely to see the provision of public services or money only to those who are labelled poor as unfair or overgenerous.

The issues of maldistributed power are exacerbated by market forces increasing inequality. The idea that market providers can be regulated to comply with ethical standards ignores the difficulties that governments have in regulating the powerful.

There is a self destruct button being pushed by some central governments. They are trying to redefine their role as steering, not rowing. Yet the same time, their legitimacy is under question by the electorates. Instead of proving their value by visibly providing indications of their existence, many governments are reducing their roles, their functions and their assets.

Public sectors are, and have been contracting, at least in the English speaking countries. As Australia already has one of the smallest public sectors, further cuts can only create more problems. Our fiscal anorexia may do serious harm. On the other hand, because we have the smallest public sector in the OECD and the lowest tax bill, we do have plenty of room to move up and increase our 'common wealth'.

In Hannah Arendt's schema of the human condition, there is recognition that the nation state and the community have supplanted the family in many of its tasks. The education system has taken over from parents, the health care system has replaced home medicine and our daily reproductive processes are now publicly supported.

Take away the public services, and many people will feel a clear sense of desertion and loss. Fragile forms of private life try to make do on their own resources. Selling off publicly owned assets is also a problem. In the eyes of some citizens, probably poorer ones, public ownership is part of the 'family silver'. Losing these assets is seen as a loss of stability, of our common wealth. The change of public utilities to business enterprises, with user pays costing, is again seen as a loss of public service.

Moves towards reducing government activities ignore the effects that selling off public resources may have on social capital. Arendt uses the image of many families seeing themselves as owners of the nation state. As citizens, they see public services and public ownership of resources as extensions of their personal property to which they have the right of access.

Surveys show the public rejects privatisation. In the same vein, there are also signs that people are prepared to pay more taxes in return for the services they expect from government, despite an almost incessant media campaign against raising taxes.

There are other problems with equating customer and citizen. What we receive from government is paid for by us through taxes, so there is a sense of entitlement which is undermined when some services are targeted only to the poor. Those not entitled to benefits tend to question the rights of recipients and so we return to judging who is worthy of receiving public assistance.

Many taxpayers also expect to have access to government services and do not want to see need defined just in financial terms. They believe that those who pay their taxes are also entitled to government support. Allocating services and resources only to the poor, creates divisions among citizens.

In a good public sector service, there should be a mutual desire to see needs met and problems solved. In a commercial transaction, the satisfaction of the customer is driven by the profit margin and not by customer need. When public services are contracted out, the compliance is to the contractor not the client.

Users of contracted out services have no sense of entitlement and ownership. We have different expectations of public and commercial services. Public services are seen as entitlements and part of the obligations of the state to its citizens. We form different relationships with voluntary associations and with commercial enterprises.

If we lose the social capital which the expanded role of the state has provided, with its implicit and explicit concepts of citizen rights and mutual obligations, there will be serious consequences.

It is ironic that the private sector is increasingly aping the idea of citizenship. New marketing strategies are focusing on creating customer loyalty through clubs and points gained. Marketeers are smarter than public choice theorists in recognising the intangibles which are part of social capital.

The use of sponsorship by corporations is a growing phenomenon as they try to create a form of corporate citizenship. However, a burst of *Rotary*, or funding with an eye to photo opportunities, are not alternatives or replacements for civic culture.

Business purchasing sports for TV threatens local sporting clubs. These clubs are a classic part of civic cultures and offer opportunities for local meetings, yet they are being supplanted or bought by brands looking for the cachet of voluntary organisations.

So business moves towards the associational model, and government moves towards naked markets.

The other side of sponsorship is the loss of status by government when it seeks commercial sponsors for what are seen as essential services or national treasures. The owner of the rescue helicopter is a bank, the opera is *Esso*. Cereal makers support nutrition education to enhance their influence and profits. Art prizes are sponsored and so on. No wonder people are confused as to who owns the country!

It is no surprise that we have lost social cohesion. People are expressing an unrealistic fear of crime. Sales of home security devices are increasing. There is more cynicism about government and industry leaders, and generally less faith in people's ability to be decent human beings.

The image of government services as providers of last resort does not improve their legitimacy. As the visible face of government disappears, with fewer services provided directly there is a danger that people will stop identifying any function with government.

So how do we create social cohesion? We need to increase the functions and visibility of governments. We need specific cultures of civic concern - of mutual responsibility - and resources for social capital formation. We need stepped levels of government, the ability to appeal to a higher authority when the lower level fails to connect with a wider agenda. These levels provide the fora for good decisions.

Multi-level decision-making can form a web of broad trust relationships which are part of our social capital -

and the web needs to stretch all the way from the family to the national government and supra-national structures.

When we become part of public life, we become more human. This is the *vita activa* - or 'political life' - which Hannah Arendt names as one of three components of the Human Condition. This concept of citizenship can operate in a formalised framework of state power, as well as in less formal voluntaristic groups. It recognises that responsibilities go with rights and that, in the final analysis, we have to own the governments to whom we entrust power.

We work best when we make decisions collectively, by drawing on each other's experience and by debating different views. The solo decision maker is not, one might say, the full human bottle!

Next week the need for dissent, even from my views!

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The 1995 Boyer Lectures

A TRULY CIVIL SOCIETY

By Eva Cox

Lecture 5:
CHANGE, DIVERSITY AND DISSENT
(Broadcast: Tuesday, 6th December 1995, 8.30am (Rpt. 8.00pm) on Radio National.)

Introduction

Diana Gribble:

Welcome to the 1995 Boyer Lectures series titled A TRULY CIVIL SOCIETY.

I'm Diana Gribble, and as Deputy Chair of the ABC Board, it's my pleasure to introduce you to Eva Cox.

The Boyer Lectures are a rare opportunity in the media for the sustained exploration of ideas by a prominent Australian.

With twenty years experience as an activist, social policy analyst and media commentator, Eva Cox has developed challenging views of how we need to think about our society in order to prepare for the next millenium.

Last Tuesday she put the case that a central and interventionist government is essential for the well-being of civil society. Today's lecture, the second last in the series, is called 'Change, Diversity and Dissent'.

Change, Diversity and Dissent

Eva Cox:

Trust must be the basis of healthy debate in a truly civil society. There is nothing wrong with dissent, debate or conflict when they are based on mutual respect and trust. We are all fallible so no actions or ideas should be left unquestioned. If I ask you to question others, then I cannot exempt myself.

I believe very strongly that we need to value and validate the thoughtful critics of the system and debate them, as we value and debate those who maintain social cohesion. This view was elegantly stated by academic and critic Edward Said in his 1993 BBC Reith lectures.

There is no question in my mind that the intellectual belongs on the same side with the weak and unrepresented... At bottom, the intellectual in my sense of the word, is neither a pacifier nor consensus builder,

but someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready made cliches, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmation of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do. Not just passively unwilling, but actively willing to say so in public.

Said notes that critiquing the powerful may feel good, but rarely endears the critic to governments or others in positions of power. So be it!

No group or individual has a monopoly on good sense or ideas, including those we vote in to power. So we need to monitor the people who decide on our behalf. One check on their power is the existence of formal political and legal structures, another is to ensure that outside voices are heard.

I want to promote new ways of moving on, without necessarily knowing where we will end up. And, as part of our way forward, I want to encourage dissent, debate and collective decisions after hearing many views.

So far, I have raised an eclectic mix of political positions because I do not believe that any of the social theories today have found the ultimate answers, or even the questions.

I started from the premise that all is not well in the world, suggesting that part of the problem stems from ignoring the social bonding which defines us. I have advocated the retention of good governments as major players, not just safety nets and regulators, and I've argued for inclusive, not exclusive, communities which operate as egalitarian, voluntary groups.

The continuous thread that runs through these components of civil society is the need for high levels of social capital derived from trusting others, mutuality and reciprocity. Societies rich in social capital recognise our common humanity, accept diversity and reject gross inequalities.

How can we expect people to accept such a grab bag of ideas, when most want some simple rules which guarantee a happy ending?

Does my image of the truly civil society sound over the top? Too Utopian? There is a word in Italian, *magari!*, which has no real English equivalent. *Magari*, with a shrug of the shoulder, means a sceptical if only! Another childhood word memory is *Meshuggeh!* a cheerful Yiddish word for a form of lunacy; or maybe *nebbisch* which means a poor fool... These words express some of the doubts I felt as I put these ideas together.

I gain my energy from believing we can make a difference. We need to have a sense of the impossible being possible, or we make no moves. As Oscar Wilde said and I quote:

"A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias."

Wilde wrote this just over 100 years ago. Progress is now often a dirty word, because it can symbolise lost environments or values, or just a fear that moving on can be worse than the present.

But I like the idea of a map, a metaphor of a journey, moving on in search of something better. I am suggesting that travelling well may be as much as we can expect. Too often, implementing some man's utopian dreams has created a mess in the present. So unjust means should never be justified by some distant ends.

Means are as important, or more important, than the evanescent end. There is no justification for reducing social capital now. Destroying the present in pursuit of an uncertain future is not the way to go.

There will always be those who want to find a nostrum to provide easy answers to hard questions, a philosopher's stone to turn all to gold. We have all seen a variety of political systems, from markets to Marx and

back to markets, based on theories which purport to explain everything.

There are few if any easy answers to where society is going. So maybe we need to take small steps rather than great leaps.

One problem most theories share, is that they define as political only those areas of life and state seen as important by mainly male leaders. I want to see the view points expanded to develop theories which include the social. The omission of the social weakens the ability of any theory to predict what may happen.

As a feminist, I realise that just adding women to men is no solution. There are many feminist inputs which will not be welcome because they challenge existing power and priorities. Feminist views will be opposed by those blocs who control financial capital, knowledge, politics, nationality, race, geography and a multitude of other power bases. This raises the issue of power, who has it and who uses it.

Therefore our ability to analyse and theorise will always be partial and incomplete, even without assuming that as humans we could ever know everything and that knowledge is perfectible. Whatever frameworks we use, we can assume that decisions will be flawed. We should always assume that there are others who can contribute to the debate because no one should monopolise the power to decide.

I have become ever more firmly entrenched in my belief that we need to continue to debate, discuss, and disagree on where we are going. It is only through this change process, that we can remedy the obvious problems we face. We can and should deal with the immediate problems we can identify, rather than wait till we find the grand solution.

I am both a believer and a sceptic. In the 1950s, at university, I claimed to be an anarchist and a socialist which annoyed another student. He said I couldn't possibly be both because the ideas were contradictory. I wondered then why theories had to be consistent and total. Forty years later, I still want a government to make society more equal, and I still distrust its good offices. This seems perfectly reasonable for any healthy sceptic, and this is what I remain.

I question authority as an intrinsic political strategy. This approach probably came from my father, Richard Hauser, who taught me to question everything - everything but him of course. From my father, I also learned that rights come attached to responsibilities and that I was supposed to save the world, on a daily basis. He challenged the way people thought, but eventually people stopped listening because there was no way to move on.

My father's experience taught me that no one loves a perpetual critic, and so I am trying to learn when to stop and how to move on. So raising the issue of debate and dissent is a somewhat personal exploration as well as a political intervention.

The issue of dissent and conflict is not new to the Boyer lectures. Bob Hawke spoke of the resolution of conflict and the development of consensus. He proposed an alternative model based on consensus to overcome unnecessary divisions. Unlike most Boyer lecturers, Hawke had the opportunity to practice what he preached and for some years we had the vision splendid of a Government using the consensus model.

The results were not impressive. A succession of summits, the Accords with the unions and good contacts with business connections made agreements possible between main players who apparently shared similar values. The loop closed so those who were part of the power structures tended to be 'good blokes' who essentially agreed with each other.

There was no space or legitimacy for dissenting views. Instead, there were cosy relationships between groups who should have argued with each other. The model spread and so did the damage. The impossibility of dissent within other Labor governments led to WA Inc and crises in South Australian and Victorian governments. How

else can one explain some very silly decisions? There was no legitimacy in the mid eighties for lobby groups or even backbenchers to raise difficult questions.

The problem with the Hawke model is the naive assumption that consensus is possible. If consensus is defined as finding a single solution, the one possible answer, it cannot work.

In a quite different setting, some feminist groups of the seventies, along with other radical movements, also made commitments to consensus. This became the model for collectives running various women's services, and lobbying for change.

In both the Government and radical collectives there was a genuine belief that the avoidance of conflict was possible; that differences arose essentially from poor communication and a win win outcome was possible. By providing a space in which the differences could be explored and common ground sought, the various groups assumed that all would agree. Consensus was seen as better than voting because participants would own what they had agreed to, and therefore decisions would actually be implemented.

This model sounds admirable, and, in principle, is hard to criticise. Finding agreement, taking people with you, empowering everyone, giving them a part in decisions, seems like good process to follow. Whether in the Cabinet Room or in the local Rape Crisis collective, the process should, in theory, elicit the best outcome.

What a pity that the basic idea of consensus is flawed and the practice is so very different from the theory.

First, the collective model ignores some of the basic differences between interest groups and individuals, and therefore the need to seek compromise and negotiated outcomes, sometimes by taking a vote.

Second, the model fails to allow for group process and power differences. These differences operate to silence the debate on which good decision making is based. Collective and Cabinet members find themselves equally regarded as spoilers if they continue to raise objections and do not go with the strength.

Third, decisions are mostly based on time lines and pressures which obviate the possibilities of talking through ideas and allowing space for more discussion. Aboriginal groups, who do not accept the concept of either voting or delegation have a slow process of deciding, and this conflicts with 'white man's' time frames.

Group processes may operate to stifle debate, to pressure people into conformity with the powerful, and to exclude those who insist on bucking a process designed to achieve agreement.

The very discussion needed to ensure that issues are fully explored may often be replaced by processes of interpersonal stroking or bullying. These tactics soon silence or exclude dissenting voices.

There are many examples of closed groups whose survival depends on the maintenance of power structures, and who lack the capacity therefore to deal with change. These groups either stifle debate or ensure that there will always be a numbers bloodbath as people try and line up the votes.

Most closed groups use distrust to maintain control and so reduce social capital. Where there is a comfortable level of trust, the possibility of different views, and of dissent and debate, can be comfortably accommodated. We need to encourage dissent so that people can see that there are no fixed ideas, or conventional wisdom. This does not mean that every decision has to be slow.

Any decision making process must create a culture of responsible discussion. When there are new initiatives, or somebody tentatively tries to move ideas on, there must be a recognition that the innovators need support. Not just blind support, but the recognition that the new, like the old, needs to be debated and assessed, and should never be overlooked or rejected without a hearing.

Informal networks which often decide even before meetings what should be supported should be either recognised and expanded to include others, or subjected to processes which reduce their influence. Where there can be no dissenting voices, there are potentially serious problems. No organisation, community or society is above reproach and no institution can ever put itself above criticism.

This is not new problem. In 1792, William Godwin, a British philosopher, observed that as soon as a group institutionalises, it ossifies. 19th century liberals questioned those with power, and claimed the freedom to criticise. Now in the late 20th century, the popular success of neo liberal attacks on the state are being used to undermine the state, not encourage debate. Some of the pressure for privatising has gained legitimacy because the power of the state was not open to change and criticism.

Communism failed, in part, because the suppression of dissent under Stalin, allowed him to establish regimes of corrupting power and unquestioned terror. Many political movements of both left and right tendencies are flawed by the rapid ossification of their utopias and the imposition of authoritarian means to achieve them.

Political parties in government tend to make similar demands on the loyalty of members, backbenchers and ministers. The cabinet and party system means that, in Australia, there is little opportunity for independent views in parliament. No one crosses the floor, so it is not surprising that members of parliament have little power in debate or decision making. When independents or people from minor parties are elected, they tend to be treated with unwarranted scorn by the major parties.

We need to build in modes of dissent and criticism. Turnover of power and the questionability of authority seem to me to be inherent in any form of good government. If we do not know the answers, we must set up a process by which we can question, and question again, the decisions that are being taken.

I suggest we see ourselves as part of a Utopian road movie rather than arriving at the city of Oz. Change is constant and relative. Therefore the processes we follow must develop reciprocity, recognising and using our differences may be all we can achieve. And it may be more than enough to create a truly civil society, a better present and near future.

Our processes of change must incorporate the elements of trust, fairness and justice. If we cannot predict our futures with any certainty, we can at least identify the values we want and build them into the process.

I often use the fairy tale of the emperor's new clothes as a metaphor for the silencing of the masses. There are scores of unclad emperors hidden in the consensus bushes, where no one questions their nakedness. This contrasts with the story of the Roman Generals in their triumphal parades who had slaves whispering in their ears the message that they were only human.

One problem with dissent is that people see it as conflict which they associate with wars, violence and assaults. The slide from disagreement to physical strife is very much a product of macho-masculine culture. A shift from the concept of solving differences by physical means will allow us to incorporate dissent as productive rather than destructive.

There are those in the community who abuse free speech and deliberately use it to create fear, loathing and scapegoats. I have some serious concerns about absolute freedom of speech when it ignores the effects on others. Responsibility goes with rights. Incitement to hatred, the vilification of a group for its attributes and the scapegoating of an outgroup can create problems.

The problems of free speech lead back to the issue of social capital and the levels of trust and cohesion. In a society where there is an open acceptance of difference and dissent, and a high level of trust and good will, a few extremists are not a problem. They will, in fact, be ignored as they are outside what is seen as acceptable.

However, when there is a loss of social capital, a sense of fear and loathing just below the surface, then racism

or other forms of group hate become a problem. So there may be a need for short term measures to protect the target group.

The next response must be to look at why there is a distributed hate level and what is causing fears and anxiety. Often distrust springs from a legitimate sense of injustice, fanned into an unacceptable form. The mass experiences of the depression between the world wars demonstrated the problems and was one of the reasons for setting up the welfare state. Fascism flamed in areas where there was a deep sense of injustice, so this is a lesson we need to remember and fix the problems not the symptoms.

There is a censorship debate in feminist circles. I am against banning pornography as there is an infinity of problems in defining it, or even in agreeing on its effects. If pornography can exacerbate hate against women, then we should treat it as a symptom of a wider problem which is not solved by censorship. The interests of the judiciary are not feminist so I am very wary of giving them any legal power over what we see.

What about the phenomena of political correctness which often haunts debates on free speech and dissent? Think about who accuses us of political correctness. It is never applied to the boring myriads of powerful people who promote their own biases and stupid views. Is the term economic correctness ever applied to the lemming-like burblings of our many finance writers who never question their frameworks?

Political correctness is a term used by those in power to criticise those who question their power. For instance, I resent the term 'man' and 'he' being applied because I feel excluded. So I object sometimes. So do those whose disabilities are presumed to handicap them, and those whose colour, appearance or other characteristics have made them feel outsiders or invisible. We should have a right to protest our exclusion.

Anglo men have a very short fuse on their own behalf if they see they are being laughed at, or not given the respect they feel they deserve. Try telling an anti male sexist joke and see if the men laugh! Their protests are never labelled politically correct.

We need to look at language in the context of mutual respect and good manners. Respect includes respect for other's views even if you do not agree with them. Good manners do not exclude disagreement or debate. They do suggest, however, that the right to hold different views needs to be acknowledged. Only then can there be proper debate or discussion.

In this context, I have had some concern about the media feeding frenzy over two women writers in the last few months.

Helen Garner made many more book sales from being depicted in the media as the victim of a feminist conspiracy. She became the darling of anti feminists. Helen Darville collected a torrent of abuse which also sold books. However, unlike Garner, she was not seen as a heroine by anyone, because her book suggested we were capable of mixing good and evil. Demonising the Other allows us to be 'innocent', and therefore we take no responsibility for what others do, or even what we do ourselves.

We therefore need to think very carefully about the way we establish the parameters of good and evil, right and wrong. Part of this process must be to allow our judgements to be questioned, our decisions to be reviewed and our views to be challenged. We must accept that our conscience is individual, and each one of us must live with what we have done or condoned.

This can be hard to do. There is comfort in like minded beings, in sameness, in familiarity. We often choose to be surrounded by those who think like us and agree with us, and in our personal lives we should have those choices. However, if we are talking about institutions which deliver services, run the country or produce, we may need to make deliberate and conscious efforts to ensure that we are not cocooning ourselves into the familiar.

The need for diversity is one of the prime positive reasons for Equal Opportunity strategies, which provide a mix of incumbents in more senior positions. We know that cloning oneself can be very comforting, as is indicated by the constant selection of like minds and bodies for company boards.

Dissent has sometimes been painful for me because women often claim consensus as a desirable part of the feminine. Being a peacemaker, a conflict avoider and binder-of-wounds sits with the image of a 'good woman', while the stirrer-debater-dissenter fits a more masculine image.

I want to suggest that we need to reframe these limited images of feminine and masculine to move away from the constraints they impose. If we don't see conflict as bad, full of war and violence, then we can construct the means of exploring differences and debating them.

The agora, the public place where we collectively decide the next step, provides the model of how we run a truly civil society. This public place joins us as much in debate as in agreement. It should buzz with many voices, arguing the merits of their cases and respecting divergent views. This creates change.

Next week, some road rules for the utopian highway!

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The 1995 Boyer Lectures

A TRULY CIVIL SOCIETY

By Eva Cox

Lecture 6:
TOWARDS A UTOPIAN ROAD MOVIE
 (Broadcast: Tuesday, 13th December 1995, 8.30am (Rpt. 8.00pm) on Radio National.)

Introduction

Diana Gribble:

Welcome to the 1995 Boyer Lectures. I'm Diana Gribble.

As Deputy Chair of the ABC Board, it's my pleasure to introduce the final and sixth lecture in the Boyers series entitled A TRULY CIVIL SOCIETY presented by well known social activist and commentator, Eva Cox.

As founder of WET, the Women's Economic Thinktank, Eva Cox has played an important role in keeping women's concerns on the agenda of economic and social policy debate in Australia.

She has a wealth of experience in public policy with perspectives from both inside and outside our institutions.

In the past five lectures Eva Cox has presented a passionate plea for a more civil society. She has warned that the signs of damage to the social fabric such as an escalating fear of crime and the gap between rich and poor, compel us to rethink our notions of citizenship.

She has argued for a broadening of public debate agendas to include the social glue that binds us, our social capital.

Today she presents the sixth and last lecture, titled 'Towards a Utopian Road Movie'.

Towards a Utopian Road Movie

Eva Cox:

On the sixth day, in Genesis, God created human beings, giving primacy to men's views. How can we re-create the world to correct this astigmatic beginning of Judeo Christian history?

The exclusion of women is not the only problem with the way the world is being run, but it is my area and a metaphor for what is missing from civil society.

So let us start with defining a truly civil society. Civil is a rather old fashioned word meaning polite, lawful, non military. It relates to the notion of a well-governed social system.

My vision of a very civil society involves social connections with political life. Politics must combine the valuing of difference, intertwined rights and responsibilities, and collective and democratic involvement in decisions which affect us.

Civil society also resonates with the term civic and the sense of the body politic, the public sphere which we entrust with power over us. The concept of manners seems to me in the broadest sense to be civil behaviour - a respect for others and for difference, a set of social mores which makes interactions both pleasant and productive.

The term 'civil' offers alternate paradigms to counter the current public policy assumptions about competition and privatisation which are unravelling the social fabric.

Is a truly civil society possible? Yes, if we define the elements and work out what we need to change. The utopian road movie metaphor comes from my belief that there is no ultimate destination, no magical city of Oz.

But I want to offer a guide and some mapping skills for the way we might travel - a sort of stairway to heaven on \$5 per day.

I believe a truly civil society is premised on some core assumptions about human beings:

First, we are primarily social beings, defined by our relationships, linked to a broader society. The links between us are important because they define who we are and how we see ourselves in relation to others. We are born with a capability for good and evil, and we continue to learn trust, sociability, distrust and aggression.

Second, we can unlearn as well as learn new ways. We are very much products of our environments but, because we are human and thinking beings, we can choose how we respond to our experiences.

Third, we define ourselves through how others see us. We want to belong, we want to be accepted by the group. We can enjoy the status that comes from either giving or receiving, depending on which is the more valued.

Therefore, it is our social relationships which constitute society, not our individuality. Putting the social back into political decisions seems almost self evident, but somehow we have had an excess of market forces and competition which divides us.

We must design social processes which encourage us to stay connected and build stores of trust for the bad times. We need a perception of fairness and justice that is built on our respect for diversity and recognition of our common humanity. We should review and rewrite policies and programs which create a sense of exclusion, which fail to promote justice, which destroy the sense of common wealth and common good which is so necessary for social cohesion.

We need to undermine the political policy focus on the lone greedy figure of economically rational man. Humans evolved in communities, sharing tasks and responsibilities. This sharing is too often forgotten when the more affluent buy more privacy. Those who rule us are a case in point; they are well insulated from recognising human needs and casual human interaction.

For the rest of us, households shrink in size and more people live alone. For the first time in our history many of us have to make deliberate efforts to connect in person, even though we use phones and newer communication technologies to connect across space.

Relationships, social life, family life, creativity, emotions, personal care and nurture, are rarely seen as having

the importance of say, interest rates. The social fabric of communities and neighbourhood, the many daily encounters which weave the threads that bind us, remain a shadow, a mere safety net with holes.

We need to plan and organise the contact with other human beings which may once have been incidental parts of daily life and are now diluted or missing. Social contacts outside the immediate family develop positive relationships with wider communities. As we increasingly work from home, shop from home, and amuse ourselves at home, we face the danger of becoming a nation of agoraphobes.

The agora was the meeting place of Athenian democracy, barred to slaves and women, but it's still symbolic of the processes of participation and debate which underpin a truly civil society. Maybe the links of different kinds which now take place on the Internet may resemble 'town meetings'. However, they ignore the bonding of the face to face contact in the coffee shop beforehand, or the serendipitous but often productive encounters at the bus stop.

The accumulation of social capital depends on informal as well as formal structures. Both are important and possibly synergistic in creating the climate of trust and mutuality .

I've used the term 'social capital' deliberately throughout these lectures because this is masculine language, and I want to emphasise the relationship between the social and other forms of capital. Financial capital, physical capital and human capital cannot exist without a social base, ergo the need for high social capital.

How do we increase our social capital? There have been no programs specifically designed to encourage community action over the past decades. In the 60s and 70s there were debates on community development ,but these lost out to advancing economic frameworks. There are vestiges in community arts movements, in some areas of adult education and in local government.

There are still many individual and group attempts to establish alternative community life styles. There are some communes and co-operatives in rural areas. There's been a big expansion of locally based barter schemes. These efforts, however tend to be restricted to those who can afford to live alternate life styles or those dependent on social security.

This personal type of social capital production has relatively little impact on the broader society. Some participants proselytise and are members of change movements; some see lifestyle as a personal choice issue; some hope that small communities will somehow spread. Still others want to use their community to exclude those who do not fit.

I am interested in changing the mainstream institutions so we all have access to opportunities for social capital production. As most of us live in cities, we need to change urban life. If we don't change the way we are governed and the use of public resources, those without choices are left with the problems that the affluent can escape.

We must question some of the directions of public policy currently in place particularly those which create suspicion and isolation rather than a sense of belonging.

The first category of public policy we must question is the various privatisations, the loss of public capital goods that makes us feel poorer. We used to own banks, an airline, post office buildings, water, electricity and many other assets. Now we have to buy these services back from the private sector or government business enterprises. This may reduce the debt momentarily but it also leaves us with a sense of loss. We still own a phone company, but only just, and we already face the problem of Telstra being driven by profit motives rather than the daily communication needs of communities.

Another problematic policy direction is the targetting of social security payments - what was once universal now leaves out some people. We have lost the old child endowment and universal aged and family payments

and replaced them with selective cash transfers. This policy direction saves money, but it creates considerable ire among taxpayers who feel entitled to support and receive little or no assistance. It may allow government to reduce taxes on the rich but it is divisive, providing a model of public support for the worthy poor only. Most people are not supposed to need help and shouldn't expect it!

The third public policy direction is the move towards competition in the provision of public sector services. Cutbacks in public sector employment and cost cutting contribute to widespread anxieties about quality of life. People worry about the cleanliness of water, and some buy purifiers; some buy private health insurance and private schools because the public sector seems under resourced and stressed. Others save voluntarily for retirement because they believe there will be no pension. But those who can't afford to buy substitutes are stuck with a poor public sector.

It is hard to find policies that encourage the practice of social capital formation in the public sphere. The constant attacks on the role and efficiency of the public sector have reduced our sense of common good and obscured the original reasons for removing certain services from the vagaries and cruelties of market forces.

The introduction of user pays reduces the legitimacy of government and the reasons for paying tax. Even though we agree to these user pay systems, we are left wondering why we pay taxes in the first place. Is the government double dipping?

Government becomes invisible when the services it used to offer directly are privatised or contracted out to another deliverer. Disappearing state functions such as post offices and even banks raise serious issues of loss of social capital to create financial gains.

Let me offer three examples of the effects of changing government directions which highlight the problems clearly. The first is in the Arts, the second is in universities and the third is a *mea culpa* in the community sector.

Arts and cultural policy is one of the high profile areas under the Keating government. It focuses on an inclusive but unaggressive national identity and performs useful social capital functions. However, the arts industry - note the word - feels compelled to justify its funding by pointing to its capacity to employ people, its export potential, and even its capacity as a marketing tool to promote a national identity.

These justifications neutralise any opposition from Treasury and Finance. They make the bean counters feel secure. However, the emphasis on industry undermines our capacity to see the arts as an area where we explore creativity for its own sake; where we enjoy participating in activities even if they are not professionally saleable. Creative outputs are more than their resale value.

Creating is part of our everyday social life and participating is a major generator of social capital. Indeed David Putnam's work on democracy in Italy found that choirs were a major contributor to civic culture.

The second example of changing government direction is the universities. I am now back at a university after a twenty year break and I like not what I see. There are more students, which is terrific. However there have been substantial losses and these relate to both social capital and efficiency.

Universities are no longer funded as repositories of knowledge and debate. Even though they are still teaching and research institutes, they are now almost entirely defined by quantitative outputs and their relevance to employment and industry. As academics depend more and more on research funds from industry, independent advice from academics becomes harder to find.

For instance, it would be exceedingly hard to find a university that can deliver independent advice on food and nutrition without jeopardising existing and future research funding. This 'partnership' between industry and academia affects the potential operation of our food regulators and the safety of our food supplies. There is no

corruption or deliberate fraud but what are the consequences of joining the tertiary sector to the industry?

Government funding policies are turning academic disciplines into production lines where the joy of learning is lost. It is ironic that students are losing the freedom to explore and debate ideas at the undergraduate level just at the time when we let more people with disadvantaged backgrounds into the tertiary education sector. Soon, it will be only the post graduates and the elite students who will have the time to talk and think and explore ideas with their academic leaders.

The joint pursuit of knowledge is an important source of social capital.

My final illustration of flawed policy is child care. As a long term activist in the community sector, I carry some responsibility for changing the terms of debate because I taught others *Econospeak*. We learned that translating what we did into bean counting terms meant we could talk to the animals and make some progress.

We translated child care into an economic problem and over the past two decades have been most successful in the expansion of child care places. This has been a real achievement. Places have quadrupled in the last decade, though there are still some shortages.

However, there is a downside to this success. Almost all of these places are set up for parents with work related child care needs. Home-bound parents are allowed a sliver of time in occasional care so their needs can be met, but no one really considers the needs of the children.

We lost sight of the social functions of child care services; the need for children to have out-of-home care for its own sake. Now we have to work out a new strategy of child focused services which create sociability.

I could go on to other policies such as retirement income where present superannuation strategies will undermine social capital and create a very contested safety net by the year 2042.

It may be possible now to label these types of policies as 'Wrong Way, Go Back', but I would be satisfied with at least a 'Go Slow' sign, and time to repair the potholes.

Let me finish with some immodest road rules for creating a truly civil society. My proposals are some ways to go, some ways of doing what we want to do; means and not ends.

First, some damage control! Demand a social capital impact statement before selling any public assets, or converting them into business enterprises and then calculate whether the financial gains exceed the social capital losses.

What are the social capital costs of selling off the family silver? Would we do better if we were less economically pure and more socially aware? Are we losing too much if we have to pay for services that were once free?

Should we offer to pay more in taxes so we can keep our public assets? This is heresy indeed. It will take time to unwind the incessant anti tax messages of media barons who basically want to reduce their tax burden, not ours.

Communities must share resources, the haves with the have-nots, so no one is left out in the badlands.

Second, some enhancement of social capital. We must protect and extend services such as free libraries, galleries, museums, sporting grounds, and historic sites. We must retain sports as communal and not commercial activities. We need active public spaces, not just circuses as in Ancient Rome, but places where we can participate and join with others to help produce. Jane Jacobs, a social commentator in 1961 stated

'Lowly, unpurposeful and random as they may appear, sidewalk contacts are the small change from which a city's wealth of public life may grow'.

We need to ensure streets and public spaces are safe and welcoming so people feel at home when they are outside as well as inside.

Third, let's bring back the eight hour day. Make this a maximum and penalise those who work longer. Can anyone really claim to be productive or effective after an eight hour stint, paid or unpaid? We would create more jobs, and even the high flyers could not avoid everyday life by hiding in their boardrooms.

We need time to take part in social and communal activities. The human condition requires that we have the time for public life as well as family and paid jobs.

Fourth, save our common wealth! We must keep governments and make them visible as providers of social and communal resources. The state must protect the less powerful and redistribute limited resources preferably to the poor and not to the rich.

Only government can make sure we have communication policies which reduce the powers of big conglomerates and give voice to those who are silenced. Do not sell Telstra, fund public broadcasting to stay free to air and encourage debate and dissent.

Fifth, we must increase our political engagement. Interest in elections is positive, protests and demonstrations can be optimistic and cheerful when they are not opposed by the police. People can gain a sense of optimism through their involvement in social equity lobby groups. Participation in public life and in collective and egalitarian groups gives us a taste of the *Vita Activa* that Hannah Arendt identifies as the most civil part of the human condition.

Each of these five propositions runs counter to the directions of public policy over the past fifteen years. Yet few voices have been heard in protest or challenge.

The wimping of the welfare lobbies, the drying of socialisms and the populist right attacks on the residues of the state need a forthright response. The markets must be controlled. We need to return to a level of social capital which can counter the distrust generated by competitive individualism.

We must develop social trust, mutuality, reciprocity and a recognition that we work best co-operatively. The collective 'we' benefits us all rather than the singular self.

We should develop a social capital monitor to assess the strength of our connections. In this way we can road test our policies and programs and see if they generate trust or distrust.

Social capital banks goodwill. There are already some credits we can enter so the task is not overwhelming. But committing ourselves is hard when our environment constantly reinforces anti-social messages.

We are good citizens, at least some of the time. We make personal, and even organisational commitments to increasing social capital in many settings. We give to each other, to those we know and work with, to customers, to friends, and sometimes to strangers. We pause to let a car join a line of traffic, we walk a little further across a park to put our rubbish in a bin, and enjoy giving at fund raising functions.

There are even some signs of social trust at the Federal level with the more inclusive Keating model of government. This gave us the Redfern Speech, legislation on Mabo, Creative Nation and other manifestations of a sense of belonging. But these initiatives have been quarantined from the economic debates or sometimes somewhat incongruously, they have been hung on the economist's coat tails.

Australia has the potential to be a very inclusive society. We have learned about diversity and, despite continuing problems with racism and sexism, we are much more tolerant than we once were. We are open to new ideas, good and bad, so we need be more critical of overseas fads and fancies.

We must tell those who seek to turn back the clock that they need a trust injection because no retreat to the past will solve present problems. We live in times of massive change so we cannot stand still.

We must learn to travel hopefully in a discomfort of contradictions, a concordance of contraries and a conjunction of opposites.

The absence of certainty puts the onus on us, as citizens, to debate collectively so we make the best decisions, and take responsibility for the society we want to live in.

There are no simple nostrums. There is no magic nation of OZ. We create the ways of acting which become the truly civil society!

Let us recognise what we have achieved - celebrate, debate, re-create and move on.

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