Australia—Who Cares?

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Caring Australians: on the endangered list?

David Callahan

... marked by an original incompleteness, we owe others our very existence.

-Tzvetan Todorov[1]

The title of this volume is meant to be provocative but not in the way that would be expected, for the question it asks is: who, in Australia, is doing the caring and how do Australians see the act of caring? I was led to propose this question in light of two things. One was the depressingly ceaseless string of news stories which reach where I live in which Australia is a heartless spurner of the weak and needy, an incarcerator of those desperate refugees who get through, and, on the iconic Australian location of the beach, a thuggish dealer of violence to certain minority groups who do manage to make it out into the community, as well as a nation that arrogantly refuses to support initiatives to reduce greenhouse gases or even to take in Pacific Island neighbours who have lost their homes as a result of rising ocean levels. The second thing had been my lingering unease about the response in Portugal in 1999 to Australia's intervention in East Timor, set against the background of an extremely negative view of the country in the Portuguese media. And here an excursus is in order.

* * *

At the time of the 1974 revolution in Portugal, Australia was seen as a counterbalance to the already perceived threat of Indonesia.

neo-Marxist influences into a more open theoretical framework which welcomes the insights from cultural studies. The de-centring perspective, the identification of privilege, the attention to voice which cultural studies brings is very exciting for those of us working in critical pedagogy. Carmen Luke's discussion of 'critical cultural literacy' shows well how the two theoretical frameworks can come together in education for social change. Critical cultural literacy, according to Luke:

> challenges how representations of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation and culture disempower some groups while privileging others. It gives students analytic tools with which to read and remake maps of meaning—maps which delineate how people are taught to view themselves and their relationship to others within the dynamics of everyday life in local and larger societal contexts … A critical media and cultural studies, therefore, must move beyond analyses of how meaning is produced and circulated (i.e., the study of cultural industries) and created (i.e., the study of audiences), and extend to explorations of how individual and corporate sense-making tie in with larger socio-political issues of culture, gender, class, political economy, nation, and power.[37]

For some people the experience of listening to silenced voices will be the first time they have had the opportunity to imagine an existence different to their own. The dislocation that this can cause is in itself a challenge to what previously was perceived as an hermetically sealed dominant discourse. Understanding that other valid ways of living exist challenges the cultural superiority of the dominant discourse, and for some this will lead to more questions about other, previously taken for granted, assumptions. For those already looking for cracks and ways out of the dominant discourse, the rupture caused by the contact and informed imaginings possible in an empathetic space can aid significantly in that process of escape. The sense of connection, well supported by education around alternative discourses, works to further the transformational process.

The reflexivity of critical pedagogy demands that what we learn from these insights gets re-invested in the educative process. This is a process of trying to understand a little more about how we are inscribed by the dominant discourse and the possibilities and limitations which we negotiate in challenging that discourse.

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'They are still people': economics, welfare and advocacy in Australia

Nicholas Brown

'Specious promise?'

In 1890, Alfred Marshall, outlining the *Principles of Economics*, called on economists to 'develop the faculty of sympathy': an ability to enter imaginatively into the 'confidences and affections' shaping their object of study. He went further, emphasising their need to cultivate that 'rare sympathy which enables people to put themselves in the place, not only of their comrades, but also of other classes' who were, thanks to industrial change, more actively shaping social forms and values. In arguing this way, Marshall was conscious of taking a progressive view of the extent to which 'the masses of the people' could reliably shoulder the responsibilities of economic freedom without risking the foundations of property. From many perspectives, he maintained—not least that of 'biological studies'—it seemed that individual 'will' and carefully regulated environments might be trusted to over-rule potential instability in 'character'.

Yet there were dangers, Marshall cautioned, as evident in the Australian colonies. There 'bold ventures' in policy were 'hold[ing] out specious promise of greater immediate comfort and ease'. Perhaps, he allowed, this extravagance could be excused to some extent by a wealth of assets to exploit in the antipodes, but it should in no sense set a precedent. In the more demanding task of achieving a just measure of economic welfare, Marshall's conviction remained that economists must seek a basic disposition towards understanding the subject of their care: the 'hearts and homes' giving life to the 'industrial organism'.[1]

This sentiment might seem extraordinary today when a prevailing theme in critical studies of economics is that any connection between economics and 'caring' is at best tenuous. The 'sympathy' Marshall encouraged is very distant from current neo-liberal constructions of the subject of economics as the market, and of 'character' as being best expressed and disciplined in individual choice rather than engineered towards social consensus. 'Care' as an act of sympathy is now effectively positioned as antithetical to economics: as compensating for the operations of the market, and tolerated as a private, voluntarist act that must fall short of the distortions introduced by 'special interests'. How are we to understand this reversal, particularly as it seems so marked in Australia where, as Marshall observed, policies which once so precociously 'pushed up' the citizenry are now replaced by those presiding over escalating levels of inequality?

This paper deals with established explanations for this reversal, particularly as they centre on a polarity between a 'faculty of sympathy' and economics as a discipline central to contemporary concepts of society as open to government and direction. These explanations emphasise a radical change in Australia over the past thirty years in the ways public policy, under the sway of economists, has exercised/abandoned care and identified who should, and how they should, receive it. My concern here is to avoid the stalemate that can follow these hypotheses of rupture in attitudes and provision, casting it as an ideological war between the caring and the heartless. Instead, I will trace some changing contexts of 'sympathy' as it has conferred legitimacy on a range of actors, defining relationships and identities in the processes of government. This approach might help us understand—by following a crucial discipline as it drew the boundaries of care—what was invested in getting us into our current state, and how we might understand the dynamics needed to shape a different future. The question 'who cares?' invites a ready response identifying those who do, and who do not, possess sympathy. My interest here is in examining, instead, what it is that shapes such sympathy and its inter-relationship with the object and agents of care. As Marshall's injunction suggests, economics has a more complex role to play in such an inquiry than a simple polarity implies.

The 'locust strike'

The characterisation of an antithesis between economics and care was firmly locked in place in Australia by the diagnosis of the 'locust strike' of 'economic rationalism' from the 1980s onwards. Here was the triumph of the economist, trimmed of any humanising traits into an unforgiving neo-liberal professionalism, and insisting on the indisputable primacy of the market in determining social value. Michael Pusey gave this interpretation its prominence, and has diagnosed a further evolution from the ideologues of 'rationalism', capturing university departments and bureaucracies in the aftershock of the 1970s, to the practitioners of 'economic functionalism' who have dispersed into an interlocking corporate elite. In think tanks, board-rooms, opinion editorials and radio talk-back—bastions of the New Right—this grouping wields a 'strategically contrived public discourse', suffocating discussion of welfare and equality.[2] 'Once the most successful post-war capitalist democracy in the world', Pusey argues that Australia's pursuit of 'economic reform' has exhausted that birthright. The domain of 'the economy' now 'subsumes some basic proteins of social experience into a purely personal, and largely incommunicable, world of private striving and consumption'.[3]

This is a powerful characterisation of economics/economists/the economy. It has exerted considerable influence in explaining the depleted state of Australia's social conscience. Given its power, however, it is important to get the history behind this diagnosis clear. While these assembled identities—the discipline, its agents, and the subject of intervention—provide an effective emblem of 'capture', we might look more closely at the relations between each element and the extent to which they can be understood in contexts of social change. The impact of economic rationalism in diminishing a concept of 'care' might seem self-evident, but if each element in the diagnosis is given an historical dimension—from the fields of 'care' through to the status of those agents emerging from evolving knowledge claims, advocacy roles and fields of intervention—we might arrive at a more subtle view of where the 'locusts' came from. As a first proposition, we might ask—putting aside the preparedness of liberal critique to endorse essentialised identities, good and bad—what processes produced these various agents and objects and the possibilities for their politicisation?[4]

In his recent biography of H C ('Nugget') Coombs—an 'icon' of social conscience in Australia, but also an economist in training and career—Tim Rowse questions Pusey's broad-brush interpretation by portraying Coombs as always an 'economic rationalist' in his intellectual formation and professional influence from the 1930s onwards. If we are to appreciate Coombs's commitment to social reform, Rowse argues, we need to understand what has been invested in 'the economy' as an 'object of knowledge'—a way of comprehending social issues—and in economics as a way of energising that knowledge in policy. An interpretation of Keynesian economics is crucial in this regard, particularly as it refined Marshall's concepts of 'character' and 'will', mapped in the micro-economics of value and price, into macro-economic regulatory mechanisms of malleable demand and investment. In understanding how society might be 'shaped, mobilised and governed' amid depression and war, economists of Coombs's generation accepted a widening social dimension to economic management. Subjectivities of consumption and expectation were rendered open to intervention, and so a 'faculty of sympathy' was rapidly tooled-up into scales of rationing during World War II, subsidies and rebates through taxation schemes during the post-war 'boom', and concepts of 'welfare' or 'opportunity' into the 1970s. Yet even here, as Judith Brett has suggested in her study of Australian liberalism and middle class morality, Keynesian economics—departing from the discipline of thrift and adopting the stimulus of demand—was also seen to have uncoupled an alignment between the 'virtues' of respectable and responsible households and 'the prosperity of nations'. This uncoupling, on the one hand, brought confusion to the political meanings of 'spending and saving' as disciplines of 'character'; on the other, it laid foundations for the later neo-liberal uncoupling of 'market' and 'society'.[5] Adopting Rowse and Brett's perspectives, the polarisation of the economic and the social, diagnosed so forcefully from the 1980s onwards, was not so much a reaction to early formulations of reform, but reflected tensions inherent within identities and categories actively produced by those formulations from the 1930s onwards. Acts and modes of 'caring' could not but be caught up in this process.

To offer a more specific grasp on these processes, I want now to approach them through a biographical perspective on aspects of the career of another prominent Australian Keynesian economist:

R I Downing. This focus allows a more extended exploration of Pusey's sense of ideological rupture, and the issues of periodisation raised by Rowse and Brett. And—given the nature of Downing's career—while the focus here is on economics, the issues raised touch more generally on the shaping of registers of conscience in Australian society.

Exemptions to prove the rule?

Downing, Professor of Economics at the University of Melbourne from 1954 until 1975, confronted directly the role of economic knowledge in shaping a theme of care in Australian welfare advocacy.[6] As Australia's leading Keynesian economist in the 1950s and 1960s—in ways earlier and more fervent in his embrace of a world of managed prosperity than Coombs—Downing was an enthusiastic public campaigner for causes such as pension reform, national superannuation, public health and redistributive taxation. His engagement with these issues spanned from an inter-war education in welfare economics and public finance to the decades of post-war affluence and full employment. It also spanned considerations of entitlement-based 'safety-net' social security, perceptions of the increasing strain that expectations of wage growth and public expenditure were placing on social rights and citizenship, and intensifying debates (as Marshall had foreseen) over the reconciliation between social protection and economic efficiency in Australia. So how should we understand Downing's interests, his influence, his presentation of economic questions with reference to an antithesis between economics and care?

As already noted, there are established explanations relevant to this question. They are worth summarising, in part to understand the range of factors engaged in characterising the social engagement of economics, in part to note the levels of analysis that are taken as sufficient or discrete in each case.

From one perspective, Downing—like Coombs—could be seen as an example of that generationally-specific liberalism spanning from the social reconstruction 'planners' of the 1940s through to the brief resurgence of social democratic enthusiasm during the Whitlam Government.[7] A cohort of economists, in this view, were redeemed by the sentiment of social justice given professional credibility in Keynesian precepts, having been schooled in the crisis of the 1930s and supported by the unprecedented growth—not least in their own career opportunities within government and the universities—of the post-war decades. The waste of unemployment and the failure of governments to intervene in curbing the Great Depression were vital elements shaping their reformism and their commitment to move beyond the meliorist connotations of Marshall's 'sympathy' into more comprehensive mechanisms of economic management. Their enthusiasm, however, was quickly blighted from the mid-1970s, as neo-liberalism offered new formulations of the causes of imbalance (excess pressure on wages and social benefits) and reclaimed the classical inheritance of the 'dismal science'. Downing died suddenly on the eve of the Whitlam government's dismissal: in neat symbolism, then, he framed a generational aberration between 1945 and 1975.

A harsher judgement made of this cohort, recruited into government under the pressure of World War II, is that they were part of the narrowing of opportunities for social engagement presented by the 1940s.[8] Beneath the veneer of 'sympathy', they never fundamentally questioned the unequal structures of Australian society, or the imperative of containing public expectations. Instead, they made the best of the collapse of market-based concepts underpinning their discipline in the 1930s by adapting their expertise, and their models of the economy, to pressures for wartime control and the centralisation of bureaucratic power. Economics was the weapon of choice for states dealing with challenges to their legitimacy, particularly from reform agendas spurred by civil and industrial mobilisation, whether during war or, subsequently, full employment. The policy failures of the 1970s—precisely reflecting the pressures of 'specious promises' of 'comfort and ease'—meant that the market could resurface as the touchstone for the discipline, knocking back the excesses of social expectations and redeeming the profession from its over-investment in state action.

And there is a third interpretation which sees the economics in which Downing was trained—its institutional dominance from the 1920s onwards, its tribalism and patronage—as effectively suppressing the wider compass or imagination a discipline such as sociology might have brought to the understanding of social issues, and to changing social structures.[9] Underpinning this interpretation is a dialectic within Australian political culture as—so Hugh Collins

termed it—a pragmatic 'Benthamite society', or—in W K Hancock's formulation—framed by a state conceived as a 'vast public utility', serving a levelled and fragmented citizenry.[10] Economics, precociously and effectively coordinated among the social sciences in a new and development-oriented nation, had first claim over its political and its institutional networks, shaping an understanding of an 'industrial organism' to be protected, arbitrated, and supported by public investment but lacking a more pluralist liberalism. The civic ideals and values of sociological analysis in exploring 'confidences and affections' (again recalling Marshall's terms) were over-ruled by a distinctively Australian calculus of 'interests'—of labour, capital and the state—resulting in a limited ambit of social management.

From each of these perspectives, a dismissive judgement is made of the potential coupling of the inherent tendencies of economics with social concern in Australia. At a basic level, each suggests that the plague of economic rationalism was not unprecedented. While it hit severely in the 1980s, the disposition to a more narrow economic view of social strains was already there, and the significance of figures such as Downing and Coombs is illustrative of exceptions to underlying rules. Together with Pusey's model of ideological capture, then, these longer-term interpretations confirm the fraught link between economics as a discipline and care as a 'faculty' to be accessed in social conscience.

But if there is an ambivalent (at best) relationship between economics and social reform, then it is important to understand how that relationship works—particularly since economics has become central to the modes of Australian government over the past fifty or more years. What if we explore the relationship between economic knowledge and the object of care in its dynamics and interdependencies rather than its polarities? The question then becomes not what economics has included or excluded from social concern, but how such a boundary has been created and how it has interacted with social change?[11] From this perspective, each of these interpretations has its value, but a synthesis between them—of elements of generational experience, disciplinary alignment, and institutional authority—might get us closer to understanding how such boundaries of care are constituted.

'The smoke curled, the coffee cooled …'

One example must serve to draw out this proposition. It comes from neither the bold days of wartime reconstruction nor the brave rush of policy innovation under the Whitlam government in the 1970s, but from near the middle of that long span of 'successful' democratic management from 1945 to 1975. This example reveals something of the interdependent relationships between understandings of care, the influence of economics in defining areas of intervention, and the shaping of identities among the advocates of policy reform as well as its recipients. While this example is not 'robust' enough in itself to challenge the interpretations listed above, it might begin to suggest different ways of understanding care not as an inherent deficit in social policy, edged aside by economics, but as a reflection of a range of social factors, needing each to be taken into account in understanding, and looking beyond, dominant regimes of care.

An article in the Melbourne *Herald* of 14 May 1957 reported a campaign on the part of a group of mainly University of Melbourne academics to reorient the provision of the old age pension in Australia from a basic, common flat rate towards a more differentiated allocation. The group was predominantly made up of economists, led by Downing (already sufficiently familiar in public commentary to be described as 'the wiry, bushy-haired Professor of Research in Economics'). The economists were Jean Polglaze, Joe Isaac, Graham Turner, Mollie Bayne (an economic geographer), Alan Boxer and Frank Davidson. Other members were Ruth Hoban (associate professor of social studies—essentially social work), Kathleen Fitzpatrick and Jim Main (both historians). The group's proposal had been publicised in a pamphlet—a form which had been central to more populist campaigns of economic and social reform of the inter-war years but was becoming steadily less current in the formalised debates of the post-war period.[12] And this pamphlet—astutely circulated by the well-connected members of the group—stimulated the article in the *Herald*: a paper courting the more 'serious' liberal readers of current affairs. The essence of their case was that individual circumstances among elderly Australians, such as whether they lived alone, or faced specific health and housing needs, should be taken into account in determining the level of their pension.

The context for this campaign was an increasing awareness, developing through the early 1950s, of relative disadvantage in specific sections of the community, particularly those outside the presumed consensus decreed by full employment. Further, it was noted that the incidence of poverty especially could be linked to a range of factors—such as home ownership—which were upheld as social goals, and objects of integrated counter-cyclical economic policy, but required individualised remedy when they had not been achieved. This awareness, in turn, was bolstered by the professionalisation of social work and the identification of a matrix of 'personal problems' at the intersection of social, psychological and medical factors. For the aged, these factors were encompassed in the emerging socio-medical field of geriatrics, itself a product of a more consultative post-war approach to the provision of carefully categorised, essentially public, care.[13]

This *Herald* article, then, provides a window on a particular episode of generating care in analysis and advocacy. The salient points in this example so far are: a level of professionalised/academic authority; a particular form of publicity—the pamphlet and the article; a subject which exposed a policy shortfall, but on the margins of the pressures then associated with an expanding economy; and a way of exposing that shortfall in terms of specific, individual needs and specific forms of expertise.

Earlier, in 1954, elements of this new concern for the elderly had shaped another study, commissioned by the Rotary Club of Melbourne, and led by Bertram Hutchinson, who had been seconded from the British Social Survey Department and was based in the University of Melbourne's Department of Social Studies (which had, not least through Hoban, overlapping interests with Downing's group). Hutchinson's analysis—explicitly sociological in themes and analysis—focused on the loss of status among the aged, and the need to secure a 'readjustment' of 'older people to a proper place in a co-operative life with the younger sections of the population'.[14] This, clearly, was a different field of reference to that of Downing's group. Why two distinct, but closely related, approaches? Where Hutchinson asked questions of social integration, pushing the registers of compassion into a more reflexive mode as a wider social problem with significant psychological overtones, Downing focussed strictly on calculations of financial need. Unlike Hutchinson—to take one revealing contrast—Downing proposed a continuance of means testing on the basis of a redistributive principle, putting aside any attributed stigma of selectively targeted provision or a rights-based sense of universal entitlement. Downing's was an emphatically empirical, statistical approach, built around a basic model of an individual pensioner's entitlements, not their relative social participation. On this basis, then, the argument that economics in Australia edges aside the more expansive aspects of social science analysis would seem to hold true.

Moving specifically to this newspaper report, we might note the relationship between these registers of care and their forms of advocacy. The article presents a campaign which is partly a tactical exercise (to raise public attention following the release of the pamphlet), partly a reflection of changing attitudes towards 'expertise' in public commentary (the author's were described as 'this degree-studded group'), and partly evidence of an evolving subject of public concern ('the pensioner's plight'). The pamphlet, *Raising Age Pensions*, set out five key recommendations and, unlike Hutchinson's report, published as a book (*Old People in a Modern Australian Community*), it was framed as a popular intervention, and widely and successfully disseminated as such—albeit, as noted above, with some sense of disjunction between its form as a pamphlet, the subject of its concern (the poor and elderly being discussed by middle-class, middle-aged academics) and the expertise of its signatories (an early sign of the uncoupling of academic objectivity from 'publicity'). Whereas an earlier generation of philanthropists might have come to this cause in a formal civic meeting, and a later generation as a research project drawing on specialised fields of knowledge, Downing's group met casually in a South Yarra home ('the smoke curled, the coffee cooled, and the 10 dinner guests sat back to sample—the pensioners' plight'). As this newspaper report indicates, it was not just the analytical basis of the Downing and Henderson inquiries that was distinct.

The article reflects an intriguing process of constructing the status accorded to this group as they advanced their cause. The *Herald* interview with Downing presents a careful positioning on both his and the paper's part, showing a kind of primal 'policy elite' negotiating—borrowing a formulation from Bourdieu—a relationship between the cultural capital they carry (as academics, consolidating a status for disinterested knowledge, distinct from the centralisation of regulatory power in the 1940s) and the cultural inheritance of those they seek to engage (a citizenry encouraged to reflect on the boundaries of their cohesive 'way of life').[15] Downing must first explain a sense of incongruity between the topic (the aged) and a group of young-ish academics (led by 'the 42-year-old professor'), all highly qualified but not experts. Even allowing for journalistic flair, these themes were common across much reportage of the campaign, and were underpinned by Downing's explanation of the initiative. 'It was a matter of conscience for us', he remarked: 'It is not good to live in a community where a lot of people are in want'. He distinguished his colleagues as an 'investigating body' from any suspicion that they were a 'pressure group'. The 'cold economist and realist' in Downing is noted as just one of a range of attributes giving balance to this entry into public debate. While it was allowed that 'pension groups' might distrust their analysis, these academics' appeal was more generally to 'the community'. At a time of increasing recognition of the importance of education, and of massive increases in university funding to build 'an educated democracy' (as the Prime Minister put it the previous year, announcing the expansion of higher education especially as a national priority), the group was positioned to seek consensus as an exercise of informed citizenship. These features—the incongruity of their identities in relation to the issue, the generalised concern of their appeal, their crafted authority—secured a level of legitimacy for their recommendations that outstripped Hutchinson's report, which more directly confronted formulations of social 'adjustment'. Borrowing Norbet Elias's concept of 'mutual identification'—the increasing extent to which a loss of class rigidities in modernity is compensated for by other ways of constructing boundaries of respect and obligation—this pamphlet and press report suggest complex interdependencies in shaping a successful boundary of care.[16] Anticipating criticism that pensioners living in degraded conditions had clearly failed to provide for themselves, Downing insisted that 'this is not a good enough argument. They are still people and they have to be looked after'.

This apparent detachment was not altogether genuine. Several of those dinner guests, including Downing, were personally dealing with the care of elderly parents and aware of needing to adjust this responsibility to their own careers and personal lives. Most of the group also had some prior involvement with processes of more formally and systematically surveying social disadvantage which were, as Graeme Davison has shown, integral to the sense of disciplinary integrity and professional mission among many academics and philanthropists in Melbourne from the 1930s onwards.[17] Downing's 'matter of conscience' drew on sophisticated empirical inter-war practices of enquiry into living conditions, nutrition, demography, employment and the distribution of wealth—a 'social ecology'—which accorded with Marshall's injunction to understand the environmental/'biological' influences on the will and character, the 'hearts and homes', of the 'masses'. Yet these practices had to some extent been eased aside by Keynesian macro-economic precepts ('social accounts') and the mobilisation of resources for 'total war', centring on the management of aggregate trends in consumption, saving and investment—practices easily politicised in post-war debates over 'freedom' versus 'planning'. These associations bequeathed an awkward balance between the exercise of care through public policy and the legitimacy accorded to political intervention.[18]

All of this lay in the background of *Raising Aged Pensions*, defused in the safer, self-conscious image of a Yarraside dinner party. At one level, then, it is possible to read this example as confirming aspects of each of the interpretations listed above—a post-war generational aberration; economics' default to a narrow compass of reform; its trouncing of more sociological concerns. But do these judgements account for the conditions that produced the pamphlet and secured its influence?

Pushing the boundaries

Raising Age Pensions has been seen as consolidating a powerful empirical tradition in Australian social policy, with its itemisation of numbers in receipt of benefits, of housing conditions, of differences in weekly budgets between single and married pensioners, and its firm case for a more comprehensive governmental responsibility.[19] These features meant that its arguments were readily fed into tentative policy reform within bureaucracies that were cautious of over-stepping the scrutiny of government intervention. It was also welcomed by charitable organisations, such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence, keen to move towards a more research- and public relations-based, targeted

social advocacy while still maintaining older, philanthropic community support. And, equally, it found a receptive audience in a public debate wary of 'indiscriminate handouts' but equally sensitive to the incongruities of poverty amid relative affluence.[20] Through this diverse influence, the pamphlet was instrumental in moving pension policy towards supplementary assistance in defined circumstances (legislated in 1958) and then differential rates of payment (implemented through the 1960s).

Even given its modesty, then, the 'moment' of *Raising Age Pensions* is significant in its conditions of advocacy. And in this the boundaries it defined are as revealing in suggesting the conditions of care as they are in marking a decisive shift in policy or awareness. Coming out of an advocacy tradition geared around allocation according to quantifiable needs, *Raising Age Pensions* differed from Hutchinson's inquiry in not asking questions of identity in a wider register of social citizenship. From that perspective, it was a limited intervention, but one that tapped effectively into an existing political culture. Equally, however, from that moment, the attempt to quantify the *needs* of the individual pensioner as a subject of welfare policy (rather than the *level* of the pension) became increasingly problematic. As revealed in subsequent debates around ending the means test to secure the full pension as a right, and over contributory components in social insurance versus redistribution via taxation, pensioners were identified by their dignity in a changing society, by the need to know, verify, and approve their needs, to balance subsidised 'informal relationships' in community support against a certainty and efficiency of government services, by their entitlements as citizens to equal provision or their relative needs as individuals for special care, and not least by their standing as the largest single, identifiable group of people in poverty in Australia.[21] As social advocacy adjusted to these new settings and boundaries, it also began increasingly to question the solidarities ('they are still people ...') Downing assumed as given. *Raising Age Pensions* might seem a pragmatic exercise, safe within the boundaries of its political culture; but, even so, it reveals the production of new public and private spaces of rights, regulation, care and identity that would generate their own 'proteins of social experience' and policy legitimacy in successive iterations.

Aspects of this process can be seen in the work of the Institute of Applied Economic Research, which Downing was instrumental in establishing at the University of Melbourne through the 1960s, in part building on the momentum of the pensions campaign. Drawing on diverse corporate and academic support, and centring on the careful, statistical tracing of short-term, then later longer-term economic trends, the Institute moved from macro-economic and allocative modelling on Keynesian lines to lay the ground-work for the Henderson Poverty Inquiry of 1975, which endorsed the concept of a minimum income, a 'poverty line', and the importance of welfare systems being embedded within localised agencies on the grounds of their responsiveness to immediate and specific needs, a participatory ethic and a goal of community representation.[22] The Institute also developed an effective public advocacy role, encompassing, as Peter Saunders notes, regular attitudinal studies (tapping new trends of 'public opinion', the state of public and private 'sentiment') and the capacity to feed and influence more sophisticated media and political processes—albeit ones that could in turn shape perceptions into their own search for power. [23] While the welfare goals of the Institute remained solid, if shaken by the inflationary pressures of the early 1970s, it was in itself part of a culture in which a political culture further fragmented solidarities in competing rights, expectations and identities while also seeking more subtle ways of identifying objective indices of need and comprehending sociologies of exclusion.

Steadily politicised through the 1970s, these tensions fed into the neo-liberal critiques of the 1980s. At what point, however, do we identify a decisive rupture, a triumph of cold economics over sympathy? And who is to blame? Was the break, as Davison argues, caused by the mounting questioning of social consensus that became so much a part of debate by the 1970s? Or was it, as Wendy Brown suggests in more abstract terms, a product of the ways in which the subjects of policy were cast into the contradictions of a sense of universalised liberal entitlement within a deeply individualised, normative identity as an integral part of the social welfare project?[24] From either perspective, the question 'who cares?' demands a fully contextualised answer.

Without elevating a 1957 dinner party to a watershed in social reform, this account might at least suggest ways in which areas of vulnerability develop within boundaries of care, producing new forms of accountability, responding to aspirations and resentments that in themselves reflect or displace elements of the processes that

bring them to recognition. It is not simply that Marshall's 'faculty of sympathy' was discarded by mean-minded economists reacting against the distortions arising in times of sustained affluence. Perhaps not even economists are powerful enough to commandeer the dynamics of social change on their own. They, too, need to be seen as creatures as much as creators of their time, and their circumstance.

Returning, then, to the generational icons of socially-conscious economics, within the same intellectual paradigm Downing and Coombs saw a range of issues in different ways, in accordance with the areas of professional involvement available to each of them. For Coombs, as the shrewdly neutral Governor of the Commonwealth Bank from 1949 to 1960, inflation was the key factor in economic instability, and could be traded against other areas of expectation, such as consumption and even (with reservations) employment. This was a banker's view, but it also reflected Coombs's unease with pressures of 'private affluence' that spanned from his community reconstruction ideals of the 1940s to later environmentalism. It also reflected a personality, to be glimpsed in Tim Rowse's biography: a certain puritanism; a proud self-consciousness in the power of public administration traded between an ideal of social cohesion and anxiety at the conformities that came with it.[25]

For Downing, informally advising the Commonwealth Court of Industrial Arbitration on wage margins and adjustment through the same period, inflation could instead be a healthy sign of a society in pursuit not only of better things but also of better remuneration and more extensive redistribution of wealth to those who worked from those who owned.[26] This preference reflected a personality that masked the insecurity of the scholarship boy with noblesse oblige, an academic's mission in an 'educated democracy' to push the boundaries of discussion, and an assertion of the inherent good that comes from the freer exercise of personal taste (this last quality, after all, was—as Judy Brett reminds us—something to be taken from Keynes's uncoupling of household thrift and economic growth). For both, the fine-tuning of inflation/unemployment—presented as the key intellectual challenge, the danger zone of post-war macro-economics—constructed the most sensitive points on the boundaries of social and economic policy. By the 1970s, these sensitivities coalesced in the 'inflationary psychology' diagnosed by both Downing and Coombs among a citizenry that in itself seemed to be failing Marshall's trust that 'will' might overcome 'character'.

Without minimising the political and economic shocks of the 1970s, it is important not only to lament a reformist tradition traduced in the rise of the neo-liberal market, but to see how vulnerabilities in policy had been fostered by reformism's own core assumptions and modes of advocacy. From this perspective, it is significant that in 1974, despairing at the incapacity of policy to redress the strains emerging in economic and social development, Coombs maintained that it was 'the statisticians rather than theorists who have failed us' in not developing social accounts capable of tracking the strains of growth and setting normative values.[27] What had become of the earlier, reform-minded empirical tradition in Australian economics—of finding registers to express the needs of citizens? In part an answer to this question takes us back to the moment of *Raising Age Pensions*, and a new search for indices of entitlement.

Almost in the wake of that pamphlet (in timing, if not in cause), a comparative dimension became more central to legitimising the boundary of care. The question in welfare advocacy, for societies confident in their overall affluence, increasingly became not so much a distributional matter—what does this individual need or have a right to as a citizen?—but a comparative matter—how does their entitlement relate to those of others ('they are still people')? The rise of this comparative dimension—contrasting sectoral, national and increasingly international performance and policy priorities—added considerably to the ambit and complexity of a 'faculty of sympathy' as it sought relative settings amid the many claims that might be made of it. Where Marshall had invoked the 'biological' as corrective, and the social survey tradition expanded the range of environmental factors needing to strengthen 'hearts and homes', the comparative approach did at last seem to bring in sociology: the quality of life as a relative measure, and the factors that might explain different priorities in policy settings. The establishment of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1960 gave particular authority—and accountability—to such social and economic comparisons. Australia joined, in 1971, setting aside concerns that its record in areas such as race relations might be open for scrutiny in favour of access to the expertise and authority represented by the OECD as a source of

better practices. In 1972, the OECD's first national survey noted that Australians, pursuing and protecting their 'egalitarianism', 'have for long leaned towards the view … that economic growth is not everything'.[28] Marshall's concerns about the colonies' 'specious promises' to its citizens, perhaps, were laid to rest—or recast.

The comparative dimension effectively eased aside the normative approach that had underpinned the social survey contribution to economic engagement from the inter-war years. In that earlier mode, Downing had drawn on standards set by the International Labour Office (ILO), for example, on the conditions, rights, and provisions for 'the worker', 'the child', 'the mother' and so on: norms to which states should aspire, and which existed in a domain of legislative accountability. This approach, again, was reflected in the social survey mode of the 1930s and 1940s and was reflected in the campaigns of the post-war years ('they are still people …'). But the OECD's emphases served different purposes in advocacy, and were capable of exposing lagging governments and stingy public expenditures in areas such as foreign aid, education, health and public infrastructure provision—areas in which states would be assessed according to the outputs and processes that could be traced in their national accounts. By the mid-1960s, international comparisons had moved to the centre of Downing's and many others' welfare advocacy, taking the focus from 'the community' to be exhorted to care for 'people', to a state to be pressured to expand programs of assistance in the name of 'growth' and 'development'. 'Social indicators' expressed the more subjective dimensions of these comparisons, engendering new debates about what was needed to add a welfare dimension to headline-grabbing rankings of GDP performance, to encompass new areas of citizenship, and to define the boundary between those things that fell within the domain of economic management and those which did/could not. These fields of reference again seemed to expand the boundary of care. But they also introduced a new potential volatility to the field.

By the mid-1970s, the OECD began charting comparative over-spending by governments and agencies: imbalances in 'discretionary' social programmes; inefficient levels of service—all linked directly to a 'crisis of the welfare state' requiring structural change if 'welfare' was not to be at the expense of 'productivity'. Some element of responsibility, it was argued as a general proposition, must be returned to citizens.[29] Accordingly, the 1980 national survey of Australia indicted high spending on social services, relatively high levels of welfare dependency and budgetary strain, and the need for new policy disciplines to 'improve consensus' and bring the community back into line with 'economic reality'.[30] Clearly, the ideologies of neo-liberalism were part of this transition in analysis, and exploited it: but they did not solely create it or the vulnerabilities detected at its boundaries.

All this takes us a long way from a pamphlet and a newspaper report. My point has been to suggest that even in the moments of generating care, we should seek to understand the relationships that make that process possible. In indicting those who fail to exhibit a certain quantum of care, we should also seek to understand what shapes care's changing boundaries; not what is denied as a solution, but what is created as a problem to be resolved. Such an approach will assist in understanding how the boundaries of care are formed, and perhaps how they might be moved. As Christine Everingham has suggested, the more recent formulations of 'mutual obligation' in Australian social policy need to be seen in the contexts that have produced 'shock jock' popular radio, the framing of community around concepts of self-reliance rather than consensus, and the politics of 'downward envy', as much as they do around some resolved ideology in government.[31] Downing's concerned and dispassionate dinner companions might seem to inhabit another world, very different to the pervasive networks of Pusey's 'economic functionalism', as does the press that reported them. But it is important that this contrast be understood as a product of historical change, and not simply of values lost. By tracking such change we might better understand its pathways into the present, and the prospects for future constructions of care that will have to adapt to or effectively counter boundaries set by equivalently intersecting factors, including a media of 'virtual' individualised worlds, expertise framed by celebrity, and forms of 'sympathy' for members of our society that are based more on 'forms of sociability' (as Castell puts it) than 'models of behaviour'.[32] Whose 'plight' will then be discussed while the coffee cools?

6

Ecology and identity: Australians caring for deserts

Libby Robin

European Australians historically looked for progress across the sea, rather than the land. The colonial cities that became Australia's state capitals all had ports. Commercial goods and people arrived in ships, and letters travelled back from each city to Britain and elsewhere via the ports. Communication between Australian cities also was a conversation conducted via ships for a long time. Competition between cities—such as between Melbourne and Geelong at the time of the goldrushes in the 1850s—was often won or lost on the quality of a city's harbour. Eventually, the people in the cities began to look over their shoulders—out back, out the back of beyond—to the interior.[1] The historically seaward gaze had to be contradicted, inverted, even surprised, for the interior to be considered. The 'empty' interior of Australia awaited wisdom from its seafaring cities for much of the colonial past. Its emptiness was essential to the *terra nullius* myth. And apart from the country adjacent to the coast and the ports, the 'inside country'—the desert country of the outback—was hardly the Australia Felix of the nation's pastoral identity.

In this article I trace the evolving relations over the course of the twentieth century between science and Australian identity through the question of pastoral development for the arid centre. The notion of strategic science filling an empty and undercapitalised land has never been far from the minds of anxious governments.[2] The arid zone has provided a forum for international scientific