

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, staff of University of South Australia, ladies and gentlemen and, most important of all, graduands. As has probably been said too many times today, this is one of the most important days of your lives. Your graduation marks not the end of your education but the beginning of your career: the application of your education to your life, as it lays ahead of you.

And might I say Welcome! Welcome to the thinking class. Now I abhor classes and other divisions of society but I am a strong advocate for recognising that there is a subset of humanity, the thinking class, and we are the ones who make our world what it is today, we are the ones that will shape the future, we are the ones that employ the only uniquely human character (and that's thought) and wield it as our most effective tool in shaping our destiny.

In celebrating your graduation today, we celebrate all that is the best about what it is to be human; the next layer in the towering intellect that we share as a species.

In a purely biological sense, your education is something unique to our species – the spreading of complex ideas.

While there is a rich debate as to why our species has been so successful, there's little doubt that we can trace most of our success back to our uniquely large brains. To put it crudely, we have thought our way to where we are today. Ultimately, every hurdle that we have had to clear, every trial that we have had to endure, has been overcome by smart thinking. It's the one thing that we can do, as a species of animal on the face of the earth, that no other species can.

Our intelligence driven by our curiosity allowed us to master fire and fashion tools. Our intellect coupled to our keen sense of observation let us develop agriculture and the domestication of a huge variety of animals. Our smarts allied to our instinctive understanding of social structures produced societies, civilisations and empires. Our thinking hitched back to our curiosity gave us science, technology and engineering. Our huge brains not only have the abilities to conceive abstract thoughts, they can also communicate them to other brains and thus we derive education. And so on and so forth. Every endeavour that has contributed to humanity today was only made possible by just over a kilogram of greyish goo sitting inside the head of every person who has ever lived.

One of the teachings of Buddha is that, 'with our thoughts, we change the world'. That's not something I've learnt from years of studying Buddhism but something I picked up from watching *Monkey Magic* as a kid! But regardless of how I picked it up, and whatever its original intention within Buddhism, this teaching is literally true. We have, through our thoughts, changed the world in which we live.

Another reason put forward for our success as a species is that we have the ability to change our surroundings to meet our needs, thus stepping outside Natural

Selection as the primary evolutionary process. If it's too cold, we're smart enough to be able to build a fire or put on clothes rather than live or die by our biological ability to handle the cold.

But now we have reached a turning point in our history. We have modified the world so much that its capacity to sustain our populations is now in question. We've been clever enough to devise ways of having more children surviving to adulthood, and to having their own children, so that we've over populated the planet. The global sum of our local activities chewing into our limited resources now exceeds the accounts of the Earth to pay for them. Ladies and gentlemen, we have thought our way into a crisis that could present us with the catastrophic collapse of our culture, our civilisation perhaps even our species. We stand to lose everything that we've thought up over the last 10,000 years or so.

But I have hope in this thinking species of ours! If we've thought our way into this mess, I'm confident that we can think our way out of it! And that's where you come in with your new, shiny, freshly-minted degrees from this fine institution. In one way or another, your education will be pressed into solving problems such as how to live on planet Earth without consuming all the available resources. How do we develop market systems and political structures that more fairly distribute the resources that we have left? How do we restrict population growth in ways that are fair and respectful of every individual's right to live and have a family? How do we sustain more than 7 billion people on a planet that until very recently (and by that I mean a thousand years or so) never numbered more than a few million? Prior to 1800 there were never more than a billion people on earth. The challenge you face is how to set up the planet to cope with seven times that population for at least then next 200 years.

As I said, I have every confidence in the abilities of human thought to both front-up to these problems and to find solutions to them. And as I look across this room this morning at all the bright young minds about to go out into the world and think up our future, I'm reassured that we will succeed.

Good luck with your future endeavours, whatever they may be, and simply remember this: Never stop thinking – it's what our species does best!