



THE RAMSAY CENTRE
FOR WESTERN CIVILISATION

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Can columnists be civilised?

Henry Ergas speaks at The Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation

Sydney, Tuesday 27 November 2018: In an increasingly polarised and fragmented media environment, and society, is there room for civility? Can columnists be civilised?

That's the question economist and *The Australian* newspaper columnist Henry Ergas will ponder tonight, as he delivers the fifth Distinguished Speakers Address, for The Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation.

Speaking to an audience of newspaper editors, journalists, businesspeople, political leaders and students, Mr. Ergas will argue that the twin forces of audience fragmentation and political polarization are reshaping the media and its role in informing public debate.

"Everywhere, the 'public sphere' – the sphere in which opinions are expressed, views are tested and images of reality shaped – seems to have lost its ability to build a common sense of the present, much less a shared understanding of the future," Mr. Ergas says. As competition for readers and viewers has become ever more intense, stridency has increasingly triumphed over substance, with civility a value acknowledged, only to be ignored."

Mr Ergas will contemplate whether these are pressures from which there is no escape, or whether our roots in western civilisation "...could help both analyse the situation and avert its dangers". And he will address the question of whether columnists and public debate could be civilised in this environment.

CEO of The Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation Simon Haines said he is delighted Mr Ergas will deliver the fifth Distinguished Speakers Lecture for the Centre.

"Henry Ergas is an eminent public intellectual who is able to discuss current economic, social and political issues in the broadest historical and philosophical contexts."

The Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation was created with an endowment from the late Paul Ramsay AO, founder of Ramsay Health Care, to promote a deeper appreciation of western civilisation through the creation of university degrees, Ramsay Scholarships, summer schools and public lectures. The Centre hosts its Distinguished Speakers lectures to encourage wider interest in and appreciation of western civilisation, hosting speakers from all walks of life who have important and interesting perspectives relating to the world and our western heritage.

Printed versions of the lectures and video podcasts are available on our website: www.ramsaycentre.org

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Henry Ergas Brief BIO

Henry Ergas is an economist and weekly opinions columnist for *The Australian* newspaper.

Prior to this Henry held concurrent roles as Professor of Infrastructure Economics at the SMART Infrastructure Facility, University of Wollongong and Deloitte Australia's Senior Economic Adviser.

From 1978 to 1993 Henry was at the OECD in Paris where amongst other roles he headed the Secretary-General's Task Force on Structural Adjustment and was Counsellor for Structural Policy in the Economics Department.

He has taught at a wide range of universities, including the École nationale de la statistique et de l'administration économique in Paris (1980-1990), the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard (1994-1995) and Monash University in Melbourne (1988-1990).

He chaired the Intellectual Property and Competition Policy Review undertaken by the Howard government in 1999-2001, and was a member of the Export Infrastructure Review in 2005. He also served as a member of reviews of the National Broadband Network and of defence industry policy.

In 2016 Henry was awarded an Order of Australia for distinguished service to infrastructure economics, higher education, public policy development and review, and as a supporter of emerging artists.