

"Good Government Starts Today": On the Death of the Public, the Triumph of Private Interest, and the Loss of the Good

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The interest of the dealers, however, in any particular branch of trade or manufacture, is always in some respects different from, and even opposite to, that of the public...The proposal of any new law or regulation of commerce which comes from this order ought always to be listened to with great precaution, and ought never be adopted till after having been long and carefully examined, not only with the most scrupulous, but with the most suspicious attention. It comes from an order of men, whose interest is never exactly the same with that of the public, who have generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public, and who accordingly have, upon many occasions, both deceived and oppressed it

– Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*.¹

"Good government starts today", declared the then Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbot, after surviving a potential leadership challenge in February of 2015.² The question is, what sort of government does the Prime Minister think is good? It seems unlikely that the conception of good government he was referring to was the same as the famous portrayal of good government in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the 14th century.³ There good government is seen as based on the promotion of the common good for which "it is indispensable that our rulers should be lovers of justice".⁴ Lorenzetti contrasts good government with bad, and of the city characterised by bad government, we are told that "because each seeks only his own good, in this city Justice is subjected to tyranny". [Insert image 1: Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 'Allegory of Good Government' (1338-40), Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, Italy]. I will come back to Lorenzetti in a moment, since in spite of the distance between Siena and Canberra, in both time and space, Lorenzetti has something to say about good government that remains true today. To return to Tony Abbot, however, it would seem, on the face of it, that the short answer to the question as to his own conception of good government was essentially that it was a government in which he remained Prime Minister. Viewed more broadly, and looking to the actual practice of government under Abbot, as well as under other administrations both Liberal and Labor, good government in contemporary Australia would seem, in contrast to 14th century Siena, to be taken as defined by a relatively narrow set of considerations, almost all of them, with the exception of electoral success, economic – and

almost all of them also short-term (this seems not have changed under Abbott's successor, Turnbull). Moreover, in taking the economic as their over-riding principle, they do indeed seem, in the terms of Lorenzetti's portrayal, to subject Justice to Tyranny, since what typically underpins the economic in its contemporary form is the assumption that "each seeks his own good", rather than the good of all.

Such a narrow orientation seems to have become typical of governments across the English-speaking world from Australia to Canada, and, in addition, often infects governmental and policy discussion at international levels. It is a focus that takes the economic to be the primary concern of public discourse and the primary consideration in the determination of the public good. It might be objected, however, that even though contemporary public debate is indeed often focussed around matters economic, this is not to say that the public and the economic have therefore been conflated or the one reduced to the other. The realm of public discourse includes other topics than the economic as its focus, while the public remains distinct from the economic as a realm of debate and discourse that is apart from the realm of commercial transaction, monetary exchange, and financial management. Although such an objection may appear to be correct, what it overlooks is the way in which the realm of the public is now indeed structured in a way that takes economic considerations as primary, and in which the economic and the commercial themselves enter into and often determine the very character and context of public discourse and decision-making. The so-called 'business-model' now determines almost everything from art to health. Not only does the economic provide the terms in which public activity is almost invariably framed and by which it is assessed, but increasingly our public engagement with others takes place in economic and commercial spaces, by means of electronic communication and information systems that are commercially owned and operated, and often itself has the character of a form of an economic or commercial transaction. The realm of the public – or indeed the 'civic' – does indeed seem to have become almost identical with the realm of the economic.

It is worth reflecting for a moment on the starkness of the contrast here between this conception of good government and that which we find in Lorenzetti. 'The Allegory of Good and Bad Government' does not neglect the economic – economic activity, in this case, buying and selling, is clearly portrayed in the fresco among the 'Effects of Good Government' – but it is secondary to Justice, as well as the other virtues, and secondary also to Wisdom, to which Justice herself attends [insert image 2: Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 'Allegory of Good Government –

Effects of Good Government in the City', (1338-40), Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, Italy.]. Economic success is indeed one of the *effects* and not a *cause* (whether effective or constitutive) of good government, and neither can economic success be said to be a principle of good government or that which rules over it. One might argue that the ideal of good government that arose in Siena was one dependent on Siena's own rise to prosperity, but the ideas of good government portrayed in Lorenzetti's fresco are nevertheless not peculiar to Siena alone, reflecting ideas prevalent in much pre-humanist and humanist thinking, and in the Latin traditions on which Lorenzetti seems to draw as well as the Greek.

What characterises the conception of good government, and so also rules the domain of public life in Lorenzetti's portrayal, is *virtue*. The economic is itself subject to virtue, and is indeed made possible by it. Lorenzetti's account is not peculiar to the pre-modern, but can also be seen as present in modern conceptions of good government. Most significantly, it is clearly present in the work of Adam Smith whose *Theory of Moral Sentiments* should properly be regarded as the essential preliminary to *The Wealth of Nations*. Indeed, not only does Smith contest the idea, popularised by de Mandeville, that the pursuit of private interest is sufficient for the advancement of the public good, but he also argues for the need for the activities of the marketplace to be constrained by considerations of morality if the public good is to be preserved (moreover Smith, as the lines at the head of this essay suggest, warns strongly against allowing business interests to lead governmental policy). The contemporary dominance of the economic is not something endorsed by Smith any more than by Lorenzetti (and Smith's thinking is itself heavily influenced by the Stoic conceptions that are also present in Lorenzetti). In this respect, both Smith and Lorenzetti offer important counters to the contemporary mode of 'economistic' thought and governmental practice.⁵

Yet although the contemporary situation is one in which the public, and so too the political, seems to have been engulfed by the economic, the economic nevertheless appears as an anomalous category to be associated with the public. The economic, that which pertains to the *oikos* (to use the original Greek term from which 'economy' comes), is a category that originally belonged with the domestic and the familial. That the term might indeed encompass the public is indicative of a shift in the understanding of the economic and the public, but also of the increasingly problematic character of the traditional distinctions between the domestic and the civic, between private and public, between the 'social' and the 'political'. The idea that the public good – that which is the concern of 'good' government – might be first and

foremost an economic good, further reinforces the breakdown that appears here.

The understanding of the public good as an *economic* good, and of that good as determinative of public and governmental decision-making, typically leads to the transformation of the public good into a set of private interests, and government comes to be oriented to the fostering of those interests, while public discourse becomes a domain in which differing private interests compete for the right to be viewed as the means by which the public good is to be furthered. Contemporary liberal political theory has reinforced this tendency towards an economistic form of government though its refusal to recognise any 'metaphysical' or properly moral underpinning to the political – its refusal, for instance, to recognise the pre-eminence that is given in Lorenzetti's portrayal, to Justice, to Wisdom, and the virtues that flow from them – instead treating the political as essentially a realm for the negotiation of private interest and preference. The liberal model is thus itself already predisposed towards 'economism' and so also stands, so I would argue, in a problematic relation to the very idea of the public as distinct from the economic. It does so precisely because it can no longer provide any articulation of the public good, or indeed, of the good as such, that stands apart from private interest. What the public might itself be thus also become uncertain – the public becomes merely an agglomeration of the private.

One could view the process that I have begun to sketch here as one in which the idea of the public (along with the notion of the economic, and perhaps even of the political and the moral) has simply changed, but I would suggest that it is better viewed in terms of the *death* of the public. There is no longer any clear sense to be attached to the idea of a public domain – or a public good – that goes beyond private interest. In the brief discussion that follows I want to explore some of what is at issue here, and especially the way in which the rise of a privileged economic discourse contributes to this death of the public, not only through the triumph of private interest that is associated with it, but also through the transformation it brings in the very idea of the 'good' – whether in association with the notion of the public, in association with ideas of government, or, in more general terms, as it might refer to the 'good' that is the focus for ethical discourse and around which a properly human life might be said to be oriented. Moreover, inasmuch as I would talk of the 'death' of the public, so the seeming 'transformation' of the good that occurs with the rise of economism actually amounts to a *loss* of the good – though part of the way this occurs is precisely through a shift in language that obscures the very fact that it is a loss.

Talk of the 'death' of the public is immediately suggestive of Richard Sennett's famous work from the 1970s, *The Fall of Public Man*. Sennett's book does not focus on the economic in quite the way I have sketched here (although the economic is certainly not absent from his discussion), but Sennett does argue for a problematic tension between private and public as that emerges in modern, and especially contemporary culture. For Sennett, what occurs with the rise of modernity is a turn away from the public towards the private, not construed in terms of a shift from private good to public interest, but rather in terms of a shift from the outward engagement with others to an inward engagement with the self – although it turns out to be an engagement that cannot be satisfied.

There is much in Sennett's argument with which I would agree, except that, when read against the background of contemporary 'economism', it seems that the turn to the private that Sennett identifies should actually be understood as a turn towards a self that is now almost entirely constituted and shaped by the primarily economic context in which contemporary modernity situates it. I would argue that part of what is problematic about the contemporary world, and part of what underpins Sennett's own analysis, is an emptying out that has occurred, not only in relation to public space and its forms – an emptying out that is tied to the turn 'inwards' – but also in relation to the private. Moreover, this has occurred precisely through the reshaping of human life through economic forms and their associated structures – forms and structures that are focussed around interest and preference, but also around interest and preference as these are taken up within the frame of the economic and the commercial, as they appear within systems of consumption and production, as they are amenable to surveillance and manipulation, as they operate to drive systems of authority and power.

The rise of social media is an important example of this. Media platforms like Facebook and Twitter ostensibly offer new forms of social engagement – apparently allowing the opening up of new forms of intimacy and new possibilities for the articulation of the self. They also have a prominent role in contemporary forms of public and political engagement - even politicians tweet, and every politician has a Facebook page. Yet Facebook and Twitter are first and foremost commercial systems that sit within a framework of production and consumption, but in which consumption, in this case consumption of the service Facebook and Twitter offer, is itself immediately productive and in multiple ways.

Facebook users themselves generate the content that Facebook users also consume;

while Facebook users also generate the content – the informational content and the access to a consumer marketplace – that Facebook sells to its commercial customers, and the same is analogously true for Twitter. Not only have the consumers of Facebook and Twitter become the unpaid producers of what it is that Facebook and Twitter sell (the collapse of consumption into production that is evident here being a characteristic feature of late capitalism), but the consumption and production that occurs here, as well as the seeming transformation of social engagement into itself a form of commercial exchange based around the accumulation of ‘followers’, and binary expressions of preference in terms of ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’, also depends upon and exemplifies the peculiar collapsing of the private into a form of public discourse, and of public discourse into the realm of the private.

This collapse occurs in several ways. One of the factors that drives it as well as being in turn driven by it is the tendency towards individualisation. On the one hand this leads to increased focus on individuals as they stand apart from more complex forms of social relationality, instead reducing them simply to subjects, and so as the focus for systems of production, consumption, surveillance and control. This sort of individualisation, because it involves a reduction down to a form of empty individuality, is itself compatible with forms of mass socialisation, and is a key element in contemporary systems of individual disempowerment and impoverishment. On the one hand, the tendency towards individualisation also leads to the concentration of power, authority, and attention in specific individuals – hence the contemporary cult of celebrity, the over-valuation of ‘leadership’ and excessive individual reward for those in ‘leadership’ roles, the increasing tendency towards top-down systems of management and decision-making, and the rise of arbitrary, narcissistic, and sociopathic behaviours on the part of those in positions of power and authority.

In contemporary discourse, individualisation and economism seem to go together, and they certainly reinforce one another – especially given the economist presumption of an essentially market-oriented model of social interaction as occurring among individual ‘consumers’. In a world of individual subjects, the very idea of any form of public good becomes opaque – if it remains, it seems it can only be as something constituted out of individual preferences and concerns, in which case public good seems to become nothing more than a multiplicity of private goods. This does indeed look to be what has occurred across much of the contemporary English-speaking world (it is less common outside it): what was previously understood as a genuine public good, such as education, is now increasingly

construed as a private good, and access to it determined accordingly as something that could be privately funded – or if publicly funded then on an individual basis. Almost all of those goods that were previously provided by the State have been transformed or are in the process of being transformed in this way. The transformation of public good into private interests also leads to the privatisation of the means by which public goods were previously made available. Not only do public goods become private, then, but the realm of what was public activity is transformed into a domain of private entrepreneurship. Indeed, even worse than that, the public realm itself becomes a domain for commercial exploitation by private interests. Thus public administration is increasingly infiltrated and driven by private commercial interests, most notably, especially in contemporary Australia, by the interests of the big accounting and audit firms who even get to define the ethical standards under which they will themselves operate. Indeed, the peculiar situation now exists in which those firms essentially set the constraints – often given regulatory as well as ethical force – on how public administration should itself operate at the same time as those firms also stand to benefit directly from the constraints they impose. One particularly striking example of this, affecting both the private and public sectors, is the imposition of the International Accounting Standards – formulated by the same firms who directly benefit from the implementation of those very standards.

The conversion of public good into private interest also leads to the effective identification of the public good, inasmuch as that notion still retains any content, with certain particular private interests, namely those corporate interests who command the greatest influence within government through the sheer weight of lobbyists employed, through personal influence, or through the personal and professional connections that link politicians and political parties to the business and commercial sphere, often linking them directly to corporations and their CEOs. The ‘governing class’ thus becomes almost indistinguishable from the ‘business class’. It should be no surprise that the dominance of economic discourse is accompanied by the increasing dominance of the most powerful economic interests. Indeed, when economism prevails, there is an inevitable tendency – reflecting the tendency for concentration and centralisation identified by Marx as a feature of capitalism itself – towards the dominance of particular sectional economic interests and groups over others that reflects the economic dominance of those same interests and groups. Economic dominance thus brings discursive dominance, and that in turn institutionalises, in the very discourse, underlying forms of economic power and inequality. This is one reason why contemporary

economism is so starkly opposed to any genuine concept of the democratic, and perhaps also partly explains why anti-democratic measures are so readily embraced by economically-inclined governments.

The predominance of economic and business interests in contemporary public discourse is underpinned by the economic prejudice towards what might be termed economic universalism or foundationalism: the idea that economic interests are the bedrock on which any and every other interest is founded. The satisfaction of economic considerations is thus taken to be the absolute precondition for the satisfaction of any and every other consideration. On the face of it this may seem such a common-sensical idea as to be beyond challenge. But it only appears so because of the prior dominance of an unquestioned economic prejudice – a prejudice that, never acknowledging itself as a prejudice, presents itself as somehow neutral between interests, or as promoting an interest that belongs to all, at the same time as it implicitly promotes an identification of certain particular economic interests as privileged over others.

In many cases, the prioritization of the economic is presented in a fashion that make sit looks as it were merely the discourse to which other discourses must attend if they are to have any chance of satisfying their goals, but which is neutral with respect to those interests. The economic thus pretends not to differentiate between goods, but to be that which allows other goods to be realised. In this way the focus on the economic converges with a 'liberal' political sensibility that refrains from any adjudication of the nature of the good, but instead supposedly aims merely at an impartial negotiation between competing claims and conceptions. Yet at the same time, any and every economic decision or judgment, and the political decisions with which they are implicated, involves the differentiation between interests and the realisation of some interests over others. Thus, although the Greek *oikos* does not name that which is valuable, but rather concerns the management of the domain in which that which is valuable resides, the manner in which such management operates is itself expressive of a commitment to the value of that which it aims to preserve and protect. The idea of economic discourse or indeed of liberal political discourse – as somehow evaluatively neutral is thus doubly problematic in that it obscures the inevitable evaluative partiality that it supposedly abjures – allowing the promotion of sectional interest under the banner of sectional impartiality. The realm of the economic can only function on the basis of decisions about what is valued, and yet those questions are kept outside of the realm of public

discussion by the very prioritization of the economic as such.

Of course, sometimes, the prioritization of the economic is presented in terms of the prioritization, not merely of what facilitates value, but of that which is indeed valuable in itself, and equally valuable to us all, namely, economic prosperity and success. Here the supposed 'neutrality' of the economic resides in the supposed universality of the value enshrined within it. Once again, however, this obscures the way in which the idea of economic prosperity or success is often itself geared to very particular measures of such prosperity or success, and, in addition, also involves a fundamental misconstrual of the nature of value and of the economic. To refer again to the Greek notion of *oikos*, even though this domain is predicated on valuation, *oikos* does not name anything that is in itself a value (unless it be a secondary value). To take an analogy from business, profitability, here the analogue to economic success, is not itself a good or value in its own right such that business can take the maximisation of profitability alone as its guiding principle. Profitability becomes a partial measure of the effectiveness of business management (and so might be construed as a secondary value) given an already determined set of decisions about the nature and orientation of the business in question. This is reflected in the fact that those business that are oriented only to the maximisation of profit are businesses that typically lack coherence, lack effective organisational and managerial integrity, and typically also lack longevity (there ought to be an important lesson here for those contemporary public institutions, for instance, universities, that have taken economic considerations as pre- eminent in driving the operation of those institutions – on the basis of what can learn from the business sector, the future of such institutions is likely to be a grim one).

A characteristic feature of the contemporary dominance of the economic is that it is a dominance not mitigated or constrained by any countervailing interest or group – and this is largely because no other interest is recognised as an interest that is not already an *economic* interest. A useful illustration of the dominance of the economic, although a very specific one, can be seen in the climate change debate in which scientific views have routinely been discounted on the grounds, in part, that scientists have what is essentially an economic interest in promoting climate change as a result of the research grants to which they gain access as a result of the acceptance of climate change as a scientific orthodoxy. Outside of the scientific community, scientific opinion tends only to be given significant weight in contemporary discussions where it is itself translatable into an economic interest that

connects with the dominant economic interest. On this basis, there is indeed no interest that is not an economic interest or convertible into such; no interest that, if set against economic interests, is not challengeable through being reducible to an economic interest (or that can be treated as such). Those interests that cannot be reduced to the economic in this way, for instance, the interests of some green or environmental groups, are thus characterised as irrational or fanatical – even as standing against normal society — a characterization that can be seen to follow almost inevitably from the dominance of the economic, the assumption of economic interest as the only rational interest, and so the automatic exclusion from rational discourse of any discourse that is not predicated on the primacy of economic interest.

The situation here is made more complex by the fact that even though what has occurred, and is still occurring, is indeed the transformation of public goods into private interests, and the effective death of genuinely public discourse (the latter being perhaps best defined as discourse that takes the public good as its primary focus), still the language of public life retains much of the language of the public good, though it now effectively functions to disguise the very transformation and loss of the public that is also underway. Since the way the notion of the public figures here is generally in tension with the fact that it is actually private interest that is dominant, we can say that part of what also occurs is a transformation in the language of public discourse – a transformation that can be characterised as a ‘subversion’ of the good. That is, the language of the good, and not only of the *public* good, but of the good as such, and so of a host of normative concepts including ideas of justice, excellence, virtue and so forth, has itself become a language that now functions to support and sustain modes of discourse, types of behaviour, and forms of social, political, and institutional structure, that would ordinarily be taken to run counter to those ideas. The good thus becomes attached to that which is actually an emptied-out conception of the good.

This is not merely an emptying out of ethical language that reduces it to some form of neutrality, but more than that, a subversion of that language – a transformation of it into that to which it would ordinarily stand opposed. Something like this was already described by George Orwell in 1984. His description of elements of ‘Newspeak’, and more specifically his account of the various ministries that make up the governmental apparatus of the state of Oceania under the leadership of ‘Big Brother’⁶: the ministry of love, which uses torture as a means of subjugation, the ministry of truth, which propagates lies, the ministry of plenty, which manages rationing, and the ministry of peace, whose responsibility is war.

Significantly, the ministries' names are not ironic – within the social and political order of Big Brother, each minister is seen as aiming at bringing about that which is given in its name, it is just that the meaning of those names, love, truth, plenty, peace, become strangely different from what we might ordinarily imagine – language is indeed subverted, put in the service of that which ought to be considered contrary to it. The good is thus put in the service of evil – in the service of that which stands against any conception of humanity. In Orwell's account it is not private interest that has taken over, not any notion of the public good either, even though the latter notion is indeed used to justify the existing political order. Nevertheless, the state of affairs Orwell describes is not so far removed from that of the present, not only in its emptied out and subverted normativity, but in its removal from any sense of *human* value by which it could be limited or constrained. The world of Orwell's *1984* is thus different from the present world, and yet in many respects not so far away from it either – in neither case is there any value outside of the value already prescribed, any value other than that of the 'good' as determined by the existing political order or of the existing economic system.

Like the political totalitarianism described by Orwell, contemporary economism recognises nothing that constrains or limits it – economic discourse is that which encompasses all rational discourse (so in many circles the 'market' is taken, somewhat counter-intuitively, to be the epitome of rationality) and may even be said to be taken as identical with rational discourse. The refusal of limit is perhaps the most problematic aspect of contemporary economism and the public discourse that it constitutes. Not only does it mean that contemporary economism has to be itself counted as a form of discourse that is 'totalitarian' in character, but it also means that it lacks any capacity to engage in genuine self-critique, may even be said to refuse such critique, and so is blinded to its own shortcomings and failures. Moreover, in its refusal to recognise its own partiality, it also limits the capacity for public discourse to function in a genuinely democratic fashion (which can itself be seen as part of its 'totalitarian' or 'authoritarian' tendency), limits the capacity for dissension and debate, and vitiates the possibility of genuine public engagement on critical issues. The dominance of the economic does not just entail the death of the public and the triumph of private interest, but it also brings with it the effective disabling and shutting down of public discourse, and so even of the possibility that the question of the public good might emerge as a subject for discursive public engagement.

The question of good government ceases to be a question if good government is

already assumed to be completely determined within an economic frame. Indeed, that assumption essentially sets the question of the good to one side – in many cases, explicitly taking it to be a matter that is itself secondary to the economic. In this way the economic comes to take priority even over the political (which is effectively subsumed into the economic) *and over the ethical* – the economic itself takes priority even over the good. Part of what is lost in the dominance of the economic is even the sense of what the good consists in and its binding character. The good cannot be set aside because of pragmatic considerations that seem to lead in a contrary direction, and in the absence of any ethical deliberation – any deliberation in regard to the good – there can be no adequate estimation of how even pragmatic considerations should be weighed, assessed, or even determined.

Indeed, it is at this point that the extent to which the loss of the good has occurred, and the absolute dominance of the economic, becomes even more clearly evident. All too often, the attempt to reintroduce notions concerning the good or the ethical into existing public discourse, such as it is, take the form of attempts to show that ethical considerations, and considerations relating to the good, ought to be taken account of because of their economic relevance – because, for instance, ethical investment portfolios actually turn out, so it is sometimes said, to have historically performed better financially, or because unethical business practices do indeed undermine long-term business viability, or because a society that is actively engaged with questions of the good is also likely to be a society given to more creative and vibrant economic activity. In all such cases, the attempt to re-found a mode of public discourse through re-founding the idea and relevance of the good in its supposed economic virtue is not only deeply confused, but is itself destructive of the very attempt that it enacts – effectively serving only to reaffirm the very economic framework that it seeks to contest.

We cannot reclaim a sense of the public unless we also reclaim the idea of the good, even if as a contested notion, on which the public is itself founded and from which it draws its real vibrancy and viability. Reclaiming the public thus means reclaiming a genuine public discourse that already recognises the good as standing before any idea of the economic. It will not help us in that task of reclamation if we constantly give in to the discourse of the economic by trying to reinterpret the good in terms of the economic. The reclamation of the public will only begin in a reclamation and reassertion of the idea of the good. It is precisely with such a reclamation that good government has the possibility of beginning anew.

Without it, the only government that remains is bad government. The latter begins when Justice, which we can also understand here as identical with the idea of the good, is removed from her pre-eminent position, and is instead bound by tyranny. The Tyrant himself sits in company with Cruelty, Deceit, Fraud, Fury, Division, and War, and is ruled by Avarice, Pride, and Vainglory. [insert image 3: Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 'Allegory of Bad Government', Palazzo Pubblico, Siena] Not only does contemporary public discourse, including the discourse of contemporary politics, seem to lack many of the virtues identified by Lorenzetti, but it also seems all too easy to find in it exemplifications of the vices that Lorenzetti associates with bad government. Perhaps one has to take Tony Abbot's confident assertion about the new beginning of good government as itself an example of the subversion of the good, and the inversion that inevitably accompanies it.

Notes and References

¹ *The Wealth of Nations*, edited by A. Skinner (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), p.359. The "dealers" referred to here are those who "live by profit", namely, "the merchants and master manufacturers."

² He finally succumbed – being ousted by Malcolm Turnbull – some seven months later in September 2015.

³ The images included in the text are each from the series of frescos together known as 'The Allegory of Good and Bad Government' painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti between 1338 and 1339. The frescoes are located in the *Sala dei Nove* (Salon of Nine, which is actually the Council Room) in the *Palazzo Pubblico* (Town Hall) in Siena, Italy. The first shows Justice (*Justicia*) with Wisdom (*Sapientia*) placed above and Harmony (*Concordia*) below, from 'The Allegory of Good Government', the second shows 'The Effects of Good Government in the City', and the third shows 'The Effects of Bad Government in the City'. Images of the frescos are readily available online.

⁴ Quentin Skinner, 'Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist as Political Philosopher', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 72 (1986), p. 15 [1-56].

⁵ Antagonism towards the demands of the 'economic' can be seen to be present throughout almost all of the philosophical tradition prior to the twentieth century. This is not merely indicative of the philosopher's suspicion of the merchant (although this certainly runs deep – it is part of what underpins Plato's scorn for the Sophists who turn the teaching of wisdom into a commercial transaction), but of a deeper concern for the priority of the ethical over the merely prudential or pragmatic. One might even say that what is at stake here is the very possibility of the ethical and also the philosophical as distinct from the prudential and pragmatic. The contemporary attack on the critical disciplines, including philosophy, that make up the Humanities, is thus directly related to the assertion of the dominance of the economic.

⁶ The use of 'Big Brother' as the name of a reality TV show has changed some of the connotations that might now attach to the name. Indeed, the use of the name for that show seems to have only a tenuous connection with Orwell's original use – primarily in terms of the idea of continuous surveillance – although the way the show can itself be seen to fit into a larger system of corporatized entertainment that itself seems to reinforce problematic forms of social interaction may be thought to represent one respect in which the show does indeed connect quite directly with aspects of Orwell's vision in ways presumably not intended by the producers of the show itself.