

Deserving poverty? Rationing and philanthropy

Church Missionary Society representative JCS Handt of Wellington Valley was a sensitive, easily downcast man. A Prussian Lutheran and former tailor struggling to reinvent himself as a clergyman, he lived in frequent conflict with his Anglican colleague, William Watson, and quickly realised that Aboriginal affairs would not provide an easy route to advancement. In particular, he worried about being unappreciated by the Wiradjuri people he lived amongst, who relied on mission rations of food, clothing, blankets and tools. One day, in October 1833, he recorded speaking to a man who had been away travelling. Handt pointed out how thin the man had become, hoping this would demonstrate the value of staying at the mission and obtaining food through agricultural labour. Instead, to Handt's frustration, the man took this as a reminder of missionary bounty, replying that 'I ought to take him into the room and give him plenty to eat, then he would get fat again.'¹ The following year, Handt recorded another incident, which he found even more disturbing, when a group of people left the mission in a 'clandestine manner'. They took with them the blankets they had received, which were supposed to be conditional upon mission residence.

They ... made their escape by plunging into [the] river, and swimming to the other side, like persons pursued by their enemies. These are very discouraging circumstances, and try the feelings. The more we endeavour to do them good, the more they seem to withdraw. They do not appear to care for anything but for food.²

Handt's troubled anecdotes point to the significance of rationing systems to the first missions and protectorates. Indigenous people, while obtaining sustenance from other colonial and traditional sources, were nonetheless becoming dependent on charitable supplies as their dispossession worsened. Thus, the early 19th century witnessed the first attempts at large-scale Indigenous relief, and the accompanying arguments about what Aboriginal people were entitled to and what they had lost. Rationing systems were never simple or unconditional. Rather, as Tim Rowse has observed, rationing was connected to a range of relationships and ideologies – 'an issuing of goods for a more complex and ill-defined return.'³ British understandings of pauperism and 'deserving'

1 JCS Handt, Journal, 4 October 1833, in Carey and Roberts (eds) 2002, *The Wellington Valley Project: Letters and Journals Relating to the Church Missionary Society Mission to Wellington Valley, NSW, 1830–42, A Critical Electronic Edition* [hereafter WVP]: <<http://www.newcastle.edu.au>>. For more on Handt, see Le Couteur 1998: 141–144.

2 Handt, journal, 2 March 1834, WVP.

3 Rowse 1998b: 20.

poverty were transferred to the colonies with mixed results; Indigenous relief was conceptualised both as a group entitlement, based on their status as a dispossessed people, and as an individual reward for compliance with 'civilising' regimes. Rationing was, in other words, less an unconditional right and more an intrinsic element of becoming subjects of empire.

At the same time, the place of rationing in daily interactions between philanthropists and Indigenous people was complex, connected to both philanthropic agendas and personal relationships. Philanthropists often claimed that Indigenous people were greedy for possessions but also careless of them; a desire for property and an ability to regulate such desires through labour, charity and the nuclear family were vital elements of missionary and protectorate projects. Moreover, rationing, while clearly an example of state intervention, also emerged in philanthropic records as a deeply personal and local experience. It functioned not only to attract and control people, but also to draw both Indigenous people and philanthropists into shifting relationships of closeness, gratitude, conflict and obligation.

'A sort of compensation': Indigenous entitlement to support

When colonial sources acknowledged Indigenous dispossession, the main area highlighted was the destruction of traditional food sources. (Indeed, Bruce Buchan argues that many Europeans believed 'nature's bounty' was the only entitlement Indigenous people possessed.⁴) Distribution of food and clothing played a broad part in colonial governance, dating back at least as far as the Sydney native feasts from 1814. Governor Macquarie used these annual gatherings to demonstrate paternalistic good will, solicit children for the Parramatta institution, and urge Indigenous groups to elect 'chiefs', in the hopes that they would embrace a hierarchical system of government more comprehensible to colonists. The feast system was phased out by Governor Bourke in the mid 1830s and replaced by an annual blanket distribution throughout New South Wales by magistrates, Crown Land Commissioners and some settlers, who were urged to compile Aboriginal records for their districts. Bourke hoped this would encourage Indigenous people to become labourers, and urged that distribution should reflect charity and work ethics by favouring the sickly and the industrious.⁵ On the volatile frontiers of central and western Australia, rationing was also considered a useful way of reducing violence and easing the rural labour shortage by encouraging Indigenous people into pastoral jobs.⁶ Thus, when examining philanthropic rationing regimes, we are

4 Buchan 2001: 146; Buchan 2007: 388–389.

5 Brook and Kohen 1991: 65–66, 72, 90–102; Reece 1974: 20, 125, 209–210.

6 Rowse 1998b: 17.

reminded again of philanthropists' connections to the state, with its (limited) systems of administration and surveillance. However, philanthropists' own use of rationing warrants special attention. Their particular views on dispossession and state responsibility, and their relationships with Indigenous people, make their place within histories of welfare systems especially vivid, characterised by intensive efforts to change people's behaviour.

The earliest advice protectors and missionaries received about gift-giving and rationing was conflicted. Any notion of universal human entitlement to state support was absent; what emerged instead was an intriguing mixture of ideas about colonial dispossession and the deserving poor. The claim that colonisation made Indigenous people impoverished by destroying their food sources was emphasised by Archdeacon Broughton's evidence to the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements), Church Missionary Society secretary Dandeson Coates' advice to Lord Glenelg, and articles in the CMS's *Missionary Register*.⁷ Some sense of colonial responsibility was present; Rev William Yate, for example, told the Select Committee that the government had a duty to 'recompense' Indigenous Australians for the loss of their lands, by gathering them together and 'for some time supplying them with food, leading them to habits of industry; to cultivate their own land, that they may supply themselves with food'.⁸

Tim Rowse, considering later sources from northern Australia, has argued that rationing regimes, while raising various moral issues about settler-Aboriginal relationships, avoided and obscured 'the ultimate moral question of land ownership'.⁹ However, this was not necessarily the case during this earlier period. Anne O'Brien, in a rare study of initial ideas about rationing and pauperism, suggests that compensation for dispossession was an idea relevant to rationing programs in the early 19th century.¹⁰ I would add that local missionaries and protectors, perhaps because of their closeness to the issue, tended to state more strongly and explicitly than their counterparts in Britain that Indigenous people were entitled to rationing because of their loss of land. The Port Phillip Methodists were particularly passionate on the subject. Protector James Dredge, angry at having insufficient food to deter Daungwurrung people from travelling and theft, wrote angrily in his diary 'Shame upon the Government who can permit such a state of things in reference to the blacks, by the sale of whose lands they

7 Archdeacon Broughton, evidence, 3 August 1835, in *British Parliamentary Papers (BPP): Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) together with minutes of evidence, appendix and index*, Anthropology: Aborigines, vol 1, 1836: 17–18; Church Missionary Society (CMS), *Missionary Register*, August 1839: 387; CMS, *Missionary Register*, May 1843: 238; Dandeson Coates to Lord Glenelg, 31 October 1838, in *BPP: Papers Relating to Australia, 1844*, Colonies: Australia, vol 8, 1969: 29.

8 Rev William Yate, evidence, 13 February 1836, in *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, vol 1, 1836: 203.

9 Rowse 1998a: 98–99, 119.

10 O'Brien 2008: 150–166.

are aggrandising themselves'. When colonists shot at Daungwurrung people who were trying to steal wheat, Dredge blamed the government for sending insufficient supplies.¹¹ Meanwhile, Benjamin Hurst and Francis Tuckfield of the Buntingdale mission and their Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society correspondent Joseph Orton commented many times in their private papers and missionary society letters that dispossession drove Indigenous people to begging and crime. Tuckfield told the WMMS in 1840 that people had suffered 'a serious loss' from the invasion of their lands by settlers, sheep and cattle, 'without an equivalent being rendered. There [sic] territory is not only invaded, but their game is driven back ... valuable roots eaten by the white man's sheep'. Their fear of violence if they moved into foreign country, combined with their supposedly 'savage' disposition, pushed them, he said, towards crime: 'In such circumstances what can be expected but that the savage at once hungry and indolent will beg, and if he fails in that he will steal, and if the liberties he sees fit to take are resented, he will seek his revenge.'¹² Sheep theft, which may have also had symbolic and spiritual meanings for Indigenous people,¹³ was assumed by the missionaries to be a pragmatic response to poverty, a rough equivalent to the loss sustained. Orton wrote in his diary:

If a European kills a kangaroo or by some means drives them quite off the ground nothing is thought about it ... If a native spears a sheep for use, which has destroyed his food & deprived him of his natural means of subsistence, he is stigmatized as a nuisance – summarily punished by shooting ... or sent to Sydney to be tried for his life ... poor fellows though no one would teach them to steal sheep, as it is called, who can blame them?¹⁴

Thus, Indigenous entitlement to support was claimed on grounds of their particular status as dispossessed and unwilling subjects of empire. As Tuckfield told the WMMS in 1840:

There can be no question but that the Aborigines of any country have a right to food and certain articles of clothing from the soil left them by

11 James Dredge, 26 February 1840, 2 June 1840, James Dredge, Diaries, Notebook and Letterbooks, ?1817–1845 [hereafter *JDD*], MS11625, MSM534, State Library of Victoria (SLV).

12 Francis Tuckfield to General Secretaries, 30 September 1840, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Archive: Australasia 1812–1889 [hereafter *WMMS*], Mp2107 (Record ID: 133095), National Library of Australia (NLA). Also, Benjamin Hurst to CJ La Trobe, 7 May 1840, in Cannon (ed) 1982, *Historical Records of Victoria (HRV): The Aborigines of Port Phillip, 1835–1839*, vol 2A: 148–149; Francis Tuckfield to the WMMS General Secretaries, 31 June 1840, Francis Tuckfield, Journal, 1837–1842 [hereafter *FTJ*], MS11341, Box 655, SLV.

13 For discussion of this, see Kenny 2007.

14 Joseph Orton, 23 May 1839, Joseph Orton, Journal 1832–1839 and 1840–1841 [hereafter *JOJ*], ML ref A1714–1715, CY reel 1119, State Library of NSW.

their forefathers and if Government occupy their ground and thereby deprive them of their accustomed means of subsistence government is bound in justice to provide for them.¹⁵

However, this did not mean philanthropists saw the state's obligations as one-sided or unconditional. On the contrary, philanthropists, both in Britain and the colonies, emphasised how rationing should be contingent on – and constitutive of – participation in mission life. People's entitlement to sustenance, like their entitlement to land, must be mediated through their participation in charitable projects.

Here, the implications for policy could be imprecise. The advice of the Select Committee's 1837 report was rather vague, concluding that the Protectors of Aborigines should make 'occasional presents' to gain people's confidence, but should also focus on devising appropriate labour for them.¹⁶ The relationship between these conciliatory and conditional aspects of rationing led to ongoing confusion. Instructions to the Port Phillip and South Australian protectors (drafted 1837–38) stated that they would be responsible for any distribution of rations and clothing, but that they must also encourage agriculture and church attendance, which, in practice required food and gifts.¹⁷ This tension became more explicit in the instructions to the Western Australian protectors, drawn up by Governor Hutt in 1840. These stated that Indigenous people were unfamiliar with hard work, and must be encouraged gradually 'to perform occasional services for hire and reward'. Presents were appropriate to reward the deserving or to gain people's confidence, but 'gratuitous charity' was unacceptable. The protectors were reminded sternly 'A savage is always a beggar, and neither he, nor any other man, will work if bread can be procured by mere asking and importunity.'¹⁸ The initial instructions to the Buntingdale missionaries also mentioned the benefits and dangers of dependence. Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society organiser Joseph Orton reminded them that they must feed the local people, to prevent them becoming 'vagrant mendicants' throughout the countryside, but at the same time they must try to use food as a reward for work, to discourage idleness.¹⁹ Thus, while colonialism was acknowledged to destroy traditional foods, and while their replacement with a rationing system

15 Francis Tuckfield to General Secretaries, 30 September 1840, Methodist Missionary Society, Records [hereafter *MMS*], AJCP M126, SLV.

16 *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, vol 2, 1837: 83.

17 Sir George Arthur, Memorandum to applicants, in Sir George Arthur to Lord Glenelg, 15 December 1837, in Cannon (ed) 1982, *HRV*, vol 2A: 33; Lord Glenelg to Sir George Gipps, 31 January 1838, Cannon (ed) 1983, *HRV*, vol 2B: 374–375.

18 Instructions to the Protectors of the Aborigines in Western Australia, in Governor John Hutt to the Marquis of Normanby, 11 February 1840, in *BPP: Papers Relating to Australia, 1844*, Colonies: Australia, vol 8, 1969: 372.

19 Joseph Orton to Benjamin Hurst, 8 January 1839, in Joseph Orton, Letterbooks 1822–1842, ML ref A1717–A1720, State Library of NSW.

was accepted, this was not framed in terms of Indigenous people's unconditional entitlements. Rather, food distribution was associated with conciliatory gestures and the need to encourage Indigenous labour; in other words, with drawing people into systems of colonial benevolence and authority. This mix of beliefs was clear when protector ES Parker described his difficulties in answering complaints of dispossession from Djadjawurrung and Djabwurrung people. He framed rationing in terms of compensation, whilst hinting that he knew it was not wholly adequate, but also stressed that it was dependent on cooperation with protectorate regimes. These, in turn, functioned through personal relationships, with Parker believing himself uniquely qualified to supervise his district.

[T]hey have been informed in answer to their repeated complaints of the loss of their country, that the government gave them provisions and clothing and furnished them with protection, as a sort of compensation; and that the continuance of these advantages was dependent on their good behaviour. They are peculiarly susceptible to any breach of faith.²⁰

Thus, rationing, like land, was understood to be rooted in Indigenous people's specific status as a colonised group who must be both conciliated and institutionalised – in a sense, Indigenous people had a 'right' to be recipients of charity. It was no coincidence that this was an era of change for welfare policies in Britain, where the 1834 Poor Law reforms ushered in a more regulated system of relief, emphasising individual initiative and responsibility but also greater observation and control over the poor and stronger distinctions between the working poor and dependent 'paupers'. Felix Driver has observed a central irony here: the new enthusiasm for free market labour and lessening the dependence of the poor involved the extension of state power and moral discipline, made most explicit in the spectre of the workhouse – 'the janus-face of modern liberalism.' Driver argues that these reforms did not confirm the right of paupers to relief, but rather the duty of the state to relieve the poor under certain circumstances, a duty understood in terms of expediency and governance.²¹ Explicit analogies with Australia are problematic; in some ways Aboriginal welfare was clearly 'different', complicated by their status as a distinct colonised group with particular entitlements. Nonetheless, there was a relevant distinction between the state's (or the philanthropist's) responsibility to provide relief, and people's right to demand it. Moreover, on missions and protectorate stations the regulating of relief and the importance of ideas about deserving poverty would become clear.

20 ES Parker to GA Robinson, 1 December 1843, Public Records Office of Victoria (PROV), VA512 *Chief Protector of Aborigines*, VPRS12 unit 4, 1843/16 (reel 3).

21 Driver 1993: 18–19.

‘The bread that perisheth’: property and work ethics

In practice, rationing was shaped by ideology, practical circumstances and personal negotiations. Particularly relevant was the tension between using rations as a friendly gift and making them conditional on labour. Missionaries and protectors were conscious of the need to persuade Indigenous people to stay near them, at a time when people remained fairly mobile and could obtain food from other sources considered immoral by the philanthropists. Protector Parker, for instance, asserted ‘I cannot persuade the younger females to resist the importunities of the white man, while I am unable to offer a counter-inducement in the shape of food, clothing or shelter.’²² The use of food and clothes to attract people also merged with traditions of spreading the Gospel. Wellington Valley missionary James Günther remarked on the common practice of rewarding church attendance with food: ‘we must use these inducements, giving them the bread that perisheth, if we want an opportunity of administering to them the unperishable lifegiving bread from heaven.’²³ This was also apparent within the Port Phillip protectorate. Chief protector GA Robinson announced in 1841 that additional rations should be set aside to reward people for attending church services at the protectors’ homesteads, while protector William Thomas concluded ‘no preacher will succeed with the Bible without the loaf’.²⁴

Supplying people en masse was inherently problematic, though. Missions and protectorate stations risked unpleasant publicity if they were seen as having degenerated into rations depots, failing to demand Indigenous labour or distinguish between the deserving and undeserving. Magistrate Henry Fysche Gisbourne, embroiled in disputes with the Wellington Valley missionaries, told the New South Wales Executive Council in 1839 that Wellington Valley had failed, asserting that Wiradjuri people were lazy and stayed there only for food.²⁵ Rev Richard Taylor seconded this claim regretfully to the Church Missionary Society, who were re-evaluating their support for the mission. Stating that Wiradjuri people were not embracing mission life, Taylor mused ‘I feel convinced that the general idea entertained of the missionaries is, that they are stationed amongst them by Government only to distribute provisions.’²⁶ Similarly, when Colonial Secretary E Deas Thomson questioned CW Sievwright’s suitability for his protectorate job, one accusation voiced was that Sievwright was issuing

22 ES Parker to GA Robinson, 1 April 1840, in Cannon (ed) 1983, *HRV*, vol 2B: 695.

23 James Günther, journal, 15 August 1837, *WVP*.

24 GA Robinson to CW Sievwright, 9 January 1841, in Lakic and Wrench (eds) 1994: 33; William Thomas, 14 June 1846, William Thomas, Papers, 1834–1868 [hereafter *WTP*], ML MSS 214, reel 3, State Library of NSW.

25 Henry Fysche Gisbourne, evidence to Executive Council, 17 April 1840, in *BPP: Papers Relating to Australia, 1844*, vol 8: 41–42.

26 Rev Richard Taylor to Rev William Cowper, 6 February 1839, in *BPP: Papers Relating to Australia, 1844*, vol 8: 46.

rations indiscriminately.²⁷ Regardless of the accuracy of these claims, they point to a trap inherent in the philanthropist's role: they risked being dismissed as useless if Indigenous people did not settle with them, or accused of profligate generosity if they did.

Underwriting this was a colonial trope that Indigenous people were both greedy and lazy. While such slurs were a standard part of the racist discourse of dispossession, they took on different, specific meanings for philanthropists. Greed and sloth were assumed to be essentially linked, as greed was understood as a desire for profit without equivalent effort. This made feeding people a fraught process. The Wellington Valley missionaries bemoaned Wiradjuri people's 'irregular, beastly and immoderate habits' – 'Food is their only inducement to do anything' – concluding 'Poor piteous creatures they seem to have no thought but that of eating.'²⁸ Although the missionaries themselves had started the practice of rewarding religious participation with food, they were disturbed when people began to demand this payment blatantly, interrupting religious discussions with food requests. They lamented that Wiradjuri were 'as indifferent as stones' to Christian teaching but 'cunning enough as regards their stomach'.²⁹ Other philanthropists also expressed fear of voracious Aboriginal appetites. Orton described people eating like 'beasts of prey', while Parker imagined sheep thieves 'luxuriating in all the waste of savage and uncontrolled appetite, with their mangled and half-roasted prey'.³⁰ Such concerns, from Wellington Valley and Moreton Bay, were repeated by the CMS in *Missionary Register* (1839), which noted that people demanded generous helpings of food from the missionaries, whilst appearing indifferent to everything else.³¹

This did not mean that desire for commodities was automatically considered negative. On the contrary, philanthropic writers expressed equal (and related) concern that Indigenous people might not care *enough* about material things. Some religious commentators cited this as a reason for pessimism about the Aboriginal future. Archdeacon Broughton, for example, warned the Select Committee that Indigenous people's alleged lack of property sense made them hard to civilise, as they could not be bribed; 'they do not desire anything that I have, if they have enough food.'³² Similarly, JCS Handt gave a pessimistic assessment of his work at Moreton Bay in 1838, reproduced in the *Missionary*

27 E Deas Thomson to CJ La Trobe, 25 February 1842, PROV VPRS10 unit 4, 1842/491 (reel 1).

28 Günther, journal, 28 August 1837, 19 December 1837, WVP; Handt, journal, 15 June 1833, 4 October 1833, WVP; William Watson, journal, 7 September 1834, WVP.

29 Günther, journal, 23 December 1837, WVP; Handt, journal, 24 August 1833, WVP; Watson, journal, 17 November 1836, WVP.

30 Orton, 20 May 1839, JOJ, ML ref A1714–1715, CY reel 1119, State Library of NSW; ES Parker 1846, *The Aborigines of Australia*: 8.

31 CMS, *Missionary Register*, August 1839: 387, 389.

32 Archdeacon Broughton, evidence, 3 Aug 1835, BPP: *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, vol 1, 1836: 18.

Register, complaining that people did not value the clothing he gave them because they sold some of the clothes and used the others to make headbands. (In fact, this might suggest the clothes were indeed valued, in a different way, but this was not Handt's perspective.³³)

Thus, the assertion that Indigenous people were both greedy for material things and careless about them became a vital, if paradoxical, element of policy-making. In a report to Robinson in 1842, Thomas described how he lectured people crossly:

that the Blacks would take the example of the Whites in eating what they eat, in being clothed with their clothing, talk as they talk, and yet would not build house to live in like the white man and have of their own without asking others, put seed in the ground etc [sic].³⁴

Philanthropists may have associated this alleged greed and carelessness with traditional life, but they were more concerned about its new colonial manifestations. As the impacts of dispossession and Indigenous social breakdown worsened, many people were living partly off the proceeds of begging, crime and sex with white men. One of the many reasons why this distressed philanthropists was because it seemed to represent greed and gain for no labour. Watson, for instance, was outraged that some Wiradjuri men were 'well supplied with food' for lending female relatives to white men, while Thomas complained that beggars in Melbourne were 'pamper'd not merely beyond the wants of man but far exceeding what the public would credit or imagine'.³⁵

Rationing was designed to prevent this, and yet fears of mendicancy often surfaced in discussions of rationing itself. This was a particular concern for the Port Phillip protectorate, under pressure to justify their spending. Robinson reprimanded Thomas in 1841 for allowing able-bodied people who had not yet 'settled' at his station to access food supplies, warning that they were still 'wanderers without any sort of control'.³⁶ He assured superintendent La Trobe in 1849 that he deplored a handout system; it had 'a tendency to lower them rather than to elevate them'.³⁷ Even James Dredge, usually sympathetic to Indigenous claims, was irritated when people asked him constantly for food, and called them 'sable mendicants'.³⁸ As Tim Rowse has observed, the concept of pauperism

33 CMS, *Missionary Register*, August 1839: 390; JCS Handt to William Cowper, Annual Report of the Church Missionary Society Mission at Moreton Bay, 1838, Sir William Dixon, *Documents relating to Aboriginal Australians, 1816–1853*, Dixon Library, ADD 80–82: CY reel 3743, State Library of NSW.

34 William Thomas to GA Robinson, 24 May 1842, PROV VPRS4410 unit 3, 1842/71 (reel 2).

35 William Thomas to CJ La Trobe, 1 October 1844, PROV VPRS10 unit 6, 1844/1761 (reel 1); William Thomas to GA Robinson, Report of Proceedings 1 March to 1 June 1843, PROV VPRS4410 unit 3, 1843/76 (reel 2); Watson, journal, 27 August 1833, WVP.

36 GA Robinson to CJ La Trobe, 15 December 1841, VPRS10 unit 3 (reel 1).

37 GA Robinson to CJ La Trobe, 23 December 1839, in Cannon (ed) 1983, *HRV*, vol 2B: 487.

38 Dredge, 12 October 1839, *JDD*, MS11625, MSM534, SLV.

(being finessed in British discourse at this time) was both fundamental and problematic to Australian colonialism. The first philanthropic records certainly highlight Indigenous dependence and the horror it excited, but it is also clear, as Rowse notes, that efforts to separate dependent paupers and the working poor, conceptually and physically, did not always apply. Instead, Indigenous people were portrayed as inherently suspect, both passive and devious in their greed.³⁹ This blurring between poor and pauper was unsurprising, given the use of material goods to attract residents, the fact that Indigenous dependence on charitable aid was so widespread, and the nature of the rationing system itself, where rewards for labourers were distributed in much the same way as the items doled out to the needy and reluctantly ceded to the demanding. Neither the rations nor the people themselves could be clearly divided.

Such difficulties did not make philanthropists any less passionate on the subject. They still hoped to inculcate a sense of the value of material property earned through honest work. Robinson articulated this with particular enthusiasm, assuring La Trobe at the start of the protectorate that Indigenous people 'should be taught to know their wants, should feel their necessities; a desire for civilized comforts and for the possession of property should be created.'⁴⁰ When attempting to justify the protectorate's operation to the 1845 New South Wales Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines, Robinson assured them that blankets and clothing were only supplied to the needy and the hard workers; 'the effect has been very beneficial ... calculated to lead to industrious habits, and to the knowledge of the value of the property'.⁴¹ Three years later, he was still hoping (largely in vain) to reward hard workers with sheep, property and land, believing this would encourage them to stop travelling and develop a sense of 'rights and interests to watch over and property to protect'.⁴² Robinson's unusually strong statements about material property might be traced to his weaker grasp of the inadequacy of resources, of which his assistants frequently complained. It is also possible that, being less passionately Evangelical than some of his colleagues, he was drawn more to a 'civilisation first' approach. However, Evangelical philanthropy did not exclude the benefits of consumption. On the contrary, Jean and John Comaroff, in their discussion of mission work amongst the Tswana, argue that material desires were seen as a potentially elevating force, if combined with rationality, self-control and regular labour; 'saving the savage meant teaching the savage to save'.⁴³

39 Rowse 1998b: 20, 25–26, 32–33, also 40–41.

40 GA Robinson to CJ La Trobe, 23 December 1839, in Cannon (ed) 1983, *HRV*, vol 2B: 488.

41 GA Robinson, Evidence to the Select Committee on the condition of the Aborigines, 1845, in Frauefelder (ed) 1997: 52.

42 GA Robinson 2001, 1848 Annual Report, in *The Papers of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate*, Clark (ed) vol 4: 150.

43 Comaroff and Comaroff 1997 vol 2: 166–167, 191–194, 219.

Thus, supplying rations was connected to encouraging work ethics. Parker and Thomas stressed in their reports that they tried to make food and blankets for the able-bodied conditional upon labour or trading of traditional handicrafts.⁴⁴ Watson, similarly, wished to make meals contingent on regular work. This became clear in one diary entry from 1836, when a young man called George, who had been 'wandering about all the day', asked Watson for his supper.

I told him that I could not give food to natives who neither attended to instruction nor worked. He said 'Black fellow not that way when born you know, he not work, he not learn.' I told him that, wild natives lived on opossum &c and if he wanted to live as a wild native he must look out for Wild natives food [sic]. That if he wished to have his wants supplied here, he must either attend School, or work.⁴⁵

Even children (generally recognised in charitable discourse as vulnerable and entitled to sustenance) had their rations used to control their behaviour, with meals and clothes provided as incentives for schooling. Thomas, for example, promised extra clothes to children who were attentive in class.⁴⁶ South Australian protector Matthew Moorhouse arranged for flour to be given as a reward for school attendance in Encounter Bay, while Indigenous parents in Adelaide who sent their children to school were prioritised in the annual blanket distribution.⁴⁷ More ominously, some philanthropists connected rations to punishments; in 1837, George Langhorne claimed that children could come and go from his Melbourne mission freely, but those who left without permission would lose a meal that day.⁴⁸

Philanthropists believed work should be not only hard but also regular and differentiated from leisure time. Langhorne's original plans for his Melbourne mission in 1837 aimed to divide time, labour and meals in a fashion reminiscent of British workhouses, stating that the adult residents must work at least four hours daily in return for three regular meals, and would be supplied with clothing (marked to prevent theft). He added that 'Black occasional comers' should be remunerated 'on a regular scale, according to the space of time employed, or the nature of the work done', and suggested 1/2lb of bread for two hours' work, plus 1/4lb of meat for four hours.⁴⁹ Robinson also expressed

44 For example, ES Parker, *Quarterly Journal*, 1 June – 31 August 1842, PROV VPRS4410 unit 2, 1842/62 (reel 2); William Thomas to GA Robinson, 3 December 1840, PROV VPRS11 unit 7, 1840/351 (reel 1); William Thomas to GA Robinson, 11 September 1841, PROV VPRS11 unit 8, 1841/392 (reel 2).

45 Watson, journal, 19 Dec 1836, *WVP*.

46 Thomas, 22 February 1842, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 2, State Library of NSW.

47 Matthew Moorhouse to Colonial Secretary, 13 December 1842, *Protector of Aborigines, Letterbook, 1840–1857*, State Records of South Australia (SRSA), GRG52/7, unit 1; Matthew Moorhouse to Colonial Secretary, 20 March 1846, SRSA, GRG24/6, Colonial Secretary's Office, Correspondence files, no 300 of 1846.

48 George Langhorne to Colonial Secretary, 14 August 1837, in Cannon (ed) 1982, *HRV*, vol 2A: 173.

49 GM Langhorne to Colonial Secretary, 14 August 1837, Cannon (ed) 1982, *HRV*, vol 2A: 174.

initial hopes that ‘savages’ newly introduced to labour would work between 6–8 hours a day, in contrast to the 10 hours he thought appropriate for Europeans.⁵⁰ It is doubtful this was ever really enforced in practice. Ideals of mechanisation, regulation and observation, derived from the industrial revolution, did not sit easily with traditional Indigenous economies, which were seasonal and variable, and tended to emphasise obtaining food on a collectivist basis for minimal effort.⁵¹ Nor, indeed, did they have much to do with rural life. However, the wish to divide the day regularly according to work, meals, leisure and prayer did not wholly vanish, and it remained particularly apparent in attempts to institutionalise the children.

‘Like a swarm of bees’: rationing and the family

The use of rationing to encourage a sense of private property was linked, in turn, to notions of the family unit and the individual self. Accumulation of property and pride in personal labour were dear to philanthropists, who linked these things to the stability and respectability of the home. However, on Aboriginal missions and protectorate stations, Evangelical ideals about autonomous individuals saving and valuing their property within the bourgeois nuclear family came into tension with Indigenous views on family obligations, and with missionaries’ own institutional practices.

Philanthropists came to believe that a key obstacle to success lay in Indigenous people’s own understandings of the family. To missionaries’ frustration, people on their stations did not necessarily draw a clear distinction between workers and non-workers, and instead distributed food according to complex networks of kin obligation.⁵² Thus, philanthropists complained about ‘idlers’ expecting to share workers’ rations. Günther wrote in frustration:

whenever we give our Natives meat, they will be sure to take it to the camp ... Some idle fellows these who we do not feel justified to feed or another who for bad behaviour ought to be punished with receiving nothing will come & either by entreaties or by threatenings obtain part of the portion of those who have deserved it. Nay the poor fellow (who is deserving) loses some time the whole of his meat.⁵³

The young man Jemmy Buckley, who had visited the mission since its commencement, gave this as a reason for refusing to perform farm labour, telling

50 GA Robinson to CJ La Trobe, 23 December 1839, Cannon (ed) 1983, *HRV*, vol 2B: 487.

51 Broome 2001: 56, 70.

52 McGrath 1987: 124–125.

53 Günther, journal, 19 December 1837, *WVP*.

Watson 'What shall I do with it? directly Black fellow know I got wheat they come up and eat it all up at once, and then I shall have to go into the Bush like another Black fellow.'⁵⁴

Thus, philanthropists' use of rationing could aim to dismantle what they considered to be unruly or immoral family structures. This was especially evident with regard to young people, on whom philanthropists focused most of their energies, believing them to be more open to Christian influences than the adults. Protector Thomas, for example, once threatened to withhold rations from the camp if the adults took the children out of school.⁵⁵ However, the most extreme and troubling instances took place at Wellington Valley, where Watson often described 'purchasing' children for blankets, tea, shirts, tobacco and necklaces. Some adults took the gifts and left their young relatives for short periods, retrieving them soon afterwards, much to the missionaries' vexation.⁵⁶ At other times, aggressive confrontations occurred. In March 1835, Watson described a 'trying week', when a woman called Nelly tried to remove her daughter, Eliza, from the mission. (A year before, Eliza had left the station with her relatives and been forced back by Watson.) Watson believed Nelly had been frightened by rumours circulating of grave spiritual danger to Wiradjuri girls living with white people, and he refused to let Eliza go.

The Mother wept aloud and scolded on the outside of the kitchen, and the girl wept in the kitchen. Being anxious to go I gave the old woman as much Wheat and Beef as she could carry, as also Tobacco and Pipes but all would not do. My feelings almost overcame my Judgment in this affecting scene, and indeed nothing but the licentiousness to which I knew the girl would be exposed prevented me from letting her go.⁵⁷

Given that Nelly was ill and dependent on mission aid, she may have felt unable to press the subject. Watson stated that she eventually left the mission with a man called Old Bobagul, 'having received a Cake, a Blanket, and a Neck handkerchief'.⁵⁸

As such scenes show, the exchange of goods for temporary child custody occurred in a climate of inequality, sometimes heightened by missionary bullying. Nonetheless, the dynamic was not a simple one. Philanthropists may have resented and tried to undermine communal obligation, but they also became implicated in it. Historians such as Ann McGrath and Richard Broome have observed Indigenous people's efforts to draw settlers into systems

54 Watson, journal, 7 July 1836, *WVP*.

55 Thomas, 20 August 1841, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 2, State Library of NSW.

56 Watson, journal, 21 February 1834, 26–27 February 1837, 18 October 1834, 6 March 1835, *WVP*.

57 Watson, journal, 28 March 1835, *WVP*.

58 Watson, journal, 28 March 1835, *WVP*. Also, Watson, journal, 25 October 1834, 31 January 1835, 1 August 1835, *WVP*.

of reciprocity, stretching beyond individuals to their extended families. Most examples of this explored by historians have focused on issues of work or sex, but it seems likely that contact with young people was also a relevant area of rationing obligations on the first missions and protectorate stations.⁵⁹ Here, Broome's work on the later Coranderrk station in Victoria is helpful. Arguing against the belief that rations simply oppressed people and created one-sided dependence, he suggests instead that European dynamics of paternalism could be incorporated into Indigenous understandings of asymmetrical mentoring and kinship. Broome points to assertive statements by mission residents that colonial authorities had a duty to care for them, partly in payment for the loss of their land.⁶⁰ Similar dynamics – not always comfortable or peaceable – can be detected in earlier philanthropic projects. Ironically, in order to gain access to young people, philanthropists were obliged to satisfy Indigenous demands for material rewards, exchanges which philanthropists associated with begging, laziness and greed, but which Indigenous people may have understood in terms of kinship obligations.

Thus, some people who left children with the missionaries or protectors were confident and even aggressive in their material demands. This was evident at Thomas's station and especially at Wellington Valley. Thomas complained in 1844 that children were refusing to attend school, and that the older men pointed out 'too much get em bread Melbourne, no hungry no school.'⁶¹ One man threatened to remove his child from school after Thomas refused him a new blanket, and Thomas fumed that some adults told him 'Give my piccaninny black money and then school.'⁶² While Thomas experienced this as ungrateful begging, the people involved may have believed themselves entitled to demand resources from the protector, who was so eager to live with their young people, in their country. Thomas stated 'they consider they are rendering you a great service [by sending their children to school] & that you are under great obligation for teaching their offspring.'⁶³ Some Wellington Valley examples were even more emphatic. In 1836, Watson described one man, Ngarrang Bartharai, whose daughter, Fanny, was staying at Wellington Valley:

He thinks that because we have a child belonging to him, that we must give him every thing he desires. Not only would he have us supply his own wants; but he brings up other natives saying, they are 'his brothers'... This time, I have given to Bartharai, a Razor, a Pocket Knife, a Blanket, Wheat – Beef – Tobacco &c &c.⁶⁴

59 Broome 2001: 57; McGrath 1987: 124–125, 141.

60 Broome 2006: 42.3–42.4, 43.10.

61 Thomas, 26 January 1844, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 3, State Library of NSW.

62 William Thomas to GA Robinson, 31 November 1844, PROV VPRS4410 unit 3, 1844/82 (reel 2); Thomas, 13 August 1846, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 3, State Library of NSW.

63 Thomas, 19 November 1846, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 3, State Library of NSW.

64 Watson, journal, 18 October 1836, *WVP*.

On another occasion, Watson wrote:

The natives came up this morning like a swarm of Bees, demanding Beef – Wheat – Tobacco and Pipes. One native whose little girl is living with us said, 'I have many Black fellows belonging to me, you must give me for all.'⁶⁵

Such disputes highlight an irony in early philanthropic work: philanthropists' efforts to weaken the ties of extended Indigenous families, and to impart Evangelical British ideals of labour to the young people, required them to enter into the very relationships of obligation and kinship which they wished to undermine.

Indigenous views on obligation were by no means simple, though, and arguments over food distribution can be hard to interpret from philanthropic records, where the scenarios could seem garbled, impatient or confused. Aside from child custody, the other issue to emerge powerfully in connection to rationing was Indigenous control over traditional lands. Angry scenes could ensue when philanthropists supplied rations to people from foreign districts. When a large group of 'wild Natives' travelled to Wellington Valley, one of the older Wiradjuri men was offended when Watson said he would welcome the visitors. The man commented 'Hy Hy, but them wild fellows, they ask you give blanket, give flour, pipes, tobacco'. He interrogated Watson 'will you give it them?' When Watson replied that he might, the man was 'very far from being pleased'.⁶⁶ Watson may not have taken this issue entirely seriously, but missionaries at the more volatile Buntingdale station soon learned to. In 1841, Hurst recommended to La Trobe that separate missions be established for each 'tribe' in Port Phillip, in an effort to recognise (and probably to reshape and cement) divisions between groups. He agreed that food and clothes should be used as an incentive to attract people, but added that missionaries should not give gifts to foreign 'tribes'; the associated risks were too great.⁶⁷ Such examples demonstrate philanthropists' use of rationing to exercise personal and cultural power, but at the same time they make clear the limits of this power in a context of Indigenous mobility, local compromises and unequal mutuality.

By involving themselves in community networks via rationing, philanthropists also found their own families implicated. The boundaries philanthropists constructed between their private world and the 'savage' outdoors were both vital and permeable, and disputes over food supply made this apparent. Here, missionary women's domesticity was linked to the wider spheres of government policy and Indigenous kinship. Accounts from Wellington Valley place Ann

65 Watson, journal, 14 February 1837, *WVP*.

66 Watson, journal, 1 September 1834, *WVP*.

67 Benjamin Hurst to CJ La Trobe, 22 July 1841, *MMS*, reel 4, AJCP M121, SLV.

Watson at the centre of several fierce arguments with Wiradjuri men over food and blankets. On one occasion in 1833, when a group of men demanded blankets from the missionaries, Watson was afraid that one man might attack Mrs Watson because she had refused him a new blanket after he gave his old one away.⁶⁸ A similar scene occurred a year later, when Watson described a rationing session characterised by a tense mix of domestic closeness, obligation and hostility. Mrs Watson had set aside milk for Narrang Jackey (whose young wife lived at the mission sometimes), not noticing that another person had taken it.

Shortly afterwards Jackey came up and asked for milk. Mrs W said I gave it to you. He went out of the hut in a rage, threw down his pannikin with the greatest violence, summoned his two yeeners [women] and went away, and although Mrs W went out after him to give him milk he would not have it. With a hut full of Natives pressing closely to her on all sides it is no wonder she made a mistake, especially knowing that Jackey would very readily come again and again for his share of provisions.⁶⁹

Thomas's diaries provide similar accounts of Mrs Thomas supplying people with food, sometimes independently of her husband, negotiating this with difficulty when rations were insufficient. When some men, who chopped wood for Mrs Thomas, instructed her to cook plenty of cabbage for their dinner, Thomas remarked 'poor things they consider their friends had nought to do but cook for them'.⁷⁰ On another occasion, a fight broke out on Thomas's station when a woman he called 'Kurbro's lubra' hit the schoolteacher's wife, Mrs Wilson, with her digging stick because Mrs Wilson had refused to give her water.⁷¹ Ironically, it was the Evangelical ideal of women's nurturing role, as well as the uneasy reciprocity that developed between Indigenous people and missionary households, that implicated the domestic Evangelical world in a rationing process that was both administrative and passionately ideological.

'Still they are dissatisfied': the problem of gratitude

Such encounters remind us that early philanthropists' views on poverty and rationing were developing in small, face-to-face environments, where missionaries sought to maintain what Bain Attwood has termed 'distant intimacy' with Indigenous people.⁷² In this context, rationing systems brought to the fore philanthropists' wish to structure relationships according to

68 Watson, journal, 24 August 1833, *WVP*.

69 Watson, 5 December 1834, *WVP*. Also, 24 August 1835.

70 Thomas, 31 December 1846, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 3. See also Thomas journal, undated fragment, 1839, *WTP*, reel 3, f18; Thomas, Journal, 30 June 1840, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 1, State Library of NSW.

71 Thomas, 31 March 1841, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 2, State Library of NSW.

72 Attwood 1989: 28.

gratitude and paternalism, and the varied ways this related to the Indigenous wish to prioritise relationships of kinship and traditional exchange. Evangelical advocates saw gratitude as fundamental to the success of the charitable encounter. It (theoretically) affirmed the philanthropist's benevolent authority and demonstrated the willing compliance of the recipient. The frequent colonial claim that Indigenous people were incapable of gratitude was, therefore, especially disturbing. This was hinted at in Broughton and Yate's testimony to the Select Committee, where they disagreed over whether Indigenous people were too mercenary and 'volatile' to feel grateful for acts of kindness.⁷³

Indeed, Evangelical attitudes towards sustenance as a whole were shaped by ideas of thankfulness and submission to a higher power. Protector Thomas, when scolding people for not embracing farming life, told them that 'their very actions was a disgrace to them – that if white men only for one season was as indifferent as them, & God should not send rain that half the families of the earth should perish.'⁷⁴ This suggests a belief that nourishment and basic comforts were not so much universal entitlements as boons derived from higher benevolence. Such generosity must not be taken for granted. Watson employed a similar logic in 1834, when a wet spell endangered the mission's wheat crop. When people asked him 'What for God let water come up all over wheat?' he explained that 'we had an opportunity of seeing how soon God could destroy everything and leave us without anything to eat.'⁷⁵

Such ideas about benevolence and gratitude suggest, again, that while philanthropists and the state had a duty to supply goods to the needy, Indigenous people did not have the right to demand them. As O'Brien puts it, 'To most evangelicals, it was anathema to treat kindness as a right.'⁷⁶ This became problematic, however, when it clashed with Indigenous assumptions that missionaries were obliged to share their belongings, because of their access to goods, residence in Indigenous country and partial incorporation into local networks. Misunderstandings and disputes followed. Philanthropists' journals and some of their publications complained about Indigenous ingratitude; here, Evangelical ideology mingled with personal offence and hurt. South Australia's first protector, Bromley, recorded lengthy disputes with Kurna people over their hated oatmeal rations. The elders scolded him for not providing bread and biscuits instead, while parents taught their children to nag him for better supplies. They were, he said, 'clamorous and troublesome' – 'these things

73 Archdeacon Broughton, evidence, 3 August 1835, *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, vol 1, 1836: 19; Rev William Yate, evidence, 13 February 1836, *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, vol 1, 1836: 202.

74 William Thomas to GA Robinson, 24 May 1842, PROV VPRS4410 unit 3, 1842/71 (reel 2).

75 Watson, journal, 27 August 1834, *WVP*.

76 O'Brien 2008: 163.

are extremely discouraging to a person of acute feelings'.⁷⁷ Publications by CG Tiechermann of South Australia and Peter Nique of Moreton Bay in 1841 highlighted similar claims that Indigenous people were dictatorial, treating their new missionaries like servants. Nique, in particular, gave a disgruntled account of his travels in the barely-colonised country of Toorbal, amongst people who were often aggressive or disdainful towards Europeans.

They are exceedingly indolent, and would readily accept of it [sic] if we made ourselves their slaves, to fetch wood and water for them. As soon as we had got some water for ourselves, they wanted to drink it ... They would not even rise to fetch an oyster or anything beyond their reach, but wanted us to hand it to them.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, protector Thomas, whose relationships with Kulin nations in Port Phillip were more intimate and enduring, nonetheless became angry when he felt unappreciated. He lamented that he must tolerate people's material demands, lest they go begging elsewhere. When one man borrowed his horse without asking, Thomas burst out angrily in his journal 'these are unbearable people, it is useless scolding or coaxing them while they can get their wants supplied by begging.'⁷⁹

Complaints were loudest, however, at Wellington Valley. In one incident in 1838, Jemmy Buckley became angry when Günther refused to give him a cake, and said 'You stupid fellow ... you never give me anything.' Günther remarked 'It is grievous to observe the ingratitude, even of the best of them.'⁸⁰ His colleague, Watson, was irate when another man, Kabbarin, ordered him away from the camp, declaring that Watson had not fed him adequately: 'I do not want you here you did not give me good meat this morning it was all bone. I chucked it away it was dog's meat.'⁸¹ The most distressed member of the mission house, though, was the gloomy and easily discouraged JCS Handt, who mused frequently over Wiradjuri people's apparent indifference to his charitable gestures. On one occasion in 1835, he approached the local camp and was dismayed when several boys left immediately. He wrote mournfully in his journal:

Thus they shun us and our house, as though they had been ill treated, when quite the contrary has always been the case. They have had their regular meals, and as much as they could eat at each, without any

77 Protector Bromley to Colonial Secretary, 26 June 1837, SRSA GRG24/1, Colonial Secretary's Office, Letters and other communications received, no 206 of 1837; Protector Bromley to Governor Stirling, 29 June 1837, SRSA GRG24/1/1837/210.

78 P Nique, 'Aborigines: Diary of Messrs Nique and Hartenstein of the German Mission to the Aborigines', in *Colonial Observer*, vol 1, no 4–5, 1841. Also, CG Tiechermann 1841, *Aborigines of South Australia*: 11.

79 Thomas, 28 December 1845, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 3, State Library of NSW.

80 Günther, journal, 17 January 1838, *WVP*.

81 Watson, journal, 29 December 1835, *WVP*.

trouble and labour of their own, as we are often afraid to ask them to do anything, lest they should be offended and go away ... but still they are dissatisfied.⁸²

Such comments indicate more than simple irritation; they suggest a sense of painful rebuff when a paternalist dynamic was (apparently) refused. Without this, philanthropists found their work hard to conceptualise at all.

Philanthropists' sense of a mission frustrated did not derive from their belief in Indigenous ingratitude alone, however. It was also suggestive of their fear of being unable to sustain an authoritative, providing role in an atmosphere of colonial discontent and limited resources. Supply shortages, for which they often blamed the government, were especially discouraging. This was apparent at Wellington Valley in 1833, during a heated dispute over government-issue blankets (referred to earlier). A group of Wiradjuri men demanded the blankets, reminding Watson that supplies were sent by the Governor and should not be his to control. Watson relented and distributed some of them, whilst telling the men they had not behaved well enough to deserve them. Later, however, he complained in his diary (in comments presumably meant for the Church Missionary Society) that he was forced to restrict access because supplies were inadequate – here, his 'civilising' lectures merged with practical constraints.⁸³ His colleague, James Günther, lamented in 1839 that they still did not have enough food to entice people to stay at the mission. Their agriculturalist, William Porter, told Governor Gipps during his 1840 visit that he deeply regretted being unable to pay people wages or reward them properly. (Gipps, instead of supporting regular remuneration, suggested small gifts for the well-behaved.⁸⁴) More overt statements of the inadequacy of state support came from Port Phillip protectors James Dredge and ES Parker. Dredge complained in 1839 that he did not have enough supplies to employ people regularly.⁸⁵ A decade later, Parker was pleased to report that his station's residents had begun to work hard in agricultural jobs, but complained he could not reward them properly. He told Robinson that he was reduced to purchasing gifts for the labourers himself and begging donations from neighbours – a statement which emphasised both his paternalistic generosity and his compromised professional status. Parker argued that his workers should receive a 'full equivalent' in food, clothes and (interestingly) money: 'The mere "name of wages"' said one of the young men on a recent occasion, "made his heart very glad".⁸⁶

82 Handt, journal, 26 November 1835, *WVP*.

83 Watson, journal, 24 Aug 1833, *WVP*.

84 Sir George Gipps, Memorandum respecting Wellington Valley, in Sir George Gipps to Lord John Russell, 5 April 1841, in *BPP: Papers Relating to Australia, 1844*, vol 8: 68; Günther, journal, 31 March 1839, *WVP*.

85 Dredge, 6 September 1839, *JDD*, MS11625, MSM534, SLV.

86 ES Parker to GA Robinson, 16 January 1849, PROV VPRS4410 unit 2, 1849/64 (reel 2).

Philanthropists' disappointment take quite personal forms. Protector Thomas, for instance, was depressed during a journey he made around Melbourne in July 1839, without servants or supplies. Camped by the Yarra amongst Kulin peoples, he was forced to accept the kindness of Woiwurrung man Billy Lonsdale, who brought him bread and tea and tutted sympathetically at what he saw as the Governor's meanness. Thomas mused that he would never before have contemplated eating and sleeping in such savage circumstances.⁸⁷ Similarly, when James Dredge left the protectorate, the explanation to Daungwurrung people he recorded in his journal was 'that I could not bear to see all my black fellows "hungry" and nothing to give them – that I had sent for more a long time since – but that no letter had come back – and therefore I should go away.'⁸⁸ Here, Dredge was simplifying his numerous reasons for leaving, but his comments are interesting nonetheless. They indicate the importance to Aboriginal policy of personal connections, of benevolence and gratitude – what might be called the pleasures of philanthropy.

The distribution of food and other provisions to Indigenous people provides valuable insights into a number of the elements that distinguished philanthropists' efforts at governance in the first half of the 19th century: the centrality of local relationships, the necessity for negotiation, and the philanthropists' vexed position as agents of imperial policy and critics of dispossession. Perhaps most striking, however, is the way it illuminates the conditional and unequal mutuality of philanthropic governance. Any concept of universal, unequivocal rights (even to the basic necessities of life) was largely absent. What appeared instead was a sense of Aboriginal welfare emerging from a complex, contradictory set of obligations – between conqueror and colonised, givers and receivers of charity, clergymen and their congregations, and members of turbulent but close-knit communities. These dynamics, while in many ways particular to the early 19th century colonies, nonetheless provided a foundation for policies and controversies that have proved long-lasting.

⁸⁷ Thomas, July 1839 abstract, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 1, State Library of NSW.

⁸⁸ Dredge, 12 March 1840, *JDD*, MS11625, MSM534, SLV.