

Anthony Clunies Ross: An appreciation

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Anthony Clunies Ross died in Dunblane Scotland on Monday 16 March, aged 82 years.

He was the best and wisest of people.

Anthony was born in 1932, the son of Ian Clunies Ross, famous in Australia for his long foundational leadership of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), and of Janet, who is remembered for her contributions to Melbourne civil society. He started to study medicine and then shifted to economics at the University of Melbourne. He taught economics at Monash University before taking up the Chair in Economics at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1967. After moving to Scotland soon after Papua New Guinea's Independence to accompany his Scottish wife Morag, he was appointed Professor of Economics at Strathclyde University in Glasgow. Much of his later years were spent caring at home for his disabled son David, who died just a few weeks before Anthony.

Anthony's intellectual life was built around understanding humanity in all of its dimensions. His professional life sought to apply this understanding to the elevation of the material living standards of poor people, and to the promotion of peace within and between nations. His first book, with Richard Downing, published in 1963, was *One Per Cent: The Case for Greater Australian Aid*. After many important contributions, his last, 50 years later in 2014 with Mozammel Huq, was *The Universal Social Safety Net and the Attack on World Poverty*.

I first met Anthony in Port Moresby in 1970, when the University of Papua New Guinea hosted a conference of the Australia and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science. That was the beginning of a shared interest in Papua New Guinea development that remained important to us until his death.

Anthony taught well the first generation of Papua New Guinea economists who led an administratively effective and analytically strong Department of Finance (later split into Finance and Treasury) for a considerable period after independence. These students of Anthony – the first Secretary for Finance Mekere Morauta, the second, John Vulupindi and their immediate successors – guided an effective economic policy for the new nation's first one and a half decades. The awful decline in University education in Papua New Guinea since Anthony's time was a sufficient, although regrettably not a necessary, condition for the disintegration of Papua New Guinea economic policy and political and constitutional order in recent times.

It was a particular joy for Anthony that Mekere's son, James Morauta, then teaching Adam Smith's old course in Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University, was able to spend a day with Anthony and me in and around Dunblane in the summer of 2013 – to share Anthony's knowledge of Dunblane Cathedral's pre-Norman origins, and the foundational

battles of Scotland, as well as all of our thoughts about the trials of contemporary Papua New Guinea, and the wider human condition.

In the several years when we were both in Port Moresby, from early 1972, Anthony and I worked through many highly practical challenges of economic policy for a new country with weak institutions and highly vulnerable to pressures from the international economy. Lots of work on maintaining reasonable stability in incomes and employment through wild cycles in commodity prices and resources investment, public expenditure management, taxation, rural-urban migration, the nuts and bolts of funding administrative decentralisation. There was strong political will to change colonial-era taxation arrangements that were due to yield little more than zero revenue for at least half a dozen years from one of the world's largest and most profitable mines – Bougainville Copper's profits after tax in the first half of 1974 were about half the total of those of its London parent Rio Tinto. We worked together from first principles to design a system of mining taxation that would generate large revenue from highly profitable mines without deterring investment in marginal resource projects. Our paper for the Papua New Guinea Government grew into an article in the *Economic Journal*, our joint book *The Taxation of Mineral Rent* and the embodiment of our proposal in legislation in many countries including as the Australian Petroleum Resource Rent Tax.

My visits to Scotland were usually confined to a couple of days. We would walk along the roads winding through the hills around Dunblane or over the moors that were gradually growing wind turbines on the ridges above the trees, and talk about the history of humanity. I learned much from the wide sweep of Anthony's reading and thought, from the way Scottish wages rose as the margin of cultivation slid down into the valleys during the plagues, to the Andalusian contribution to the expansion of the English mind in the reign of Elizabeth and to how little it would cost to provide a global safety net of basic nutrition and health services. In our walks across the moors in 2007, we spent a long time on the principles that might be practical and fair for distribution across countries of the global climate change mitigation effort.

I find myself reflecting on the wastefulness of death. So much knowledge about the cultures and economies of the world and how they could fit together in more productive ways – gone, and never to be reassembled in that form and perhaps that order and abundance. So much wisdom about what can go wrong as human societies grapple with immediate problems that turn out to cast long shadows.

And then I reflect upon how much I and many others still retain, and how some at least of that will continue in the minds of those whose lives extend beyond those of Anthony's friends.

In Anthony's letter to me after my visit in October last year, he reflected upon the common premise of belief at least among the Abrahamic religions. Discussing my own non-theistic Christianity, he noted that he has to approach critically the New Testament narratives, 'wonderful and compelling as some of them are'. It is a comfort to read again that he was 'jubilantly glad that I cannot stop believing in the Resurrection, with all of the possibilities that opens'.

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Melbourne

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