

With the falling of the dusk

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Abstract

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Introduction

I want to pay my respects to the Gadigal people on whose land I'm standing and to also acknowledge my own ancestry — Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi, Dharrawal, and Irish — which makes me uniquely Australian. I often say there is no other place on Earth that I can come from than Australia, with all of the history that Australia is living inside of me.

With the falling of the dusk

I want to talk to you about the state of our world, what has led us here. It's quite fitting that I'm addressing what used to be known as the Philosophical Society because I want to take you on a historical, political and philosophical journey into the ideas that have animated our world and the challenges that lie ahead.

I want to take you, first of all, on a train to China, to begin with a look through a window of a train heading across the landscape of China. I took my first good look at China from the window of a train on a frozen Christmas morning. I had lived in Hong Kong and made several trips to the China mainland, but this was different. I was here to stay. My first morning in my new home. I woke early in my sleeper cabin as the sun was rising and, with the smooth of

my hand, smeared the condensation from the window. It was cold inside the train, and I shivered. A little steam rose from my breath and through the streaky window I looked out on this place.

China had always lived in my imagination — that big, mysterious place on a map that I recalled from childhood, pinned to the wall of my classroom. I remembered sitting on the floor, hands tucked under my legs and watching black and white film of a land crowded with people, grey suits and bicycles. I started school at the height of China's Cultural Revolution, and I imagine every primary-school-aged child in Australia at the time would have heard the name Mao Zedong, the Communist leader of China. I recall the first time I saw his image, a portly, serenely smiling figure standing amid a crush of young, feverish faces, all waving Mao's Little Red Book, the sayings of this man they called the Great Helmsman.

This was the height of the Cold War, when the world lived in the shadow of nuclear catastrophe. I can recall watching a film of American kids doing duck and cover drills, sheltering under the desks to avoid radioactive fallout in the event of an attack. The Communists were the enemy, we were told: the Soviet Union and China. China was distant and exotic and mysterious and exciting

and frightening all at once. Its people had their own culture and language, their own philosophy, faith and story.

What we now call China is the product of thousands of years of war and revolution, and empire. Turmoil is a constant state of being. The famous 14th century Chinese novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* opens with the line, “The Empire long divided, must unite, long united, must divide.” Empires would rise and fall. Each emperor casting a long shadow, even though all around them was treachery to the Chinese. China was the world. They called it the Middle Kingdom, the centre of all civilisation. But that was long ago.

The China that would be my home had been humiliated. For a century. It had been conquered, exploited, dominated by foreign powers. It had been weak, and this disgrace ran deep. Every Chinese child was schooled in historical vengeance, reminded endlessly of the hundred years of humiliation from the mid-19th century opium wars with Britain to the Communist revolution in 1949. They now would complete the great rejuvenation of the nation to return their motherland to what they believed was its rightful place at the apex of global power.

That’s what I saw from my train window, the space between the future and the past, between becoming and being, between progress and eternity. I also saw a country haunted by history. This land seemed to pulse with memory. In the cold morning light, with just the rattle of the train to break the silence, I felt like I could hear the whisper of all the people who had lived here. In the distance I saw an old Buddhist pagoda surrounded by hills with barely any trees. And there on a flat piece of ground was a lone man working his field with a horse-drawn plough.

My wife and our boys were still fast asleep. The day before, we had closed the door on our life in Hong Kong and boarded this train for Beijing. This was the move I’ve been hoping for — a life of adventure, as China correspondent for CNN, one of the biggest news networks on the planet. The return of China as a great power was already shaping the world. In the years ahead, it would exercise a great hold on me. It would become the defining story of my journalistic career.

This country was in the midst of an economic revolution that had lifted more than half a billion people out of poverty. The Communist Party was defying the Western liberal belief that said the country could not become rich without also becoming free. The Party was instead doubling down on its power. It would stop at nothing, not even the slaughter of its own people, as we saw in Tiananmen Square, to keep its iron grip on the nation. All predictions pointed to China becoming the most economically dominant nation on the planet. Truly an authoritarian superpower.

As the train pulled past, I stared at this man in the field. Although from different worlds, this man and I shared a lot. Our lives stood at the crossroads of history. We were twinned with fate. We belonged each to old cultures whose worlds had been upended by the march of modernity — he in China, me as an Indigenous person of Australia. History lived in us. Every one of our ancestors had a hold on us. This man had likely never strayed far from his village. Yet the world had come to him as China shook itself from its slumber and began to throw off the yoke of 100 years of humiliation. And me? I had left my country to find a place in the world, and my wandering had brought me here.

We find ourselves now at a hinge point of history. To understand the gravity of this moment, we need to take a snapshot of our world. Thirty years after the end of the Cold War, there is talk of Cold War 2.0, the United States staring down a new rival, China, and we are witnessing a return of great power rivalry. Yet China is economically more powerful today than the Soviet Union was then, and the United States is unquestionably, a diminished nation.

America is politically fractured, deeply divided along racial and class lines. It has endured the grip of an opioid epidemic and a frenzy of gun violence. And of course, it has been devastated by the coronavirus. Alarming, life expectancy in the richest country on Earth is decreasing. America appears as an exhausted nation. It has been beset by crises for decades. The Al Qaeda-orchestrated terrorist attacks of 9/11/2001, the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq, the banking collapse in global financial crisis of 2007–2008. It is today a nation worn down and poorer. It is less sure of itself, and the world is less sure of American leadership. A decade ago, the journalist and political commentator Fareed Zakaria coined the phrase “the post-American world.” The post-American world. He saw a world in which the United States was still powerful but no longer dominant. Others had caught up. Is this now the post-American world? China is on track to become the biggest economy in the world and is building a military, it says, will fight and win any war. The two nations have been on a collision course.

Some historians see an overlay today with the drift to world war in 1914 or 1939. Writing about the lead up to World War One, Christopher Clark, in his book *The Sleepwalkers*, says that political leaders have

become hostage to events, “causes trawled from the length and breadth of Europe’s prewar decades are piled like weights on the scale until it tilts from probability to inevitability.” Are the weights tipping the scales again? The Indo-Pacific is a tinderbox of old enmities expanding militaries, disputed territories, unfinished conflicts and nuclear-armed states. The founding dean of the Harvard University Kennedy School, the noted historian Graham Allison has looked back to 400 BC and the lessons of Thucydides. The historian of the Peloponnesian war between Athens and Sparta. The “Thucydides trap,” as it is known, holds that when a rising power leads a waning power, war becomes inevitable. Allison fears the world is lurching towards conflict unseen since World War II. In his book *Destined for War*, Allison writes, it was the rise of Athens and the fear this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable.

Then it was Athens, Sparta. In 1914, it was Germany, Great Britain. And now it is China, United States. As far ahead as the eye can see, Alison says, the defining question about global order is whether China and the US can escape Thucydides’ trap. Most contests that fit this pattern, he says, have ended badly. Allison writes, on the current trajectory, war is not just possible, but much more likely than currently recognised. Now, a virus that came out of China has only added to our global instability. As Australia’s Prime Minister Scott Morrison has said, our world is poorer, more disordered, and more dangerous.

Reflecting this threat, Australia has updated its defence strategy, significantly increasing spending and investing in new weaponry. The recent announcement of the AUKUS Alliance — Australia, UK,

US — and Australia's decision to cross the nuclear threshold, purchasing nuclear-powered submarines, only underlies that we have entered a new and dangerous era. War, it must be said, is still thankfully unlikely. But we are not alone in preparing for what was not so long ago unthinkable. John Adams, one of the founding fathers of the United States and its second President, once said, "Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, murders itself." He said there never was a democracy that did not commit suicide. Is this what we are seeing in our time? Is this the inevitable death of democracy before it has even had time to truly grow old? The turmoil of the world is set against a weakening democracy and a seemingly ascendant authoritarianism.

Freedom House, an organisation that measures the health of democracy,¹ now counts 15 straight years of declining freedom and democracy in our world. It says we are witnessing a return of the iron fist, the resurgence of political strongmen who exploit fear and anxiety and govern over division.

It is only 30 years since the Berlin Wall came down. And then a young American political scientist, Francis Fukuyama, declared the end of history. In 1989, the triumph of liberal democracy over Soviet communism, he said, truly had settled the great ideological questions of humanity.

Is this where the end of history has taken us? It wasn't supposed to be this way. The second half of the 20th century was a boom time for democracy. Germany emerged from the trauma of Nazism. South Africa threw off the yoke of apartheid. Decolonization across Africa and Asia created free democratic nations and in other parts of the world,

in Latin America and in Europe, autocratic regimes were swept aside. Between 1970 and 2010, the number of democracies in the world increased from 120 to 350: 63% of the world's people then lived in democracies.

To its defenders, democracy's appeal is obvious. *The Economist* magazine has pointed out that democracies are, on average, richer than non-democracies, are less likely to go to war, and have a better record of fighting corruption. More fundamentally, democracy lets people speak their minds and shape their own and their children's futures. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others. It's easy to say, I suppose, when democracy has been designed for you. To much of the world, democracy also grew out of ideas of Western universalism, too often imported at the barrel of a gun. To much of the world, Western triumphalism sounds like humiliation.

And now there is a blowback that is shaking the West's faith in itself. Today, what we have called the global liberal order is unravelling. Global politics was in a state of flux before COVID-19 escaped the Chinese city of Wuhan and put our lives into a tailspin. War, economic collapse, refugee crises, political populism. All of these things have tested us and none of us has escaped unscathed. Terrorism has struck in cities from Paris to London to Jakarta to Sydney to Christchurch in New Zealand. People who lost their savings, their jobs or their homes in the financial meltdown a decade ago are still struggling to recover. Some never will. These shifting fault lines have exposed deep socio-economic inequalities, extant racial divisions and simmering political antagonism.

¹ <https://freedomhouse.org>

The Indian writer Pankaj Mishra has called this the Age of Anger. The West has poisoned itself with the very seeds it has sown. The Chinese American lawyer and academic Amy Chua says we are witnessing a resurgence of political tribalism. The old political left-right binary fails to explain, she says, what we are living through. This is the politics of identity, religion, race, ethnicity, nationalism. These are the drivers of our age.

I am reminded of the words of the great Irish poet William Butler Yeats:

*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.*²

As a reporter of four decades, I have traversed this world of intensity and hate. I have stood in the bombed out marketplaces in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. I've travelled to the closed world of North Korea and of course reported the rise of the authoritarian behemoth China. I have indeed followed the trail of blood where the ceremony of innocence is drowned.

I have seen how identity excludes and shrinks our world, how easily it is weaponised: Hutu versus Tutsi in Rwanda, Catholic against Protestant in Northern Ireland, the Muslim blood feud of Shia and Sunni, Hindu against Muslim. On and on it goes. I have touched the outer limits of our humanity, and it has proved to me one thing: the Indian philosopher and economist Amartya Sen is right when he warns that identity can kill, and kill with abandon.

This is identity fuelled by grievance, by vengeance and anger. It is identity poured through the strainer of history. Everywhere there is resurgent populism, nationalism, sectarianism, tribalism, and all of it feeds on history. Think of what Xi Jinping tells the Chinese people: remember the 100 years of humiliation. Vladimir Putin laments the end of the Soviet Empire as what he calls the greatest catastrophe of the 20th century. In Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reminds his people of the greatness of the Ottoman Empire. In Hungary, Viktor Orbán, a populist leader who has boasted of his illiberal democracy tells his people they were cheated after the end of World War I, when the country lost two thirds of its territory, and vows never again. Islamic State is still fighting the Crusades and dreaming of rebuilding the Caliphate ahead of what it sees as the final battle for humanity.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche told us that we all suffer from a consuming historical fever. History. The vengeance of history is the poison in the blood of our identities. Nietzsche warned of what he called the Man of Ressentiment. His, he says, is the unquenchable thirst for revenge. The refusal to let go. Suffering forms the core of his identity. To Nietzsche, the Man of Ressentiment is a prisoner of his past. Caught in a time warp, he always returns to the source of injustice that he cannot fix and does not want to fix.

This toxic identity that has made our world so perilous has taken root, too, in democracies. As American political scientist Mark Lilla has pointed out, it spreads like a cancer. He argues that the politics of toxic identity is shattering the idea of shared

² From "The Second Coming," 1919.

citizenship. The word “we,” he says, has been banished to the outer reaches of respectable political discourse. Lilla says this is a disastrous foundation for democratic politics. At worst, this pits groups from left and right into open and often violent conflict.

In democracies today there are those who seek power through division, who revel in carnage and exploit fear and anxiety. They vow to return their people to some imagined golden age, while at the same time defining who the true people are, who belongs and who doesn't. And these populists are often very popular. They are seizing power with a simple, seductive message for people who are tired or angry or left out, left behind and fear. This is the state of democracies. Far too often today, a competition for recognition and power that is rendering our polity fractured and unworkable. Talk of unity or hope cannot but sound trite or naïve. When politicians and political parties can so persuasively appeal to a constellation of difference, we define ourselves not by what we are or who we are, but what we are not and who we are not.

Into this mix of great power rivalry, fear of war, rising authoritarianism, retreating democracy, political populism, nationalism, tribalism and toxic weaponised identity, we now add the coronavirus. The last two years have been unlike any other in our recent memories, COVID-19 has revealed and widened the fault lines of our world. Globalisation, which has brought us closer and made us richer, has also left us vulnerable. Our world is smaller and the virus can move so much more quickly.

Our defence against COVID was to lock ourselves away, to seal off our borders. Our isolation is a potent symbol of a political and economic system that seems out of

answers, unsure of itself. The poor, the black and brown, the white underclass, those left behind by decades of neoliberalism and its worship of the market are those who have suffered the most during the pandemic. Will democracy meet this challenge? While democracy can be the best vaccine against tyranny, it carries within it its own tyranny.

To many people — the poor and oppressed — democracy appears as a sham, a game played by and for the elites. On 6 January 2021, an American mob stormed the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. Members of Congress fled and hid as the protesters, some of them armed, overturned offices and stormed the hallways. I was on-air with the ABC as this scene unfolded. Here were America's worst fears made real. The news anchors and commentators on the US networks competed with one another to describe this moment: was it a coup? An insurrection? Was this terrorism or treason? All fingers were pointed at Donald Trump, the Clown Prince of American politics, once called a cartoon fascist by British political scientist David Runciman, who had taken his reality TV show all the way to the White House. I interviewed guests who bemoaned the theft of American democracy. How could this happen in the land of the free and the home of the brave, they said? Where was this glorious City on the Hill? This is not who we are, they told me. But of course it was.

What we saw in the American capital was America laid bare. Like everyone, I suspect, I was stunned by what I saw. It was a moment that fixed in my mind as surely as the attacks on the US on 11 September 2001. Yet I was not surprised. In its own way, this was a moment of honesty, of reckoning. The angry mob storming the Capitol Building reflected a broken country where tens of

millions of people have traded the American dream for what Donald Trump called American carnage, and no longer know what truth truly is.

American politics, business and media have been complicit in delivering the United States to this critical moment. The sad scene of a country that has long billed itself as a beacon of democracy, tearing itself apart, revealed the hypocrisy of those condemning it. Former President George W. Bush called this scene a sickening and heartbreaking attack on democracy. America, he said, resembles a banana republic. But, remember, this is the man who concocted evidence of Saddam Hussein possessing weapons of mass destruction as a pretext for an invasion of Iraq. His lies led to hundreds of thousands of Iraqi deaths and upturned the Middle East, setting off unending conflict, and cost his own nation \$2 trillion and the deaths of so many of its servicemen and women. Another former President, Bill Clinton, said the attack on the US Capitol Building was fuelled by four years of poisonous politics by Donald Trump. But, remember, this is the same Clinton who was President, who perjured himself, disgraced the White House, and became only the second President to be impeached. Donald Trump became the third.

While Trump peddled his conspiracies of election fraud, I could only remember that Hillary Clinton had also told Democrats there was a vast right-wing conspiracy trying to destroy her husband's presidency. The truth is American political leaders have been playing fast and loose with the truth for decades, deepening partisan divisions and whipping up anger among their supporters. Trump exploited a sick politics, from Richard Nixon's Watergate lies and corruption to Bush and Clinton. All roads

led to Donald Trump. The dangerous delusions of his crazed followers should only remind us that America has always teetered on the edge of collapse.

It is a nation born in crisis and awash with bloodshed, the genocide of Native Americans, the enslavement of Africans stolen from their lands on whose scarred backs America filled its wealth. Let's not forget this is a nation created by revolution and torn apart by civil war that has seen presidents assassinated. The 1960s was a time of violence, revolt and political killings, and it lit the fuse for the division and tribalism that continues today. America is locked in a perpetual culture war, lacerated by class, race and faith.

Trump was, in fact, right when he said that America was seriously divided before he got there. Previous presidents at least paid lip service to unity. Trump never pretended that he governed for all. The country was ripe for his brand of political opportunism, us versus them populism feeding on fear and anxiety, and exploiting racism. Growing inequality has fractured America, with the working poor left behind, while power and wealth is concentrated in the hands of what's been dubbed an American meritocracy. To be a member of the top 1% in America is to have wealth 900 times greater than a member of the bottom 50%.

The financial crash of 2008 left the country poorer and deeply scarred. Ordinary Americans lost their homes and their jobs while rich bankers got bailed out. Large parts of white America are poorer and sicker. Even before the coronavirus, the country was in the grip of a deadly health crisis. Economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton chronicle this downward spiral in their book, *Deaths of Despair and the Future*

of *Capitalism*. It is a devastating portrait of a lost generation. They reveal an America of haves and have nots, where a four-year college degree can be the difference not just between better and worse career prospects, but in fact between life and death.

This is an America, they say, of meaningless or no work, of declining wages and shattered families. Most striking of all, for the first time in a century, not since the 1918 'flu, American life expectancy is falling. This generation of Americans is dying younger than their parents, and where people live determines their fate. The largest increases in mortality rates for whites aged 45 to 54 are in West Virginia, Kentucky, Arkansas and Mississippi, which, as Case and Deaton point out, are all States with education levels lower than the national average.

And how are these Americans dying? They are killing themselves. In the words of Case and Deaton, they are drinking themselves to death or poisoning themselves with drugs, or shooting themselves, or hanging themselves. There is no faith in American capitalism, which Case and Deaton write, looks more like a racket to make the rich richer. I defy anyone to read *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism* and still cling to the myths of America.

One of the most famous portraits of Napoleon has him standing before the tomb of Frederick the Great of Prussia. His arms are folded and he bows his head just slightly. It is staged so that he appears humble and respectful. One of Napoleon's biographers, Philip Dwyer, says the portrait was a powerful tool of propaganda, both a mark of respect for Frederick as a general and a sovereign and a means of enhancing Napoleon's own reputation by obliging people to compare him to Frederick, one of the greatest gener-

als of the 18th century. Napoleon had crushed the Prussian Army under Frederick William III in the battles of Auerstedt and Jena on 14 October 1806. The Kingdom of Prussia now came under the Empire of France.

At this time the philosopher Georg Hegel was living and teaching in Vienna. He glimpsed Napoleon riding through the town. Hegel was moved to describe the great general as the soul of the world. In that moment Hegel had an epiphany. Napoleon was more than Emperor. More than general. He was the fulfilment of human destiny. All of human endeavour, Hegel said, all thought, war sacrifice, life and death had led to this moment. To Hegel, Napoleon was a force from which history was set in motion. This is what humanity was destined for. Napoleon was, to Hegel, the absolute spirit. Hegel saw the Battle of Jena as more than just a military victory. It was a moment of transcendence. As he described Napoleon, "dominating the entire world from horseback," Hegel gave flight to a radical idea. The end of history itself.

Hegel's end of history casts a long shadow. Even those who have never heard of him, let alone read him, live in the world Hegel made. It's not possible to imagine the modern political state without Hegel. One Hegelian philosopher, Stephen Houlgate, has called the 18th century thinker the most important political philosopher of the post-French revolutionary era. Hegel, the philosopher to whom I have turned as a guide to our times, believed he had glimpsed the perfect sight, a state of freedom at the end of history. In Napoleon's France, he believed he had seen the light of the world, the absolute spirit. Humans had reached the summit, the promise of freedom and liberty, the end of history.

Stalin, Hitler, Mao — they, too, believed that they would be the final word on humanity. Perhaps Xi Jinping believes the same today. Those who cling to the American myth might still believe that it is humanity's last great chance. Francis Fukuyama believed he had glimpsed history's end with the fall of the Berlin Wall. The rush to crown the glory of the West has always been premature. Hegel warned that the end of history might also lead to what he called the highway of despair. It is "in utter dismemberment that the spirit finds itself."

What is our despair? It is alienation, the loss of community, the betrayal of leaders, the corruption of capitalism, the destruction of our environment, dehumanising racism, and the brutality of authoritarianism.

American leadership has been a great gift to the world in so many ways. It has given us the computer age. It has taken us to the Moon. It is overseeing what's known as the Great Peace, since the end of World War II. It has helped to bring us to this point, but America alone will not deliver us from it.

We are indeed entering what's been called the post-American world. This is a moment fraught with peril, but inevitable. Pope Francis has spoken to this crisis, questioning Western values in the American way of life. A professor of theology, Massimo Fagioli, has explored the pontiff's role in this world of swirling change. In his book *Joe Biden and Catholicism in the United States*, he says Pope Francis invites a radical critique of the inclination to embrace Western triumphalism as a creed of religious faith that looks forward to the eventual acceptance, willingly or not, of Western-style American-led democracy by the rest of the world.

We face a reckoning, a realisation now that democracy may not be the natural

order of things. It may not even be the natural order of the United States. Hegel, the philosopher, warned that we courted danger when we turned away from despair. In despair, we find new ideas, he said, an opportunity to grasp truth. Philosophy, he wrote, reveals the progressive unfolding of truth. It has been described as an engine of change. As Hegel poetically put it, the bud disappears in the bursting forth of the blossom. One refutes the other until the fruit of the blossom reveals a new truth. This, he said, was their fluid nature. What begins, ends and begins and ends and begins and ends again and again and again. Ultimately, for Hegel, the contradictions that drive change are resolved in the ethical state.

This is what Fukuyama believed he had seen at the end of history, the rise of the ethical liberal democratic state. Yet even Fukuyama, in his fervour of Western triumphalism, conceded that it could trigger an immense war of the spirit, as he wrote, engaged in bloody and pointless prestige battles, only this time with modern weapons. Presciently, he warned that this war could start within democracy itself. He said the chief threat to democracy would be our own confusion about what is really at stake. Fukuyama recognised that the end of history might just get history started again.

This is the world I have reported, the return of history and the rejection of the idea that liberalism or democracy speaks equally to us all. We are all on the highway of despair. As to the idea of truth, there is debate now about what that even meant. Democracy itself has broken with liberalism, hijacked by demagogues who use it as a cover for tyranny. The champions of liberal democracy, like Fukuyama, now confront the prospect that their great faith itself may

not outlast history. As we emerge from the worst of COVID-19, the virus has accelerated the change in our world.

Writing more than two centuries ago, Hegel could be speaking to our age and even uses the metaphor of infection. We cannot deny our despair, he said, we must embrace a new consciousness to struggle against it. It betrays the fact that infection has occurred. The struggle is too late and every remedy adopted only aggravates the disease.

I think often of that train ride to China and that man that I saw in a distant field all those years ago. What has become of him? There is no way he could have remained untouched by the momentous change in his own country. Back then, he still worked his land as his ancestors had done. It was still possible for parts of China to remain shielded from the world. No longer.

When the sun set on the Cold War that pitted the West against the Soviet Union, it rose again in China. We may like to think that we can bend time, the universe itself, to our will, that we can capture the human soul and construct a society to fit. We may believe that we can end history itself, but the world is not flat and time is not straight, and history will go where it will. I woke that morning on a train to China in a world of possibility, in a new home with a new story to tell.

But wisdom is not gained in the dawn, as Hegel well knew. The Owl of Minerva, he wrote, spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk. Thank you so much.

Q & A

Christina Slade:³ Thank you so much, Stan. Very wise words. You have an extraordinary ability to bring together tales about your life as a correspondent with a long historical and a philosophical view. It's an extraordinary tour de force. I want to ask at first about the question of identity. You warn about great power rivalry, the rise of political and toxic tribalism. Yet you understand the resentment of displacement of those emotions. You're a cosmopolitan, I'm afraid, even though at times you're sceptical about Western liberalism. I want to go back to Amartya Sen's book, *Identity and Violence*, that you mentioned in your talk. He describes the fashion in which many of us have multiple identities and the fact that you can have multiple identities that are not in conflict. You appear to be an example of that. So how have your multiple identities informed your work? And are there any lessons for us from our ability to reconcile multiple identities in this rather dismal prospect of the future that you have described for us?

Stan Grant: Christina, that is a wonderful observation and a wonderful question. It goes absolutely to the heart of what I've written about in my book, *With the Falling of the Dusk*, and what I've grappled with in my reporting of the world. Identities can be very nourishing and positive things. My identity as an Indigenous Australian, is deeply rooted in a connection to family and place, kinship and belonging. But it is not all I am, nor should it be. The healthiest identities are ones that overlap, that allow us to connect with others.

³ Emeritus Professor Christina Slade FRSN is a Councillor of the RSNSW and helped establish the Western Branch.

I embrace all aspects of my history, my ancestry — Irish, as well as my Indigenous heritage. I think the danger in the world is when identity has shrunk to one simple thing. As Amartya Sen warned of, the solitairist identity, the identity that cannot see the shared humanity with others. And cosmopolitanism has become almost a dirty word in our world. It's attacked. Cosmopolitans are attacked for being ruthless and without a sense of history or belonging. And yet we are all cosmopolitans. We all carry the dust of many lands on our feet.

We all come from somewhere else. We all share ancestry with someone else. All of us are meeting here today from different backgrounds, different histories, different ethnicities, different religions, and all of these things. And we come together and we share something. And where positive, multiple, overlapping, cosmopolitan identities exist, we see healthy societies. But unfortunately, in our world, identity is drawn from the well of vengeance and grievance, unending historical grievance, the wounds of history that have not healed, the sense of injustice that so many people feel from those same crimes of history.

And they fester into a political tribalism that pits us against each other. And it's weakening our democracies. We're seeing this everywhere. And yet it is undeniable. And the challenge of our age is when we live in a world where we are so much more connected, where our economies are connected, where once COVID passes, we can hop on a plane and be in another part of the world within 12 hours, where a boy who grew up as an Aboriginal boy living on the margins of society and the small towns of outback New South Wales, grew up to live in the great cities of the world and report for the biggest news organisations in the world

and cover the great stories of our time from more than 80 countries.

That when we live in that world, the challenge of our time now is how do we live in that world with peace? And that's being tested. And it's being tested because the fault lines of identity that run from China to Russia to the Middle East to America, here in Australia as well, tearing us apart. Identity as a word for me has become almost redundant. It is a dangerous word for me, and I try to replace it with ideas of belonging that overlap and don't divide us and put us into our boxes.

Christina Slade: Thank you. Now the questions are pouring in. Sid Parisi talks about the disorder of status systems and asks you your own culture and society of the Aboriginal peoples of this land enjoyed. In his phrase it was a state of "mere anarchy" that is not disorder, but the order of a society without the state. Do you see any value in terms of learning from such anarchy?

Stan Grant: It's another good observation. In fact, just to name-drop here. I was having a conversation with former Prime Minister Paul Keating yesterday. We often have chats and share ideas about things — we've known each other for a long time. And he makes the point, and I think it's a useful point, that the global political structure is anarchical. It is anarchical because we live in a world that is so difficult to order. And when we impose order, inevitably there is tension within that order.

We hear a lot about the global liberal order, as if that is a permanent state of being, an unquestioned good. And, yes, while it has been a force for good in so many ways, it is also an order that has not always included all the states of the world. It has not been a global liberal order, but in fact a global order for liberal states. And so now we're

seeing a tension in our world when you see the rise of a state like China, which does not share the roots of that liberal democratic order and yet is emerging as potentially the biggest power in the world — and certainly economically by the end of this decade, it's on track to be that — and that challenges the order as we know it.

And it reminds us again of the anarchical structure of that order. How we incorporate these tensions in our world without resorting to violence is going to be the test of our times. Now, to relate that to Aboriginal society, while not looking to valorise or to romanticise it, the reality is that for 60,000 years, as far as we know, perhaps even longer, there was a unique culture here where people survived and thrived. And, when the British arrived, had deep connections, trade and ceremony and civilization, art and dance and music and everything else that had thrived here in a state where apparently there was not an overarching political order but a constellation of nations sharing a space.

And perhaps there are lessons to learn from that. And as we open up our minds now to living in a world that is much smaller in its own way, isolated and yet connected, that where the natural order, as we know it has been challenged, there may be lessons to learn with how you live with a positive sense of an anarchism within a political structure. There's a lot to think about that.

Christina Slade: Is there a possibility of a good outcome, in this globalised world? Will we see a rise of competition and coercion and populist government? Will we fall into an abyss? Is there the possibility of a good global outcome? What do we need to do to bring it about?

Stan Grant: The first thing we have to recognise is, as Hegel has pointed out, as Francis Fukuyama pointed out in 1989, the poten-

tial to fall into the abyss is real. Despair is a part of the human condition. Orders do not hold. As Yates pointed out to us, the centre cannot hold. And this happens. We've been lulled into a false sense of our own security, really, over the past 50, 60 years, I was fortunate, we all were on here today, to be born within the period of that great peace. Yes, there have been conflict: in Korea, in Vietnam, of course, throughout the Middle East. And we've seen the last 20 years in Iraq and Afghanistan. But the great nation-on-nation, civilizational conflicts of World Wars One and Two, we were spared from. We live within that period of the great peace, and that's almost become unthinkable to us. And yet the reality is when order breaks down, when trust breaks down, when the centre cannot hold, we can so easily slide into war. And we are preparing for that eventuality.

That's the reason we have the Quad Group or the AUKUS Alliance. That's the reason we're spending more on our military. It's the reason Xi Jinping is spending more on his military. We live with the potential of a return to something we have not seen for over half a century. And that is big, great power nation-on-nation conflict, catastrophic in its scope. And that is a real possibility. Now, if we accept that as a real possibility and that history teaches us that these things are entirely conceivable, then how do we avoid that?

That's going to take immense statecraft. It's going to take an immense understanding of the nature of history and the resilience of a global order that can accommodate, for the first time, certainly since the end of World War Two, a global power that does not share the liberal democratic values that we have taken for granted and benefited from in the West. Can we incorporate the rise of China into a global order, or will it

lead inevitably to conflict? And what are the red lines that we draw? Because, of course, we cannot countenance a world of tyranny. We can't countenance it here in our country, there are lines that definitely need to be drawn, and we would hope that once drawn, we can avoid those lines being crossed. And that's the challenge for us right now.

Here's the good news. The good news is that the rise of China thus far has been conducted entirely within a global system and a global system helmed by the United States itself. China has entered into a global order. It is a member of the World Trade Organisation, a member of the World Health Organisation, a permanent five member of the UN Security Council, a contributor to UN peacekeeping missions, a signatory to hundreds of international covenants and treaties that bind it to a global order. The rise of China, unparalleled in our time, a country that could not feed itself in my childhood that has lifted 700 million people out of poverty, that has become the biggest trading partner of Australia, and so many other countries around the world, has been achieved without a single shot being fired. That's a remarkable achievement.

How do we maintain that? And it's going to get harder. It's going to get harder as inevitably American power is challenged, is seen as being in decline. As China becomes more powerful and Xi Jinping becomes more assertive, it's going to be challenged. But we have managed it thus far. And if we want to know what happens, if we fail to manage it, we only need to look to our own history, the catastrophic conflicts of World Wars One and Two and know that they can happen again.

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