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Introduction

In these strange times vital decisions affecting the peoples of the world are being made at the highest level by people whose mindsets and priorities have been predominantly determined by their experience in the oil industry -- or their obligations to it [more; more; more; more; more; more], as well as the prospect of rapidly diminishing oil reserves. It is useful to review metaphors specially associated with those who work in such environments, including the military, that exemplify a very grounded and concrete aspect of human activity -- far from what they would see as the "egg-head" theories, speculations and resolutions of international policy-making regarding human rights, democracy, justice, environment and other preoccupations of the "weak". As bluntly expressed by a New Zealander, this is the world where men are men and the sheep are nervous. According to Edward de Bono, for example:

The skills of action are every bit as important as the skills of knowledge. We need to change our conceptions about thinking and action... To effect this change we need a concept such as operacy which gives status to the thinking involved in doing. We need to appreciate effectiveness and not just intellectual games.[more; more; more]

A valuable point of departure is the image-rich language associated with many strategic and practical decisions. In the case of informal oilfield jargon: "Almost all the terminology can be taken two ways" -- a "dual use" terminology -- one of which has sexual connotations [more]. In what follows the focus is provided by the very widespread use of the term "ass" (or "arse" as it is spelt and pronounced in British and Australian English [more]). The two spellings are often interchangeable. In American English, whether signifying a donkey or the buttocks, the two are pronounced identically (as specified by the American Heritage Dictionary).

This paper is an exploration of the unconscious implications of the confused relations between these terms with respect to how they frame the primal action-oriented driving force of many -- from the highest executive level down to the worker in the field. This follows an earlier exploration of the strategic implications of a lack of distinction in the pronunciation of "Terror" and "Terra" in most American dialects, and a second on the pronunciation of "Iraq". The concern is how these terms may frame thinking about practical options for the future.

Although the focus of this paper is most distasteful to polite society, it does recognize the operational reality of large numbers of people whose actions are affecting the future of the world. It recognizes the framing of the social reality with which they so effectively engage. The fact that such language is primarily characteristic of the "smoke-filled rooms" and field sites where real decisions are taken -- and tends to be excluded from public discourse -- is part of the problem of the times. In the USA, for example, habitués of the Executive
Mansion are known to "yell and swear" and many presidents have used "locker room jargon" [more] -- as is evident from the Nixon tapes [example]. George Bush was widely reported for his use of the term "asshole" in public dialogue with Dick Cheney -- both from the oil industry -- during his 2000 election campaign [more].

A brief argument between Vice President Cheney and a senior Democratic senator led Cheney to utter a big-time obscenity on the Senate floor this week [June 2004] ... A chance meeting with Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (Vt.), the ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, became an argument about Cheney's ties to Halliburton Co., an international energy services corporation, and President Bush's judicial nominees. The exchange ended when Cheney offered some crass advice. "Fuck yourself," said the man who is a heartbeat from the presidency. [more]

Part of the problem also derives from the fact that the association of terms is peculiar to the English language -- as the vehicle of global decision-making -- and especially to its American variant. Another aspect is that the terms in question tend to be restricted to a mode of discourse that is considered by some to be inappropriate "in front of the ladies" or in religious groups -- problematic when both are now intimately involved in key decisions. As a kind of "secret discourse", it points to what might be termed the "backside of decision-making" -- recalling Elise Boulding's extensive study on The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time (1976). Hence the title of this paper: Backside to the Future (which, coincidentally but appropriately, is also the title of a porn movie). No wonder the disempowered, especially the young and women, occasionally resort to "mooning" ("baring their asses") to express their disdain for the "globalization" proposed by the "suits" for their future.

If the world's future is to be conceptually grasped and framed through the backside, then there is a case for understanding what this may imply.

Context

Ass has two primary referents:

1. Any of several four-footed, hoofed mammals of the genus Equus, resembling and closely related to the horses but having a smaller build, longer ears, and a shorter mane, shorter hair on the tail, a dark stripe along the back, with longer ears. A donkey is a domesticated ass.
2. Buttocks, namely the two rounded fleshy parts of the backside on which humans rest when they sit. British English usage of arse is restricted to this second connotation. British arse and American ass are both vulgar slang, although the taboo is much diminished. Ass remains one of the 'filthy words' cited in 1978 by the U.S. Federal Communications Commission as indecent, if not actually obscene. It may refer more specifically, but perhaps allusively, to the anus.

It is curious that it is the second (the buttocks) that interfaces directly and intimately with the former (the donkey) in one of the oldest transportation systems developed by man -- an "ass-on-ass" connection, like a modern centaur. Clearly there are many possibilities for conflation of meaning.

However it is the metaphorical connotations associated with these, separately or in combination, which are of much greater interest in framing individual and collective collective action relating to the future -- and attitudes towards it:

1. Building on the supposed stupidity of the donkey, "ass" may refer to a vain, self-important, obstinate, silly, stupid, aggressively stupid, or stubborn person; a simple-minded fool often marked by stubbornness or stoildity.
2. Building on scatological and sexual connotations of the buttocks, "ass" may be treated as attractive or repugnant and may then be used to qualify actions accordingly.

The argument which follows draws upon the collapsing semantics between two referents of "ass" (thanks in part to technical comments by Benjamin Slade and Fred Riggs). As with Pavlov's dog -- even though there is no a priori relation between bell-ringing and food, when the two continue to occur at the same time, the mental link between the two is strengthened. Likewise, even though there is no real semantic connexion between "buttocks" and "donkeys", the homophony of the word "ass" in American tends to reinforce a "pavlovian" association between the two. Additionally, when one word in a homonym pair becomes contaminated with negative associations, it tends to contaminate the other. Through the fact that both have derogatory connotations, the semantics may collapse to be interpreted, either consciously or subconsciously, as the "same" word/concept. Such conflated/associated semantics are ultimately driven by whatever the processes are behind punning and folk-etymology. For example, "hamburger" (derived from the city Hamburg) has nothing to do with pig-meat; but the "ham"-" of "hamburger" has nevertheless been re-interpreted in folk etymology, (by contrast with "cheeseburger") even though few believe that is made from ham. A more extreme example of this is to be found in Chinese (as discussed by Kuang-Ming Wu, The Butterfly as Companion, 1990, p. 198) which has a peculiar semantic principle: "Words of a sound flock together in sense; like sound, like sense" -- often exploited to explain a notion or prove a point. From another perspective, Plato held that letters and syllables had ontological significance (I M Crombie. An Examination of Plato's Doctrines, 1963: II: 115-17, 202ff; 241-60; 411-16).

A far more concrete approach to this semantic association is through the deliberate product promotional process of "co-branding" or "cross-branding" that ensures consumers associate one product name with another unrelated category of product to which it has also been applied. This has been a matter of considerable concern to environmental groups with regard to corporations endeavouring to "greenwash" themselves through eco-labelling and other promotional devices [more]. Similar concern has also been expressed at the opportunity offered to corporations to "blue wash" themselves through partnership with the United Nations through its Global Compact [more] -- as with the abortive pairing of UNICEF with McDonald's [more; more]. In the terms of such intentional word association, the concern in this paper is with the possibility that global strategic decision-making is effectively being subject to a process that might be called "ass washing". 
As extensively demonstrated by George Lakoff with Mark Johnson (1980, 1987, 1999), language matters -- or as Lakoff (1991) put it in relation to the Gulf War, "metaphors can kill" [more]. "Ass" might well be considered as one of the "dangerous things" in Lakoff's Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: what categories reveal about the mind (1987). As background to the concerns of this paper, the implication of metaphor for strategy-making and governance has been explored in a series of papers elsewhere and notably in commentaries to a section of the online Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential.

This paper is not concerned with the extensive discussion of "colourful" or "bad language" in governance and efforts to deplore it [more], suppress it [more], or justify it (as with the robust language of the parliament of Australia -- famously described by its Prime Minister, Paul Keating, as "the arse end of the world"), or the fact that Winston Churchill trained a parrot (alive in 2002) specifically to use such language. All the "bad" terms listed below are however characteristic of debates in some parliaments with a generous view of so-called "unparliamentary language". It is extremely improbable that oil industry executives would exert a restraining effect on this tendency.

The concern here is with the effect which certain metaphorical expressions may have in framing strategy so as to render it inappropriate to the challenges it faces. In the much quoted phrase of George Orwell (Politics and the English Language, 1946): "But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought. A bad usage can spread by tradition and imitation, even among people who should and do know better." He noted that the English language "becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts." [more; more]

Contrasting clusters of operational meaning of "ass"

In the clusters which follow, the various uses of "ass" in decision-making outside "polite discourse" are identified. Each cluster can be reviewed as effectively holding a vital relationship to action and reality -- whose significance tends to be obscured by the associations. Such significance is in each case effectively collapsed into "ass" as an operational marker for a distinct mode of dealing with reality (identified in an italic comment) -- but is distorted, if not perverted, by the negative associations with which it is amalgamated.

- **Foolishness:** The term is frequently used to label someone pejoratively, as in "dumb ass". The use of "asshole" [more] is perhaps the strongest form, closely followed by "pain in the ass". It may also be used humorously, ambiguously, and even affectionately, as in "He made an ass of himself at the party" or "When they make asses of themselves, they do it in the grand style". In the case of specific operational judgements, the term "half-assed" [more] may refer to actions which are careless, inadequate, incompetent, unsatisfactory, half-hearted, half-baked, poor, unenthusiastic, second-rate, contemptible, ridiculous, or stupid. A variant is "not knowing his ass from his elbow". Defective cleverness may be described with the term "smart ass".
  - Stereotyping those with whom one is in extreme disagreement as "asses" is not a basis for fruitful dialogue -- as demonstrated in parliaments tolerating such "unparliamentary language". Even when done in their absence, associating the differences with such repugnance in no way ensures the emergence of a conceptual frame through which to consider the nature of the differences and ways of bridging them.
  - In strategic terms, there are numerous examples of the difficulty of distinguishing foolishness from risk-taking and innovative genius. In the case of the American initiative against Iraq, the Bush regime would want opponents' criticism of foolishness to be reframed in this light.
  - There are also many examples of initiatives foolishly taken with little appropriate thought to subsequently disastrous consequences. This would be the view of many opponents of Bush policies. It may well be the case that history will judge George Bush to have "made an ass of himself" -- whether in a cause of higher significance remains to be seen.
  - As a mode, "foolishness" can conceal a valuable ability to translate between frameworks and to envisage or engender new frameworks. Hence the extensive literature on the jester and the wise fool.

- **Forcefulness:** Through terms such as "kick ass", "move their asses", "get your ass over here", or "get off your ass", the capacity to forcefully oblige people to act in a particular way is a typical, and much valued, macho indicator of strength and capacity to "get things done", or "get things moving". "Kickass" may be used as a descriptor of excellence as in "The Canadian Olympic Canadian Hockey team is kickass!" "Hard ass" describes a particularly aggressive person, with variants such as "bad ass" to indicate, possibly appreciatively, a tough guy. It may of course be abused and experienced as various forms of bullying and harassment.
  - Whilst aggressive instructions like "move your ass" may be appreciated by some, they are totally alienating to others who would then be motivated to engage in opposition and subversion rather than support. Whether such terms are used face-to-face or not, thinking in such terms projects an attitude which arouses similar opposition.
  - In strategic terms, there are numerous examples of the need for such forcefulness. The attitude is typically characteristic of the White House hawks in their response to the Taliban for sheltering Osama bin Laden (and their refusal to engage in a deal for the oil pipeline), to exact revenge for 9/11, and in their frustration with their former ally Saddam Hussein and his control of oil reserves -- the Republican Party allegedly produced a bumper sticker reading "Kick his ass and get the gas". Although of quite different derivation, it is not surprising that it is an "arsenal" that is required to back that forceful attitude and that F D Roosevelt made the point in his Arsenal of Democracy (29 December 1940) fireside chat to the American people: "We must be the great arsenal of democracy".
  - There are also many examples of initiatives of excessively violent response, typified by the treatment of Americans of Arab descent, and the undiscerning response to anybody that can be stereotyped as a suspect terrorist. Such treatment is consistent with the harassment deliberately cultivated at bootcamp and in other institutional environments. As stated by Cofer Black, Director of the CIA's Counterterrorist Center (1999-2002) indicated in reaction to criticism of this attitude: "All I want to say is that there was 'before' 9/11 and 'after' 9/11. After 9/11 the gloves come off" [more]
• Application: The hard work associated with many forms of effective action in a competitive society may be described as "working your ass off". This may include taking responsibility, as in "putting your ass on the line".

  • This approach to work may be basically unsustainable, preventing the development of team continuity and ensuring dysfunctional turnover as people seek rewards commensurate with such unbalanced work.
  • In strategic terms, hard work is what has made most economies work and distinguishes them from those where such application is lacking.
  • There are also many examples of obliging those in developing countries (notably in the primary commodity sectors and sweatshops) to "work their ass off" under exploitative conditions in support of western economies.
  • This is the mode of commitment and engagement over time -- being bound by time until work is responsibly completed.

• Disassociation: Phrases such as "my ass" may be used to express contempt, denial or disagreement. Given the importance of respect amongst peers in many social settings, variants of the phrase "up your ass" are used to explicitly signal lack of respect and contempt. As indicated above, protesters "baring their asses" ("mooning") is another example.

  Expressions of disrespect are not a basis for dialogue or evoking loyalty in any sustainable collective endeavour. Such disrespect severely inhibits collective creativity when it may most be needed.

  • In strategic terms, this attitude is a significant factor in the personalized disrespect between nations as exemplified by the attitudes of Saddam Hussein to George Bush, and vice versa. It takes visual form in many demonstrations.
  • It can be understood as a surrogate for violence in the assertive defence of self-esteem and boundaries -- as demonstrated by many animals in defence of their status or territories.
  • This is the mode of letting go of a particular framework -- essential in order to move on.

• Deference: In any hierarchical organization, much use is made of variants of terms such as "ass licking" (notably in Australian parliamentary criticism of Australia's relationship to the USA) and "kiss my ass" to describe the obsequious (sycophantic) relationship between those seeking to rise (or maintain their status) in the power structure by "currying favour" and demeaning themselves in relation to those who can enable this transition (or provide protection). Other variants include "brown-nosing". Such phrases are often made as judgements on the exaggerated degree of respect of the "yes" people that surround chief executives. They are curiously linked to old superstitions of warding off evil (for example using gargoyles) -- with a "kiss my ass" as a keep-away deterrent to demons.

  • Situations in which excessive deference are elicited engender resentment and covert disloyalty that can ultimately prove disastrous for an organization. They inhibit the emergence of alternative perspectives that may be vital to the survival of any collective endeavour.
  • In strategic terms, centuries of diplomatic experience dictate a prudently high degree of deference between weaker and more powerful states -- a relationship which can be manipulated by the latter in the kind of coalition-building associated with the "war against terror" in the service of American interests.
  • It is useful to recall that ethologists attach less stigma to the physical expressions of disrespect between nations as exemplified by the attitudes of Saddam Hussein to George Bush, and vice versa. It takes visual form in many demonstrations.
  • This is the mode of dealing appropriately from weakness with more powerful contextual forces.

• Uncritical appreciation: In hierarchical power structures, the uncritically obsessive relation of followers to their highest authority -- especially when a leader is framed as charismatic -- may be encapsulated in the phrase "they believe that the sun shines out of his ass".

  • Collective endeavours based on such uncritical appreciation create a mindset of dependency that is known for being unhealth in a collective enterprise.
  • In strategic terms, in contrast to sycophancy, this is the mark of a true believer whose admiration for a leader knows no bounds.
  • It could be argued that it is important for followers to be accepting of the "lower" attributes of their leaders, as much as of the higher.
  • For leadership to be able to ensure group cohesion, this mode of followership is required.

• Attraction: In a male dominated institutional world, considerable attention is given, both within the work environment and outside it, to the attractiveness of a "great piece of ass" -- despite the constraints on sexual harassment. Women may also rate males in terms of the attractiveness of their asses -- as they do of their vehicles. "Ass" can also refer to relations between two people, usually involving making out, groping, and sometimes intercourse. Because many people think of sexual relations as merely a physical act they sometimes associate it with a physical part of the body common to both sexes, the ass. The phrase "getting some ass" may be a prime concern in the process of corporate entertainment to sweeten a negotiation process. Executives may rate "getting ass" as an important process in after-work recreation. Most hotel chains, notably in the US, provide video access to soft porn as a surrogate or adjunct. Posters in factory workshops provide a focus for this attention to "ass". The internet provides
The feminist movement has articulated the highly problematic consequences of distorting social relations by treatment of any women involved as sex objects. In an increasingly permissive society, this critique also applies with regard to men. Clearly an oil industry mindset is not responding to the call to shift to a more balanced representation of feminine perspectives.

In strategic terms, this is often seen as the tangible and visible reward for any initiative. Bill Clinton sacrificed his presidency for such a reward. Earlier presidents have enhanced their reputation through their conquests. The Empress Catherine the Great was renowned for her sexual preoccupations.

Such attraction between those of opposite sex is a hardwired feature of biology and physiology vital to the propagation of the species. It is the short-term and narrow attention to its physical aspects (to the exclusion of its longer-term social, psychological and symbolic dimensions) that is problematic.

This mode senses the direction in which it is fruitful to move and to what it is useful to attach.

- Parsimony: Any inherent meanness of people and institutions towards opportunities that may be worthy of a degree of charity or altruism can be labelled with the term "tight assed". Psychoanalytical theory uses the term anal retentive to cluster a triad of traits: obstinacy, parsimony and orderliness associated in some typologies with an obsessive-compulsive character. Curiously it is this resistant characteristic that is valued in occasional use of the phrase as a descriptor of desirable sexual partners.

- Inability to act generously reinforces a "scrooge" mentality of unmitigated self-interest that restricts collective options.
- In strategic terms, this is exemplified by the policies of western countries towards poverty in the world (sustaining the high costs of pharmaeutical drugs to populations dying of AIDS; refusing to alleviate debt, even in the case of countries facing starvation, as typified by the Nestlé Ethiopian scandal in 2003). It might also be associated with the excessive austerity measures imposed by the IMF to control developing country economies in the light of dominant western economic models.
- Restrictions on profliacay may also have positive functions relating to prudent conservation of resources and sustainability.

This mode restricts unnecessary use of resources.

- Protection: Given the high-risk nature of decision-making, often necessitating rule-bending and even illegality, individuals and institutions need to be continually aware of the need to protect themselves, notably from peers who seek to take advantage of any vulnerability. This process tends to be described by expressions such as "watching my ass", or "covering one's ass". It is associated with what has been termed "plausible deniability" and is essentially designed to minimize transparency and exposure to accusation. A related concern is carried by the phrase "saving one's ass".

- The issue here is the appropriate balance between risky under-protection and dangerous over-protection, and the consequences of the choice for any collective endeavour.
- In strategic terms, this is exemplified by the extent of secrecy in the restrictive classification practices of institutions and the willingness to destroy evidence to safeguard the involvement of intelligence agencies (as in the case of MI5’s involvement in the Cayman Islands in 2003).
- In a world dominated by sexual preoccupations, the increasing need for "protection" in sexual intercourse is ironically matched by the extent to which sexual and excretory functions are edited out of public discourse as indecent -- whilst constituting a major driving force for the entertainment industry, notably via the internet. Fig leaves have merely changed their form.

Vigilance and protective measures ensure, through this mode, security and reduction of vulnerability.

Configuring preoccupations with "ass"

These nine dimensions of "ass" may be usefully interrelated in the tentative diagram below using a much studied dynamic template -- the enneagram. This has the merit of suggesting the possibility that there may be functional relationships between them, in some version of that diagram, that can be fruitfully rendered explicit.

![Worshipping the Golden Ass](image)
This pattern might be explored in the light of studies of sets of sins and their corresponding virtues, such as that of Donald Capps (Deadly Sins and Saving Virtues, 1987). And with increasing reference to "corporate greed", it is interesting to explore the possible collective equivalents to the "sins" implied in the diagram. Following an earlier study, in the light of Capps analysis, these might run as follows:

- Excessive consumption of resources, especially energy
- Collective anger, especially expressed in violence
- Collective greed, especially in the accumulation of resources
- Collective envy, especially for resources controlled by others
- Collective pride, typically as arrogance and triumphalism
- Collective lust for power, typically as expansionism
- Collective apathy, typically in response to emerging problems
- Collective despair, typically in acknowledging current impotence and in recollecting past failures

Insight into the underlying nature of the functions highlighted in the diagram might also be explored in the light of insights from various meditative disciplines that also recognize nine key modes -- as indicated below. Whether or not the enneagram provides useful clues to the dynamics of their relationship also remains to be explored.

At issue is the nature of the obstacles to fruitful global strategy resulting from "ass-washing" collective thinking. Possibilities for each of the 9 have been indicated in the previous section. It is in what ways that the dysfunctional dynamics of such usage precludes more credible global strategies that is the question.

**Myth and transformation of "ass"

Of subtler implication than those above, are some of the mythological and metaphorical associations of "ass" explored below.

**Ass-worship: a symbolic dance**

According to Robert Graves (Greek Myths and Legends, 1968), the ass was domesticated by early peoples in the upper Nile valley. It was priceless for farming as well as trade and transportation and became the center of a cult. It was worshipped as being sacred to the great god Set, Lord of the Universe, the original head of the Egyptian pantheon, whose home was the South. Set was often depicted in a donkey's shape. His distinguishing mark was, unsurprisingly, long and pointed ears. Representations of these ears became the prototypes of divine and royal power, i.e. ultimate authority. They form the power glyph: the two tips of every scepter carried by Egyptian gods and kings, as tokens of remembrance that all legitimate power derives from Set. With Set's downfall in Upper Egypt and the regions under his influence, the Southern part of sky and earth lost early on much of its prestige. The seat of power, celestial and otherwise, moved slowly north, down the river Nile to the Mediterranean basin. Elf Raymond (1992) remarks that "Contemporary attitudes toward the South, whether they be geo-political, or relate to the human body as cosmic analogue, seem to perpetuate the judgments accompanying the fall of Set".

In the cults of Asia Minor the ass was also a symbol of Typhon (notably for Gnostics), Satan, Jehovah, or Saturn. In that period the divinities worshipped were frequently symbolized by animals. Thus the Gnostic Demiurge, engendered seven animal-headed angels to assist in governing the world -- the second with the head of an ass [more]. The ox was associated with a form of worship that was being displaced at the time of the arrival of Christ -- symbolized by the birth in a manger. But there were still many who worshipped the bull, following practices prevalent in an earlier era (associated by astrologers with the age of Taurus), and which were preserved at that time in the mysteries of Mithras and of Egypt. The era immediately preceding that of Christianity (the age of Aries, the Ram or Lamb) is symbolized by the sheep motif in biblical times. The ass was specifically associated with the story of Mary and her Child. Two asses are mentioned symbolically in the Gospel story, one coming from the north and bearing Mary to Bethlehem, and the other taking her down into Egypt. [more] Christianity now focuses negatively on the "beasts in the wilderness" [more], including the wild ass (Job 39:5), having effectively lost their former symbolic and transformative significance.

Priapus, the Greek God of fertility was born with a massively enlarged penis. This phallic symbol was used to ward off the evil eye and statues of him were used as scarecrows in gardens. His cult was similar to that of Dionysus, and he was often depicted as an ass -- during a Dionysian festival it is said he was disturbed by the braying of an ass while trying to seduce a nymph, highlighting the mix of lust and stupidity for which he was known. [more] Bacchus, as a variant of Dionysos, was also associated with ass-worship -- an accusation made of Jews at the time [more]. The Roman ass-god was Pales, whose temple on Palatine Hill was called a "palace". Pales was worshipped as a priapic god with erect phallic (symbolised by obelisks, church steeples, and minarets on a mosque). At the festival of the Pallia, traditional date of the founding of Rome, the wooden statue of Pallas Athene was brought to Vesta's temple. Priests of Pales wore ass-head masks as they danced in honor of the long-eared deity. One of its old customs may have given rise to the Halloween game of 'Pin the Tail on the Donkey', which recalls Rome's sacrifices of equine tails triumphantly carried to the temple of Vesta.

An early pagan belief held that Jews worshipped the head of an ass in their temple. The Jewish Encyclopaedia has an excellent commentary on ass worship of which both the Jews and the early Christians were extensively accused by Greek and Latin writers over a period of centuries. The calumny of onomatry, or ass-worship, attributed by Tacitus and other writers to the Jews, was afterwards, by the hatred of the latter, transferred to the Christians [more]. Christians in turn accused a gnostic sect of ass worship and the commentary relates this to the association with worship of Typhon-Seth, an Egyptian god. The ass is also considered by Catholics as a symbol of heresy, or of Satan [more]. The ass continues to be considered by some neo-pagan cults as a symbol of Satan.

Significantly, the worship of the ass flourished at the same period as that of another domesticated animal the ox, or bull. There has been considerable related commentary on worship of the Golden Calf amongst the early Israelites following a practice they borrowed from the Egyptians (Exodus, 32) [more; more; more]. The Israelites claimed that this borrowed symbol had delivered them from Egypt [more].
was destroyed at the command of Moses. In a most insightful review, the Jewish Encyclopedia states that: "Next to the fall of man, the worship of the golden calf is, in rabbinical theology, regarded as the sin fraught with the direst consequences to the people of Israel" [more]. Christian commentators make much use of the Golden Calf, seeking modern parallels to the idolatry and fixation on material wealth that it represented [more]. One speaks of a Golden Calf Syndrome [more]. Another prophesied in 1998 that "America's Golden Calf Is Coming Down!" -- with reference to collapse of the financial markets [more; more].

There is extensive rabbinical commentary (on the web) concerning how the sin of the Golden Calf is to be atoned through sacrificial purification by the ashes of the Red Heifer (Parah Adumah) [Bamidbar Rabbah 19:8]. This is necessary to cleanse anyone entering the Temple -- whose reconstruction, in fulfilment of Biblical prophecy, is also of such concern to evangelical Christians at this time [more]. This mysterious ritual is renowned for exemplifying a spiritual concept that is beyond human comprehension and conventional reasoning -- notably because the person upon whom the heifer's ashes are sprinkled becomes spiritually purified, but those who prepare the ashes become spiritually defiled [more]. Burning the Red Heifer (a female calf, as yet unyoked) is believed in some way to represent nullifying those thoughts and emotions seduced by the lure of the Golden Calf and all its seductive successors in the temporal temptations of this world. The Red Heifer is currently the subject of a much-publicized breeding program by evangelical Christians in Texas [more; more; more; more] as part of speculation that sacrificing such an animal could help trigger the End Times scenario [more].

In considering the dynamics of use of the various forms of "ass" identified above, there may be merit in reflecting on the ritual of worshipping an animal -- entrapped conceptually in the process of dancing around it. The challenge to understanding is exemplified by the extensive commentary on the Red Heifer.

**Golden Ass of Apuleius**

Lucius Apuleius (120-180 AD) produced what has been recognized as the first novel: *Metamorphoses*, better known as *The Golden Ass*, of which there are many translations [online text; online text] and many studies [biblio], notably by the psychoanalyst Marie-Louise von Franz (1970, 1992), the poet Robert Graves (1998), and the philosopher Elf Raymond (1992).

The tale may be summarized as the story of a young man, Lucius (also the name of the author), who is punished for his ignorant behaviour by being metamorphosed into an ass -- a literary device borrowed from Egyptian story-telling. Eager to experience the wisdom of an owl, he had resorted to the aid of an apprentice witch. His botched attempt at magic resulted in his taking on the form of an ass. According to one review, in tantric terminology he is trying to tap into feminine energies via the left-hand path -- he identifies with mindless emotions, while dissociating himself from wisdom. Paradoxically it is while he is an ass that he begins to understand the nature of consciousness. His learning as an animal is associated with wit, and an unusual degree of ribaldry, consistent with the perspective of an ass. After being stolen by thieves, he suffers as a beast of burden, is tormented by cruel owners, and is pampered as a curiosity. These experiences may be reviewed in the light of the above classification.

Finally he is restored to human shape through the intervention of the goddess Isis -- by the consumption of rose petals from a garland, as had originally been suggested to him by the apprentice witch, remorseful at the failed transformation:

"Gently pluck the roses with your mouth and you will slough off the hide of what has always been for me the most hateful beast in the universe." Isis to Lucius, *The Golden Ass*.

This suggests an interesting way of using the enneagram by which the various uses of "ass" may be interrelated. It is worth recalling that the symbolism of the rose, through the rosary, has been advocated as a means of integrating the fragmented [more]. The rose "petals" may be seen in the features of the enneagram.

In the words of Benjamin Slade, in an excellent illustrated commentary, *The Golden Ass* is simultaneously a blend of erotic adventure, romantic comedy, and religious fable. It is one of the truly seminal works of early European literature, with a distinctly Eastern flavouring and a very modern feel. Apuleius's novel has inspired many subsequent writers and artists and been one of the greatest influences in Western literature, including such classic works as Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. In these there obviously exists the same satirical style as in the *Golden Ass*, the same basic image of human madness and endeavour.

The solemn close of the *Golden Ass* -- Lucius's initiation into the sacred rites of Isis and Osiris -- may strike many readers as incongruous with the light-hearted style of the majority of the novel. This comes from the error of approaching the *Golden Ass* as purely a comic romance. Apuleius constructs a careful alternation between comic and tragic episodes, between romantic and dramatic. [see also his review The Best Piece of Asse in Ancient Rome]

The tale of *The Golden Ass* and the myth of *Eros and Psyche* are understood as mutually enhancing one another, supporting a contemporary view of pleasure seen as the Child of Eros and Psyche. They also suggest why the strange journey of a man changed into an ass should culminate in his being initiated into the mysteries of Isis and Osiris -- through which the fragmented parts are reintegrated into a transcendent whole.

Thomas Taylor (*Metamorphosis or Golden Ass of Apuleius*, 1822), argues that Apuleius, although not one of the chief disciples of Plato, is undoubtedly the greatest of the ancient Latin Platonists. Apuleius uses the tale to make accessible platonic philosophy, the mysteries of Isis and Osiris, the pre-existence of the human soul, its lapse from the intelligible world to the earth, and its return from thence to its pristine state of felicity.

How does this tale enable insight into the obscene identification with unbridled animal passions to the exclusion of strategic insights that transcend them? This is nicely exemplified by "globalization" with its predominantly extensive and greedy territorial preoccupation -- in contrast with "globalization" as a form of integration to a new level of intensive significance.
Triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem riding upon the back of an ass

During Christ's last week leading to the Cross on Calvary, 48 events are recorded in Scripture. Of those 48, the first event to occur was Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the Holy City. For Christians much has been made of the symbolism that Jesus entered Jerusalem, "thy King... lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (as prophesied in Zechariah 9:9) [more; more; see also Genesis 49:11]. It was a sign that the Lord had come down to meet men on the plane of natural understanding in patience and humility; to loose that faculty from its bondage to falsity, and to teach men true natural precepts [more].

This was no ordinary day despite the coming of the passover week, Jesus was to announce the ultimate challenge, the son of man was to proclaim that he was the true messiah, the king coming to conquer. In the Old Testament a colt was a noble animal, it was used for service and to carry the burdens of men; perhaps more importantly, it was used by kings. When they entered a city in peace, they rode a colt to symbolize their peaceful intentions. By contrast, when a king entered a city as a conqueror, he rode a stallion [more]. In the old time it was the custom for judges and their sons to ride on asses, and for kings and their sons to ride on mules. (Judges V. 10, x. 3, 4, xii. 14; i Kings i. 33 45; 2 Sam. xiii. 29)

This raises the question how the violently animal-like associations of "ass", with which "kick-ass" strategic thinking is so intimately identified, can be "ridden" peacefully. The symbolic contrast between the conquering "stallion" and the "meekness" of the donkey -- and the mysterious role of the "colt" raise questions as to how such regal qualities are combined in any leader if "crossed". Technically a mule is a domesticated, hybrid animal that results from crossing a horse and a donkey. A "mule" is a cross between a donkey stallion (a jack) and a horse mare. A "hinnie" results from crossing a stallion horse and a donkey jennet; for all purposes, hinnies and mules are classified and shown together under the general term Mule. A mule or hinny may be a male (horse mule or horse hinny) or a female (mare mule or mare hinny). Both are normally sterile but may have male or female genitalia giving four variants [more]. Symbolically do the four variants of such "sterility" point to a four-fold challenge of designing a society of "peace" whose "neutrality" is not characterized by sterility?

Such symbolism merits reflection in that the Apocalypse that figures in the End Times scenarios of the Christian Right coalition, supporting the Bush regime strategies [more; more; more], is embodied in "horsemen" -- who are more likely to be riding "stallions" than "donkeys". This symbolism has been richly explored in J R Tolkien's Lord of the Rings and its recent movie adaptation -- through the nine "Dark Riders" of the Dark Lord -- also using "stallions". Their significance for social change has been explored in a separate paper.

The ass in Renaissance thought: Giordano Bruno

Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) was a Renaissance humanist philosopher who was interested in the nature of ideas. Although the term was not yet invented it has been argued that it would be most proper to label him as an epistemologist, or as a pioneer semanticist -- later to be followed by Umberto Eco. He was burned at the stake in 1600 for holding beliefs that in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church were heretical, such as: innumerable suns exist; innumerable earths revolve around these worlds. His attempt to establish a scientific continuity among all the phenomena of nature is an important precursor of the modern spirit, especially on account of its appearance at the moment when the medieval point of view was being abandoned. It is understandable how Bruno's effort to establish a unitary concept of nature commanded the admiration of such men as Spinoza, Jacobbi, and Hegel.

One of his books Cábala del Garañón como Pegaso con la Adición del Asno de Cyllene (Cabala of the Steed like unto Pegasus with the Addition of the Ass of Cyllene) is an ironical discussion of the pretensions of superstition [summary]. This "ass," says Bruno, is to be found everywhere, not only in the church but in courts of law and even in colleges. Bruno is associated with the quote: Filosofo, arso vivo a Roma, per volunta del Papa.

Nuccio Ordine (Giordano Bruno and the Philosophy of the Ass, 1996) uses the figure of the ass as a lens through which to focus on the thought and writings of Giordano Bruno. He describes the range and depth of Bruno's attempts to dismantle and renew the foundations of late Renaissance theories of knowledge. Ordine is the first to collate systematically the theoretical meanings of asininity, to specify its every ambivalence, to analyze its contradictory meanings, and to show how this play of opposites leads to the very heart of Bruno's thought. The study focuses on the image of the donkey in Bruno's work and its place in 16th-century Italian and European literature to clarify the humanist philosopher's thought. Ordine shows the contradictory traits Bruno attributed to donkeys, ranging from humble and hardworking to ignorant and idle, in his attacks on the theologies of both the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation and in his discussions of other issues.

It is no strain on the imagination to determine how Bruno's phrase (Filosofo, arso vivo a Roma, per volunta del Papa) might now be significantly reframed concerning the strategies adopted in the Middle East.

Saviours of the ass

The philosopher Elf S Raymond (In Praise of Donkeys, 1992) prefaces a delightful commentary on The Golden Ass, with a discussion of the donkey, Bianchina, of St. Francis of Assisi. He and his first followers lived in a tiny donkey shed after having their "Franciscan" way of life officially approved by the pope in 1209. Many stories recount his relation to animals, including the ox and the donkey. He referred to his body as "Brother Ass". About this Paul Gallico remarks:

The joke is even more tender than usually imagined, for in Italy, the donkey is less the symbol for stupidity and stubbornness than it is for patience and hard work. For centuries it has been part of the scene, a beast of burden that goes docilely where it is led and does what it is made to do, often staggering uncomplainingly beneath cargoes that appear far too great for its capacity. Like all saints and ascetics, Francis conducted a running feud with his body during his lifetime. But he is the only one who bestowed a name upon his own unwillimg carcass that brings a smile to the lips. [more]
Raymond offers a valuable caution against the unwisdom of the excessive condemnation of the ass following the defeat of the gods that it symbolized (Set replaced by Horus in Egypt; Dionysos by Apollo in Greece) -- with Set transfigured into the demonic power of hot evil at the telluric centre, the Prince of Darkness, commanding the forces of hell. She notes:

> From now on, the donkey's fine virtues of patience, frugality, forbearance and moderation go unacknowledged. His name and image convey the sinister and stand for lust, lechery, wickedness, filth, and cruelty. The donkey, sacred to Set and to Dionysus, has been transformed into the most despicable of not just quadrupeds, but creatures, real and imaginary. Parts of his anatomy, the haunches, are routinely used by story-tellers as the very marks of viciousness and are attributed to the insatiably lewd, disgusting, and terrorizing demons known as Empusae, the Hellenic counterparts to the Hebrew Lilim, daughters of Lilith and Sodom.

This would seem to be the manner in which a determining symbolic conflation was made that still tragically governs modern thinking. The positive attributes of an ass (as an animal symbolizing unconscious and unintegrated human attributes) were distorted into lewdness and perversions, projected onto the donkey and notably its backside -- and by extension that of the human. Presumably because the emergent "higher" conceptual functions were as yet unable to handle their own deficiencies and negative attributes -- and desperately needed a scapegoat or "psychic sink" to sustain their coherence by rejecting "lower" functions that were beyond their conceptual capacities. This resulted in unhealthy attitudes towards sexuality and bodily functions. For society, the tragic consequence is the manner in which ordinary work ("donkey work") has become dishonourable -- marginalizing the young, and those in developing countries, who fail to dissociate themselves from it to engage in the "higher" forms of work perversely extolled by western media in notions of "bettering oneself". This would still seem to be the case -- reinforced by the American use of "ass".

Citing Goethe's reflection on the unchanging nature of even Christ's own donkey, Raymond continues:

> What is the mode the donkey will not change? What, after all is said and done, is his true nature? As zootype of Set he was endowed with attributes of majesty and fell from his exalted elevation into the pits of Hell to represent the fiendish essence. As friend of Dionysus, and, incidentally, the comely goddess Hestia's protector against Pan's designs upon her chastity, he was set among the starry constellations: a fine, extra-terrestrial place that seemed to promise safety. But in the competition for high places, the sacred least of all is safe. The victorious worship of Apollo with perfidy profaned the patient donkey by turning him, of all things, into the prototype of akrasia: the vice of incontinence and rampant insatiability.

Bad things tend to preponderate in triplets. The third and lasting kick against the donkey's reputation comes from his close association, nay, identification with Saturn. Saturn as Christmas Fool, or wizened Spirit of the Old Year on its last leg, wears the ass-eared fool's-cap dating to the Roman Saturnalia, and his foolishness is transferred to the ass. Foolishness, a quality that serves as wisdom's dialectical partner, coarsened into stupidity, which, proverbially, applied to the ass as his distinguishing mark, begat asinfinity: no longer a quality engaged in the truth-bent play of elenchic dialectic, but an immutable, disgraceful essence, projected as dismissive and invective. *O, Deus misereatur: Have mercy upon our poor tongues!* [more]

Curiously, as noted by Tim Dowling (Guardian, 18 February 2003), donkeys receive a disproportionately high percentage of charitable support from the population of the UK -- and raise funds with ease [more]. Surprisingly the Donkey Sanctuary is supported to a greater degree than major people-oriented charities for "serious" issues (the article cites Mencap, Age Concern, and the Samaritans). It cares for 75% of the donkeys in Britain, and has programs extending to other countries, where there may be counterparts. Most donations come from people of modest means although 70% of the funding is from bequests (although it is unclear whether any such donations are made to spite other relatives). The average donor is "probably more female, probably no so much below the age of 50" (possibly an unconscious reaction to the abuse of "ass" -- mainly by men). Its success is attributed to the "undeniable truth" that people like donkeys.

These unresolved confusions, fundamental to integration of the human psyche, would appear to be emerging to haunt humanity in current global strategic thinking. In a curious symbolic way, humans have their backsides fused to the animal they ride and are unable to dissociate the two kinds of ass. In this sense humans function like the primitive form of *centaur*, dominated by animal instincts -- rather than like the evolved form in which a balance has been struck between human and animal functions.

**Mulla Nasruddin and his donkey**

There are thousands of short stories, or anecdotes, of the foolish hero Mulla Nasruddin (Nasrudin, or Goha) with frequent appearances of his trusty donkey [some 500 online web documents with the donkey]. The stories dating, from the 13th century, deal with issues such as social injustice, class privilege, narrow-mindedness, laziness, incompetence, cowardliness, selfishness, fraud and ignorance. For example, of relevance to the theme of this paper:

One day Nasruddin was riding his donkey facing towards the back. Nasruddin the people said, you are sitting on your donkey backwards! No, he replied. It's not that I am sitting on the donkey backwards, I'm just interested in where I have been coming from more than where I am going, my friends.

Another variant has his response as: "I thought about it, and decided to ride my donkey like this, because I have no time for disrespect. If you move ahead of me, then you will be turning your back on me. That would be terrible disrespect. If I go on ahead, I will be turning my back on you, and that is also quite unacceptable. This way, I can go on ahead of you and you can follow behind, and we can still keep looking at each other!"
Mulla Nasruddin has a tendency to appear foolish, but in doing so exposes other people's foolishness with his own sharp wit -- he is a wise fool, wise in his foolishness, and foolish in his wisdom. He is portrayed as either very stupid or miraculously clever, a resistance figure who thumbs his nose in the face of authority and capitalist rulers -- or as an example to illustrate Sufi teachings (as recently promoted by Idries Shah).

A wide spectrum is covered by these tales -- from children's jokes to religious meditation to revolutionary rebellion. He is regarded as a noble figure, arising in countries occupied by foreign powers, and as a kind of folk hero who confronted an oppressive system by being ridiculous. His contemporary relevance is that it is he who may well inspire local attitudes to any American occupation of the Middle East. Nasruddin would undoubtedly be detained without trial under modern anti-terrorist legislation. But his insight would undoubtedly contribute most to a creative outcome to the strategic crisis in the Middle East -- where he continues to be most appreciated at every level of society.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, Nasruddin inherits the widespread tradition of the fool and the trickster. His counterparts are to be found everywhere: Boots in Norway, Jack in Appalachia, Anansi in Africa, the Chelmutes in Poland, Coyote in North America. Nasruddin tales are told from west of China and East Turkmenistan to the Balkans, Eastern Europe and up to Hungary, from Southern Siberia and the Caucasus to North Africa and Arabia. Every year, an "International Nasreddin Hoja Festival" is held in Aksehir (Turkey) where he was born and buried.

What insights from such paradoxical foolish wisdom -- significantly assisted by an ass -- would enable a fruitful response to Middle Eastern tensions? Raymond (1992) offers the thought: "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." (I Cor. 19-21, 27)

**Zazen: riding an ass in search of an ass**

The potential relation between an integrated human and the "lower" animal functions is nicely indicated by the process of riding an ass, whether as in the case of Jesus, St Francis, or Mulla Nasruddin. The rider is then dissociated from the ass. But the psychic functions relating to the nature of this detachment can be explored in another context through the discipline of "sitting meditation" as practiced by many spiritual traditions over the centuries.

Zazen is a Japanese term for such sitting meditation. It has been interpreted to mean "to touch the cosmos through one single body, our body. All existences and myself are one single body" [more]. It could also be understood, whether physically or metaphorically, as riding appropriately on one’s own ass -- namely integrating all the psychic functions, including those associated with the ass. Zenmar gives the example of Zen master Hakuin who realized that the Buddha-nature that he was searching for, was the very same one that had been conducting the search for enlightenment for many years! He quotes a Zen expression regarding the misguided nature of such a search: "It is like riding an ass in search of an ass."

The uniqueness of Zazen lies in this: that the mind is freed from bondage to all thought-forms, visions, objects, and imaginings, however sacred or elevating, and brought to a state of absolute emptiness, from which alone it may one day perceive its own true nature, or the nature of the universe. This detachment relates notably to sitting on one's ass, as stated by Zen master Huijing: If you cling to the sitting form you will not attain the essential truth. This is not to suggest that sitting should not be practiced, only that there is no practitioner who is the doer behind them. This is true of every activity [more].

In Buddhism, one way of exploring this level of detachment is through "calm abiding" as stabilized meditation brought to fulfillment. The physical body is felt to be renewed and strengthened. The calm abider meditates with few desires, knows satisfaction, has pure ethics, forsoaks involvements and commotions, and lets go of various thoughts of gratification. The mind is calm and open to insight which is then free to function. Hindrances to this mode of awareness are overcome through nine "states of mental abiding" or "stages of mind" (navakara cittasthiti). The nine states are (i) setting the mind (directing it towards the object of meditation); (ii) continuous setting or stabilizing of mind; (iii) resetting the mind as attention wavers; (iv) close setting the mind by confining it to the object of attention; (v) disciplining the mind which is overly quiescent; (vi) pacifying and calming the mind; (vii) full pacification as the mind becomes truly calm; (viii) one-pointedness as the mind becomes united with its object; (ix) samadhi (mental abiding in equipoise) - samadhi. These states of mental abiding are assisted by the powers, the first by hearing the teaching; the second by thinking (reflection); the third and fourth by mindfulness (attention); the fifth and sixth by introspection (clear comprehension); the seventh and eighth by effort; and the last by confidence.

Corresponding to these, in the yoga of Patanjali, are nine obstacles to self-realization: (i) laziness; (ii) carelessness, light-mindedness; (iii) bodily disability; (iv) wrong questioning, doubt; (v) lack of dispassion, addiction to objects; (vi) erroneous perception; (vii) inability to achieve concentration; (viii) failure to hold meditative attitude; (ix) mental inertia.

Within South-East Asian practices, kundalini is a psycho-spiritual energy, the energy of consciousness, which is aroused either through spiritual discipline (such as tantra) or spontaneously to bring new states of consciousness, including mystical illumination. It is believed to lie like a serpent in the root chakra at the base of the spine -- most closely to the "ass". Kundalini was a rarity in the West before the 1970s until more attention became centered upon consciousness. However, an examination of mystical literature and traditions showed that a transformation of consciousness associated with kundalini, but called by various names, seems to have been a universal phenomenon in esoteric teachings for perhaps three thousand years. Kundalini-type descriptions or experiences are found in esoteric teachings of the Egyptians, Tibetans, Chinese, some Native Americans, and the !Kung bushmen of Africa. Kundalini has been interpreted from the Bible as "the solar principle in man," and is referenced in the Koran, the works of Plato and other Greek philosophers, alchemical tracts (the philosopher's stone), and in Hermetic, Kabbalistic, Rosicrucian, and Masonic writings. Western religions have been so obsessed with the problematic association between "ass" and "carnal thoughts" that they have been unable to clarify the possibilities for transmutation of energy indicated by such explorations.

As with Nasruddin, the Persian mystical poet Jalal al din Rumi, has many poems that feature asses. For him, Jesus mounted on the ass...
A thousand forms like Adam and Eve are born;  
the world is full of His image, but He is not endowed with form.  
He knows what is salutary for the desert sand-grain and the drop of the ocean,  
and brings replenishment, for His knowledge is not deaf.  
Every moment He binds and releases our hearts;  
why should the heart not know Him by His actions,  
if it is not an ass?  
Through being bound and released by the hand of the ass-driver  
the ass has become a gnostic,  
and knows that he is, and none beside;  
Seeing him, it moves its head and ear assishly;  
it recognizes his call, for it is not disguised.  

Such insights are included here to point to the possibility of looking at the ass vocabulary as a disguised set of nine dynamic functions. Users of the vocabulary are encapsulating recognition of the functions in a powerful action-oriented discourse with which they identify inappropriately -- if their language is now extended to global strategies. As with the rider of a wild bucking ass in a rodeo, the rider can be quickly, easily and catastrophically grounded by any of the functions. It is this identification which is the trap that prevents the rider from controlling the ass and the relationship to it.

Concluding thoughts

As noted initially, it has been extensively demonstrated by George Lakoff with Mark Johnson (1980, 1987, 1999), that language matters - - or as Lakoff (1991) put it in relation to the Gulf War, "metaphors can kill" [more]. This paper has focused on a particular set of metaphors that are fundamental to the efficacy of much decision-making discourse vital to the lives and livelihoods of many at this time. Arguably they affect the quality of intercourse amongst those involved -- restricting their access to options for modes of interaction that are not carried by that language -- or are even undermined by it.

As noted by Simon London, the very heavy investment by the military in war gaming simulations, as a means of scooping out "every conceivable strategy", is now being adapted to the business strategies typical of the oil industry (Financial Times, 10 February 2003). The irony that the applicability of such logic has been determined in relationship to destructive or exploitative capacity, rather than anything relevant to "nation-building" or sustainable community, is not recognized. The major flaws in such logic were most embarrassingly demonstrated in the summer of 2002, in a huge rehearsal of an Iraq-USA conflict -- and with retired Lieutenant General Paul Van Riper playing Saddam Hussein. The USA lost -- due to the alternative logic employed by Van Riper, perceived by the military as a "real pain in the ass" for espousing "unacceptable" approaches (Julian Borger, Guardian, 21 August 2002, 6 September 2002) [more; more]. Such inadequate thinking is tragically -- and all too visibly -- evident in the disastrous consequences of NASA in processing negative feedback [more] -- for the second time running. Can world governance depend on the capacity of the military-industrial complex to employ an appropriate logic?

The insight proposed in this paper is that through the strategic framing offered by the nine metaphorical uses of "ass", executives and others dependent on the framings that these metaphors offer, are effectively trapped in a 9-dimensional conceptual "cage". The cage, or vehicle, is well-equipped for many operational environments. But it also has many limitations that the more mythical associations highlight -- to the extent that they can be meaningfully understood. As stated by the early policy scientist Geoffrey Vickers: "A trap is a function of the nature of the trapped" (Freedom in a Rocking Boat, 1978).

In the contemporary mythology of J R Tolkien's Lord of the Rings (and the movie: Fellowship of the Ring) there is a curious symmetry between the Dark Riders and their opponents in the Fellowship of the Ring. Each is composed of nine members. The Dark Riders are unnamed. The Dark Riders are effectively the collective shadow of the Fellowship. This points to the real challenge for sustainable development initiatives. It is as much the problem of recognizing and dealing with the denied "internal", shadowy dysfunctionalities of any Fellowship engaged in such a mission to "save the world" as it is of seeking to blame "external" shadowy figures in positions of power able to forestall it (see The "Dark Riders" of Social Change, 2002). In endeavouring to understand the operation of the "nine" in Tolkien's tale, Donivan Bessinger provides a very helpful insight into the life-cycle of the Ring of the Nibelungs from a jungian perspective [more]. He focuses on the manner and sequence by which the ring is possessed by the nine principal protagonists -- in what might here be called Wagner's ring "Fellowship".

Expressed differently, it might be said that the 9-fold cage could be understood as a kind of "temple" to a rather particular "divinity" -- significantly challenged in terms of the higher virtues. It might be oversimply described as the temple of greed -- which would accord quite satisfactorily with the spirit of a Wall Street that has endeavoured so explicitly to make of greed a virtue with the slogan: "greed is good" [more; more; more; more]. As one informed commentator on the Enron and other scandals of 2002 stated, many of the most effective performers there would "sell their mother" if the amount was right. The divinity inhabiting the behavioural temple inducing this response, as a kind of "strange attractor" [more], might indeed be usefully described as a Golden Ass. As suggested by the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson "Things are in the saddle, And ride mankind." (Ode to Channing, pub. 1867).
A disturbing extension of these distasteful reflections on "ass" is that they are intimately associated with two processes only discussed using euphemism, if at all, in public discourse (or "in front of the ladies") -- despite extensive use in the arts. In non-public decision-making contexts, however, their metaphorical constraints are as significant as the nine uses of "ass" in determining strategic responses and in conditioning operacy. The two processes are:

- "Fuck": Use of this term (or related notions such as "piss off") has now reached the point in some quarters that operacy is considered to be seriously lacking unless it is qualified by some variant of it -- possibly even in every sentence. It carries in the most archaic form a sense of generative power strongly associated with a need to dominate and work one's will on others, or assert that capacity. The frequency of its use points to unconscious psychological factors that continue to contribute to the population problem and its denial, as well as to their metaphorical equivalents. The variant "motherfucker" is used as an extreme expression of contempt (one of the nine processes discussed). It is understandable that, with an oil industry mindset, there is an inherent logic to any tendency in governance to "fuck the international community", the environment, international treaties, human rights, or any "losers" -- provided one has a big enough arsenal. As in the model cultivated in prison communities, desirable allies can be bribed with protection if they accede to such buggery -- and all that counts is protecting one's own property.

- "Crap": The degree of use of this term (or the popular variants of "shit" of a range of animals: "bullshit", "horseshit", etc.), as a judgemental qualifier on human expression and creativity in every strategic setting, is indicative of the challenge of humanity when governed by the world of the asinine. It is also indicative again of unconscious inability to handle and re-cycle the exhausted by-products of human activity and interaction in the environment. Covering every available surface, physical or metaphorical, with crap, it is no wonder the planet has an associated "emissions" problem.

Much more interesting is the implication, from the Apuleius tale, that the experience of identifying inappropriately with an ass -- whether "making an ass of oneself", "fucking", "crapping", or otherwise -- can be recognized as of major transformational grounding experience. Perhaps it is in this process that society is effectively trapped by the dominant political and economic mindsets promulgated in relation to "globalization". Combined with the tale of Beauty and the Beast, this inappropriate identification is portrayed by Jungian psychoanalysts in terms of the individuation of Psyche and Eros, or as suggested by John Beebe, as the dance of Integrity with Character [more]. It is no wonder that transformative tales suggest that it is only the wise in their simplicity -- or "foolishness" -- that can dissociate themselves from the preoccupations of the ass they ride. Clues from different schools of thought and practice, as to how the set of plus-or-minus 9 functions can be integrated to enact new paradigms, are discussed in separately in Navigating Alternative Conceptual Realities: clues to the dynamics of enacting new paradigms through movement (2002).

The Bush regime is entrapping humanity in the military and oil industry's all-terrain, "asinine" strategic framework. The issue that merits reflection is whether this will provide humanity with the fruitful transformational experience of which his evangelical confidants understand an aspect -- whilst foolishly denying others. In reviewing evangelical Christian beliefs, Morgan Strong, former professor of Middle Eastern History, notes:

> When we go to war in Iraq we will do so to summon the Messiah. That is what the Christian right believes. The final battle to rid the world of all non-believers, non-Christians, more exactly non-Evangelical Christians, is going to take place very soon at Armageddon in Israel. The Bible tells us so....What worries me is that we may be going to war to fulfill what a few deluded people believe to be biblical prophecy. And what really worries me is that we have a President who might believe this nonsense, too. [more]

Given the larger mythological context, it is perhaps no irony that both Bush and his Middle Eastern opponents repeatedly frame each other as "evil" and "satanic".

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