Abuse of Faith in Governance

Mystery of the Unasked Question

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Introduction

This is written in a period of multiple and extraordinary collective crises of "faith". It is however curious that the contexts for such crises are quite distinct and the faith in question in each case is not considered as having anything in common with that in other cases. The term used is however the same (or synonymous) and would seem to relate to a similar process of belief. Despite this implication for the individual, the various institutional manifestations of such faith are held to be distinct and not comparable.

What follows is an exploration of the implications of any such comparability. "Governance" is considered here in the generic sense of how particular social processes are "governed", whether by "government" or through the governance of an organization, a discipline, or otherwise. It is the faith in such governance processes, by those who are governed, whose abuse is the concern here. The concern therefore includes both the dependence (on the part of the governed) on such faith by the governors and the faith of the governed that governance will be appropriate.

The argument also raises the possibility that a complex society is not governable as governance is currently understood. Aspects of this issue have been considered previously (Governing Civilization through Civilizing Governance: global challenge for a turbulent future, 2008).
Varieties of crises of faith in governance (A)

A number of these issues have been reviewed in relation to an earlier commentary on “hope-mongering” (Credibility Crunch engendered by Hope-mongering: “credit crunch” focus as symptom of a dangerous mindset, 2008). Subsequent challenges to hope have been notably reviewed by Naomi Klein (Hopebroken and hopescick: Obama fans need a new start, The Guardian, 17 April 2009). As examples of domains of abuse of faith in different forms of governance, the following may be cited:

Faith in declarations of threat: Both governed and governors are dependent on the fidelity of declarations of threat and evaluations of the gravity of that threat. The governance catastrophe associated with the intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, on the basis of classified information -- notably regarding weapons of mass destruction -- has seriously undermined the capacity of government to make threats credible (other than by citing incidents which it may be suspected have been deliberately set up for that purpose). A situation has been created in which it is unclear what threats declared to be the “greatest threat to civilization” or even to “human survival” are credible rather than devices to advance particular agendas such as increasing military, industrial or research budgets. It has also been made clear - through many fictional presentations -- how important it is from a governance perspective to avoid “creating panic” amongst the population. Thus it is recognized that a genuine threat, such as a predicted strike by an asteroid, may well not be publicized.

Governance now tends to be caught in the dilemma of the tale of the Little Boy Who Cried Wolf -- with the twist that only by ensuring the presence of surrogate wolves can the boy's credibility be established and sustained.

Faith-based governance: Although faith-based governance has been fundamental in centuries past, the tendency towards "separation of church and state" throughout the 20th century has been subject to a strong reversal. In the USA this is evident in the obligation of credible political candidates to indicate their dependence on faith, the political weight of Christian fundamentalism there, and the consequent capacity of George W. Bush to act "on faith" in ordering executions or military intervention. The role of the faith of Tony Blair in relation to the interpretation of evidence for intervention in Iraq has also been noted -- and confirmed by his creation of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation. The consequent military and foreign policy disaster has seriously affected the confidence that those governed might have in such forms of faith-based governance.

On the other hand faith-based governance continues to play a very significant role in many countries, to whatever degree it is directly linked to the governance of the state (Future Challenge of Faith-based Governance, 2003). The destructive interplay of the respective covenants of the Abrahamic religions is a key factor in this respect: the Great Commission of Christianity, the implication of the Aleinu of Judaism, the commitment of Islam to extending sharia through jihad.

Aside from any clash of civilizations inspired by such contrasting faiths, the problematic consequences for human suffering are becoming increasingly evident (Root Irresponsibility for Major World Problems: the unexamined role of Abrahamic faiths in sustaining unrestrained population growth, 2007). The unfortunate declarations of the Pope provide a number of examples: with regard to: contraception and AIDS, Holocaust denial, excommunication following rape, etc. It is unfortunate that theologians of the various religions have proved incapable of resolving their differences in more fruitful ways and identifying more fruitful modes of governance respectful of their respective principles. This is alienating many from such faiths.

Faith in the financial system: Following the financial crisis of 2008, the loss of faith in the financial system has been the subject of extensive commentary in terms of loss of credibility and loss of trust, especially the implications for the regulatory governance of the financial system and the complicity of governments in previously sustaining and promoting the illusion of the financial bubble. Its implications for inter-bank lending have been recognized as dramatic. Through the manner in which that crisis has undermined individual life savings, pension funds, and mortgages, people have been obliged to reassess in what it is wise to have confidence. Much institutional effort has subsequently been devoted to “confidence building”, unfortunately indistinguishable from the forms of news management (“Spin”), typical of the years prior to the crisis, on which governance has proven to have been increasingly dependent. Confidence has been further eroded by busing remedial action on "quantitative easing", previously scornfully deprecated as "printing money".

This loss of faith has been further undermined by the process of identifying the parties responsible for the disaster or in some way complicit in its emergence. Essentially, despite the huge damage to livelihoods, no specific responsibility has been established and there has been little effort to penalize those complicit in the disaster. It has become increasingly apparent that those who might have been assumed to be responsible are again benefitting to a questionable degree from uncurtailed practices variously considered problematic. This has often been made possible by bailouts provided at the expense of taxpayers..

Faith in economic expertise: The financial crisis has severely undermined the credibility of economists who have justified, with few reservations, the whole trend towards globalization and growth, variously packaged and disguised as "development" and promoted by government. Warning signals, such as those of UNICEF’s early plea for "adjustment with a human face (Richard Jolly, Adjustment with a Human Face: a UNICEF record and perspective on the 1980s, World Development, 1991) and those indicating the merits of alternatives, have been effectively ignored -- notably by international financial institutions. It is economics of this kind on which longer-term predictions of a stable future for sustainable development are based -- whilst the immediate concerns are framed in terms of short-term growth. The dangers of systemic dependence on growth have become increasingly apparent with the economic consequences in 2009 of the financial crisis of 2008. It is now quite unclear what confidence it is appropriate to place in their predictions of longer-term stability.

The current situation has been remarkably summarized by James K. Galbraith in a statement to the US Senate Judiciary Committee in May 2010 (Why the Experts’ Failed to See How Financial Fraud Collapsed the Economy, AlterNet, 15 May 2010). Writing as a member of a "disgraced profession", he notes:

Economic theory, as widely taught since the 1980s, failed miserably to understand the forces behind the financial crisis. Concepts including "rational expectations," "market discipline," and the "efficient markets hypothesis" led economists to argue that speculation would stabilize prices, that sellers would act to protect their reputations, that caveat emptor could be relied on,
and that widespread fraud therefore could not occur. Not all economists believed this - but most did. Thus the study of financial fraud received little attention. Practically no research institutes exist; collaboration between economists and criminologists is rare; in the leading departments there are few specialists and very few students. Economists have soft-pedaled the role of fraud in every crisis they examined.

Faith in intelligence services: The drama of the purported weapons of mass destruction, the suspected implications of massively invasive electronic surveillance, and the amounts of information held classified "for reasons of national security", all combine to undermine confidence that this is being done in the interests of the wider population -- as argued with respect to ECHELON (From ECHELON to NOLEHCE: enabling a strategic conversion to a faith-based global brain, 2007).

Confidence in the intelligence services is further undermined by allegations of their complicity in torture (Rukeyya Khan, UK government to announce torture complicity inquiry, openDemocracy.net, 30 June 2010; Ian Cobain, In seven paragraphs, the proof of MI5 complicity in torture of Binyam Mohamed, The Guardian, 10 February 2010). Further evidence subsequently became available in the form of hundreds of pages of classified documents revealing extent of UK complicity in the illegal abduction and torture following al-Qaida attacks of 2001 (Ian Cobain and Owen Bowcott, Classified documents reveal UK's role in abuse of its own citizens, The Guardian, 15 July 2010; Covert words that paint a vivid picture of complicity in torture, The Guardian, 15 July 2010).

The failure to detect a global threat, which in fact bankrupted the largest US corporations and severely undermined the US economy (beyond the aspirations of any al-Qaida), is an indication of the erosion of faith in services intrinsic to "homeland security". This follows the US Senate's formal assessment of the "failure of imagination" which had characterized the intelligence approach from which it is still endeavouring to learn (Josh Kerbel, Lost for Words: the Intelligence Community's struggle to find its voice. US Army War College Quarterly, Parameters, Summer 2008).

Faith in military services: Military honour has, in the past, been the exemplification of government honour (Honour Essential to Psycho-social Integrity: challenge of dishonestable leadership to the nameless, 2005). Most curiously faith in the military has evolved from the honour, courage and admiration (with which they have previously been strongly associated) to one riven by ambiguity and concern. This evolution has derived from factors such as the indiscriminate use of essentially inhumane weapons (white phosphorus, thermobaric, etc), facile labelling of profited "suspects" as legitimate targets (notably to reframe civilian causalties), careless slaughter of civilians (wedding parties, etc), maximizing lack of personal engagement (use of drones, etc) in the face of an enemy prepared to die for a cause, concealment of the scope and consequences of military action (Fahlu, etc), extensive use of covert and "black flag" operations, apparent shame associated with those killed or wounded (prohibition of media coverage), dubious statistics of civilians casualties, complicity in abuse of civilians and prisoners (rape, Abu Ghraib, etc). This evolution is notably manifest in attitudes towards veterans. There is a special irony in relation to the declared commitment to winning any wars of "hearts and minds" and rebuilding confidence.

Especially problematic has been the exposure to the supremely confident declarations of a succession of generals taking command of forces in Afghanistan over a decade -- declarations which can only be subsequently understood as having been singularly arrogant and exhibiting an irresponsible degree of ignorance of the situation, whatever briefings they had received. It remains to be seen how history will evaluate the military incompetence of the coalition of NATO forces in Afghanistan, despite access to unprecedented military equipment and faced with what has repeatedly been framed as a disorganized group of poorly trained and poorly equipped insurgents.

Faith in police and security services: The traditionally challenging interface between police and public has been further undermined by the range of high profile cases of miscarriage of justice (tampering with evidence, forced confessions, etc). Publicity regarding the disproportionate violence in the handling of public demonstrations has caused many questions to be raised, notably in relation to major summit meetings (London, 2009), especially when police are effectively empowered to act with impunity (Genoa, 2001). The conflation of public demonstration and terrorism under recent anti-terrorism legislation (detention powers, stop-and-search, etc) has also discredited the security services, especially when such powers are abused. The invasive and omnipresent use of CCTV has also undermined the relation with the police -- especially when such facilities are not used as evidence for abuse by police. Erosion of confidence in the police is unfortunately symbolized by the conviction of the former president of Interpol, Jackie Selebi, of corruption for accepting bribes from organised crime (South African ex-Interpol chief convicted of corruption, Yahoo News, 2 July 2010).

Faith in clergy: Revelations regarding sexual and others forms of abuse by clergy, previously upheld as providers of the most trustworthy guidance to the faithful in many communities, have been especially harmful to people of religious faith. Their faith has been further undermined by the reported systematic avoidance and cover-up of the issue within religious hierarchies and their framing of it in terms of isolated cases (the "bad apple" argument). The 40-year policy of cover-up is now known to have been reinforced by specific instructions, notably by the Pope in 2005 (in his previous capacity), to ensure that any investigation was undertaken in the strictest confidence (Row over Vatican order to conceal priests' sex abuse, The Guardian, 18 August 2003; Pope 'obstructed' sex abuse inquiry, The Guardian, 24 April 2005; Will Ratzinger's past trump Benedict's present? The National Catholic Reporter, 27 March 2010). A devastating indictment of the way the Vatican has run a secret legal system that shields paedophile priests from criminal trial around the world has been articulated by Geoffrey Robertson (The Case of the Pope: Vatican Accountability for Human Rights Abuse, 2010).

A 2,600 page report of a 9-year inquiry (Towards Redress and Recovery: The Ryan Report, 2009; Executive Summary) notes that thousands of boys and girls were raped and abused in Catholic schools in Ireland over a period of 60 years (Henry McDonald, 'Endemic' rape and abuse of Irish children in Catholic care, inquiry finds, The Guardian, 20 May 2009; Madeleine Bunting, An abuse too far by the Catholic church, The Guardian, 21 May 2009). This was followed by the Murphy Report (November 2009), the result of the public inquiries conducted by Ireland into the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic archdiocese of Dublin. In a Vatican statement of September 2009 it was acknowledged that: We know now that in the last 50 years somewhere between 1.5% and 5% of the Catholic clergy has been involved in sexual abuse cases.

The question is whether the abuse has been "endemic" worldwide, beyond the documented cases in the USA and Australia, and why the
report on "Ireland" does not draw attention to this possibility given that a number of the religious orders investigated are international in scope. The conclusions of the report, and the process which gave rise to it, can be usefully be seen as illustrative of the manner in which faith may be abused by governance in other domains. It is therefore appropriate to note points made by Bunting in her summary (which specifically notes the discredited "bad apple" defence):

This could not be worse. The Ryan report is the stuff of nightmares. It's the adjectives which chill: systemic, pervasive, chronic, excessive, arbitrary, endemic. They pretty much tell the whole story of the violence and sexual abuse suffered by a generation of some of the most vulnerable children in Ireland over several decades of the middle of the 20th century. This is a crisis for Ireland - Irish bloggers yesterday were describing the scandal as their equivalent of the Holocaust - but it is also a crisis for global Catholicism....

The report rightly challenges the relevant religious orders to "examine how their ideals became debased" and why it was that they consistently put the interests of their institutions before individuals. The report is so damning, not just in dealing with the past, but on how it calls up short present behaviour - the lamentable reluctance of the religious orders to engage with the inquiry or fully accept their role…

These bred a preoccupation with maintaining the prestige and authority of church institutions; any threat to that priority - regardless of the cost to the welfare of individuals - had to be stifled. These are the characteristics which have made the Catholic church morally bankrupt.

As with other cases of abuse of faith, the fundamental issue is the responsibility of the person to whom the institutions were beholden and from whom they derived their moral authority -- in this case the Pope. This example is especially challenging at a time when efforts are being made by Pope Benedict XVI towards the canonisation of Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) -- notably responsible through much of the period of the above abuse -- already challenged by his "silence" regarding a more extreme form of abuse during the Holocaust. The popes subsequently responsible over the period of abuse covered by the Ryan Report include John XXIII (1958-1963), since beatified, and Paul VI (1963-1978), whose beatification was initiated in 1993, and John Paul I (1978), whose canonisation has been variously proposed, as with that of John Paul II (1978-2005). Concerns have been expressed at the unseemly haste of such initiatives, given the circumstances (Tom Kington, Protests mount over fast track for John Paul's beatification, The Guardian, 23 April 2011).

In the light of the scandal, and of the unrelated tensions regarding the issue of ordination of women, the Vatican framed the attempted ordination of women in the same category as clerical abuse of minors, and looking at child pornography -- making all subject to "defrocking" and excommunication (John Hooper, Vatican makes attempted ordination of women a grave crime, The Guardian, 15 July 2001). The announcement immediately followed disclosure of a further scandal in Belgium involving police investigation of clergy and a bishop forced to resign (Doreen Carvajal and Stephen Castle, Abuse Took Years to Ignite Belgian Clergy Inquiry, New York Times, 12 July 2010). Curiously, given the formal provision for excommunication by the Catholic Church, and its recent use in other instances, those recognized to have committed such abuses have effectively been rendered incommunicado rather than being excommunicated -- some even transferred to functions within the Vatican as a protection from the law (A leader who wished to end the crisis would sack Cardinal Bernard Law, The Guardian, 17 March 2010).

Despite papal infallibility, given the lack of papal perspicacity with regard to such abuse, it is appropriate for the faithful to ask on what other issues papal judgment may be flawed (cf Begetting: challenges and responsibilities of overpopulaton, 2007). It is noteworthy that more Catholic resources have been devoted down the years to covering up reported abuses than to exploring such possibilities. As a consequence, the final form of the Ryan Report is already perceived by those abused to be a cover-up (Steve James, Irish child abuse: The Ryan Report cover-up, World Socialist Web Site, 26 May 2009).

Given the problematic tradition of the involvement of the clergy in the Inquisition, it is very difficult for outsiders to appreciate the role of military chaplains in relation to those performing analogous interrogations at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, or to the interrogated, as described in two complementary accounts by Stephen Mansfield (The Faith of the American Soldiers, 2005) and James Yee (For God and Country: Faith and Patriotism Under Fire, 2005).

Faith in science: Much has been made of the historical transition from the dominance of knowledge by religious faith to dominance of rationalism -- as exemplified by science. However science is now recognized as facing a number of challenges to the extent that official roles are now considered appropriate to enhance public understanding of it. Such challenges derive from a number of factors: intimate involvement of much research in support of questionable military agendas, investment of massive amounts of public funds in questionable physics and space projects, "scientific" whaling, evidence of public funding of research considered trivial or absurd (as publicized by the Ig Noble Prize), challenges from religion regarding intelligent design and creationism, publicized cases of scientific fraud, questionable aspects of the peer review process, distortion of conventional research by commercial criteria (not applied to the most costly mega-projects), inability to relate proactively to other approaches to knowledge. These are variously described in End of Science: the death knell as sounded by the Royal Society (2008). Also significant is the inability of disciplines deemed "scientific" to resolve their methodological differences in the interest of a significantly more integrative approach to the problems faced by humanity.

Whilst "science", through particular disciplines and their associated technologies, has proven competent with respect to the challenges of narrowly bounded systems, it has not proven competent with respect to the complex systems which characterize the current world problematic.

With respect to the peer review process, Anthony Gottlieb (The Limits of Science, Intelligent Life, Autumn 2010) notes:

Most laymen probably assume that the 350-year-old institution of 'peer review', which acts as a gatekeeper to publication in scientific journals, involves some attempt to check the articles that see the light of day. In fact they are rarely checked for
accuracy, and, as a study for the Fraser Institute, a Canadian think-tank, reported last year, 'the data and computational methods are so seldom disclosed that post-publication verification is equally rare.' Journals will usually consider only articles that present positive and striking results, and scientists need constantly to publish in order to keep their careers alive. So it is that, like the late comedian Danny Kaye, professional scientists sometimes get their exercise by jumping to conclusions.

Gottlieb then adds:

In a recent book, 'Wrong: Why Experts Keep Failing Us -- And How to Know When Not to Trust Them,' David Freedman, an American business and science journalist, does a sobering job of reviewing dozens of studies of ignorance, bias, error and outright fraud in recent academic science. He notes that discredited research is regularly cited in support of other research, even after it has been discredited.

The theme is the focus of a study by Dan Gardner (Future Bubbble: why expert prediction fail -- and why we believe them anyway, 2010).

Through the acrimonious global warming debate, and the much-publicized "Climategate" crisis, "science" has lost much credibility through the reported actions of climate change scientists. As noted by Fred Pearce: Science has been changed forever by the so-called "climategate" saga ('Climategate' was 'a game-changer' in science reporting, say climatologists, The Guardian, 4 July 2010). However the third report into the matter (The Independent Climate Change Email Review, 2010) cleared scientists of accusations that they fudged their results and silenced critics, but found they had failed to be open enough about their work (David Adam, Climategate scientists cleared of manipulating data on global warming, The Guardian, 8 July 2010; 'Climategate' report: the main points, The Guardian, 8 July 2010). One remaining difficulty for any critics, however, is whether the independence of those undertaking the review could be satisfactorily proven. The debate continues.

Faith in medicine: Huge advances have been made by the medical sciences from which many continue to benefit. The medical profession is however seriously challenged by a range of factors which have undermined faith in it. This is most evident with respect to medical malpractice (whether inadvertent or deliberate), the increasingly exorbitant cost of delivery of medical care, the associated complicity with the commercial interests of the pharmaceutical industry, the questionable depreciation and marginalization of other (potentially cheaper or more accessible) approaches to health care on which people may be obliged to depend, the association of medical research with inhumane treatment of millions of laboratory animals each year, together with (complicity of medical research with questionable interrogation methods (recalling those of Josef Mengele)). Concern continues, even within the medical profession, regarding the current complicity of its members with torture (Physicians for Human Rights, Evidence of Human Subject Research and Experimentation in the 'Enhanced' Interrogation Program, 2010).

Health care effectively faces a challenge analogous to the famed "clash of civilizations" in the continuing battle between "allopathic" and "homeopathic" variants, as such constituting a metaphor of a more general challenge (Remedies to Global Crisis: "Allopathic" or "Homeopathic"? Metaphorical complementarity of "conventional" and "alternative" models, 2009). The vaunted evidence-based objectivity of medicine (in deprecating non-allopathic treatment) is also called into question through its systematic opposition to arguments for voluntary euthanasia -- when a high proportion of health care expenditure (from which the profession directly benefits) is associated with prolonging life as long as possible, irrespective of the condition or desires of the patient.

The implications of the complicity of the pharmaceutical undustry and medical professions with the World Health Organization in determining appropriate treatment has been made evident in the case of information regarding the dangers of the swine flu epidemic in 2009, concerns about its exaggeration, and reports regarding the powers of WHO to impose forced vaccination worldwide under Article 21 of its Constitution. Analysts report that pharmaceutical companies banked more than $7 billion following the pressure on governments to stockpile drugs. Given that a high percentage of health professionals in the UK, for example, are refusing to be vaccinated, it becomes unclear from whom objective information an be confidently obtained. The collusion and complicity of various parties is now the subject of various inquiries (Rob Stein, Reports accuse WHO of exaggerating H1N1 threat, possible ties to drug makers, Washington Post, 4 June 2010; Randeep Ramesh, Report condemns swine flu experts' ties to big pharma, The Guardian, 4 June 2010). As Stein notes with respect to the damage to the credibility of the WHO:

The WHO's response caused widespread, unnecessary fear and prompted countries around the world to waste millions of dollars, according to one report. At the same time, the Geneva-based arm of the United Nations relied on advice from experts with ties to drug makers in developing the guidelines it used to encourage countries to stockpile millions of doses of antiviral medications, according to the second report.

As with science in general, the science behind pharmaceutical research is now faced with a credibility problem, as noted by Ben Goldacre (Don't like your findings? Spin them away, The Guardian, 24 July 2010) describing the confrontation by GlaxoSmithKline with an unflattering meta-analysis summarising the results of all 56 trials on one of their treatments in which negative results were deliberately minimized (Ben Goldacre, Diabetes drug 'victory' is really an ugly story about incompetence, The Guardian, 17 July 2010). He notes the systematic inquiry into this tendency in formal academic research (Isabelle Boutron, et al. Reporting and Interpretation of Randomized Controlled Trials With Statistically Nonsignificant Results for Primary Outcomes, Journal of the American Medical Association, JAMA, 2010, 303, pp. 2058-2064). As summarized by Leslie Citrome, The Spin Cycle in Scientific Publishing: Is It Necessary to Have Positive Results to Get Published? Medscape Psychiatry and Mental Health, 12 July 2010), this research concluded:

Spin was identified in the Results and Conclusions sections of the abstracts of 27 (37.5%) and 42 (58.3%) reports, respectively,
with the conclusions of 17 (23.6%) focusing only on treatment effectiveness. Spin was identified in the main-text Results, Discussion, and Conclusions sections of 21 (29.2%), 31 (43.1%), and 36 (50.0%) reports, respectively. More than 40% of the reports had spin in at least 2 of these sections in the main text. The conclusion was that in this representative sample of RCTs published in 2006 with statistically nonsignificant primary outcomes, the reporting and interpretation of findings were frequently inconsistent with the results.

Varieties of crises of faith in governance (B)

Faith in administration, project management and budgetary processes: Populations are variously exposed on a daily basis to the inefficiencies, absurdities and corruption of administration with respect to which they are totally disempowered. Major projects initiated by government, on the basis of supposedly precise budgets, are typically characterized by massive cost overruns. Some significant projects, notably involving computer or other technologies, are so poorly designed that they have to be abandoned.

Quite remarkable, at the European level, is the volume of revenue and expenditure subject to audit by the European Court of Auditors represents approximately 4-5% of the total budgets of all the Member States. About 5% of the entire EU budget, five billion dollars, is lost to straightforward fraud -- from non-existent tobacco farms to imaginary decontamination plans to help deal with Chernobyl -- while another 5% or so is misappropriated, and not spent on the programs for which it was designated. One-tenth of the Union's budget, which the European Court of Auditors accepts is misspent, amounts to almost 10 billion dollars a year. The significance of such amounts is compounded by the fact that for 12 years the European Union's auditors have refused to endorse the spending of large parts of the EU budget -- funded by citizen taxpayers (Stephen Mulvey, Why the EU's audit is bad news, BBC, 24 October 2006). The European Commission, under Jacques Santer, was forced to resign in 1999 following allegations of a pattern of corruption.

Faith in statistics: There are many anecdotal tales of problematic statistics. With the advent of professionalized news management ("spin"), concerns have been articulated regarding the official "massaging" of statistics to promote or deprecate a particular policy. It has become quite unclear in what statistics it is prudent to have confidence. As a striking example, in 2003 the European Commission was faced with allegations regarding corruption in its statistical agency (Eurostat) raising the interesting question as to whether vested interests, including some member states, were involved in massaging real European data into imaginary forecasts on which policies had then been "authoritatively" based. A somewhat analogous situation pertains in relation to some cases of scientific fraud and the deliberate marginalization of disruptive new evidence. Related examples are also noted in the case of "evidence-based" medical research on statistical samples of questionable significance.

Faith in democratic and due processes: Highly publicized examples of problematic electoral processes have called into question exactly what they signify. The example provided by the USA as the purported model of democracy has been salutary, notably in the light of unresolved issues of: dubious vote rigging, problematic electronic voting machines, and the number of lawyers required to ensure that abuse can be affirmed not to have taken place. Erosion of faith in the process is manifest in the progressive diminution in the participation of the electorate in the elections to the European Parliament. Most striking has been the incapacity of the European Commission to understand the "No" vote of the people of Ireland regarding the Lisbon Reform Treaty -- requiring Ireland to vote again "until they get it right".

It remains completely unclear whether supposedly democratic institutions can respond effectively to massive electorates with a huge range of concerns, given the challenges of communication and information overload (Considering All the Strategic Options: whilst ignoring alternatives and declaring cognitive protectionism, 2009). The "10,000 lobbyists" associated with European Commission decision-making may be considered as signifying a pattern of systematic distortion in support of particular agendas: no lobbyist, no consideration of the perspective of a constituency. With respect to constraints on due process, the account of Heather Brooke (Unsung hero, The Guardian, 15 May 2009) regarding the 5 years of investigative journalism required to obtain release of details of the expenses of UK MPs is indicative of the general problem.

The parliamentary system at its best is characterized by the following problems as articulated by the first Green member of the UK Parliament, Caroline Lucas (Pushing the Green alternatives, The Guardian, 9 September 2010):

This adversarial system impacts on everything from the membership of select committees to the selection of amendments for debate. Everything is decided in a mysterious, opaque fashion. At first sight, it seems so laborious for any outsider, or novice, to understand - or influence - because parliament is so steeped in tradition and pomp. But the reality is that parliament is this way for a reason: it keeps power in the hands of the few. The main parties don't want smaller parties to make use of the powers of the institution, whether to legislate or scrutinise the government.

Faith in system of justice: Those having close association with the system of justice tend to lose faith in the possibility of a fair trial. This is notably the case when it is so clearly evident that the ability to hire a larger team of lawyers. or to ensure the exertion of political influence on the judiciary, can totally distort the outcome -- even in those countries that pride themselves on the independence of the judiciary. The case-load of courts (often to be measured in years), significant to fair trial, constitutes a further distortion of the system. The highly publicized instances of miscarriages of justice arouse the suspicion that, in addition to failing to convict those who negotiate impunity, there are many more who have been inappropriately or arbitrarily convicted. The situation in Guantanamo Bay has reinforced this conviction worldwide -- together with the release without trial or conviction of those detained under anti-terrorism provisions.

The issue is the focus of current debate in the UK with regard to superinjunctions, a form of legal gagging order in which the press is prohibited from reporting even the existence of any such injunction, or any details of it (James Robinson, How super-injunctions are used to gag investigative reporting, The Guardian, 13 October 2009). Who could prove that such legal provisions (notably including the DA-
**Faith in human rights:** "Human rights" are widely promoted and upheld by government, notably in defence of a civilization purportedly under threat from other civilizations that do not subscribe to "universal" values. However massive contradictions are increasingly evident in the neglected condition of many, even in the countries upholding such values -- especially in the light of growing income inequality. Such contradictions are most notable in developing countries and the selective importance attached to them by the "international community" (Afghanistan vs Somalia). Arguably "human rights" might be seen as the primary "fig leaf" cynically used to disguise a variety of abuses.

**Faith in politics and Members of Parliament:** Politics, in the eyes of many, has become an exercise in breach of promise -- from those made in electoral manifestos, through inappropriate legislation, to failure of promised initiatives. There are numerous instances of political parties reneging on pledges during their period in government (Coalition reneges on pledge to scrap central NHS database, The Independent, 6 June 2010).

There has long been anecdotal suspicion regarding the behaviour of Members of Parliament and the manner in which they (mis)represent the public. This has notably been reflected in spurious arguments opposing televised coverage of parliamentary debates to increase transparency. A series of variously reported scandals relating to this issue have been reported in connection with Members of the European Parliament, as noted below. Most recently this has been evident in a major scandal -- threatening the credibility of the whole political process -- involving the systematic abuse of expenses by Members of Parliament in the so-called "Mother of Parliaments" of the UK. This had been preceded by evidence regarding payments made to peers in the House of Lords to influence legislation in support of special interests. More generally criticisms had been made of the process by which MPs received "cash for questions" from interest groups. Whilst erosion of faith has been given a focus by such highly publicized incidents, these can only serve to increase suspicion that members of any parliament are open to some form of bribery that may be far more difficult to detect. Allegations have for example been made that no major policy decision is taken by the EU that is not influenced in this way -- reflecting the culture of "commissions" that has notably been highlighted and condemned by the OECD.

Mikhail Gorbachev (The Berlin wall had to fall, but today's world is no fairer, The Guardian, 30 October 2009) makes the point that:

> Clear proof of the irrational behaviour and irresponsibility of the new generation of politicians is the fact that defence spending by numerous countries, large and small alike, is now greater than during the cold war, and strong-arm tactics are once again the standard way of dealing with conflicts and are a common feature of international relations.

Further concerns are now being expressed regarding the complicity between lobbyists and lawmakers. As noted by Dan Eggen (Report: More Than 1,400 Former Lawmakers, Hill Staffers Are Financial Lobbyists, Washington Post, 4 June, 2010): More than 1,400 former members of Congress, Capitol Hill staffers or federal employees registered as lobbyists on behalf of the financial services sector since the start of 2009, according to an exhaustive new study issued. An equivalent situation as been noted with respect to the "Mother of Parliaments" in the UK, where some 15% of new Conservative and Labour MPs came from lobbying backgrounds according to research by an anti-spin campaigning group (Polly Curtis, MPs' links to lobbyists a concern, says anti-spin group, The Guardian, 4 June 2010).

**Faith in the diplomatic corps:** Traditionally the diplomatic corps, especially in the form national ambassadors, has been upheld as a focus of respectability and trustworthiness, a refuge for nationals in distress. As has become increasingly apparent, in their defence of national interests, the diplomatic corps has become a disguise for various forms of subterfuge and espionage -- using its honourability to inhibit any challenge to what is not otherwise formally protected by diplomatic immunity. Given the tax-free benefits associated with that community, there is considerable anecdotal evidence of the abuse of the "diplomatic bag" -- effectively constituting a model for the behaviour within intergovernmental agencies benefitting from similar immunity, and thus for members of any parliament. Aside from immunity in relation to crimes committed, at its most trivial this is notably evident in the publicized abuse of parking infractions (as in London and New York) -- readily considered as symptomatic of an attitude conducive to other forms of abuse.

**Faith in the "international community":** Appeals are frequently made to the "international community". This is a vague term implying a degree of coherence amongst various clusters of countries, even the majority of them, and/or the major international institutions through which they are represented. It is typically implied that this undefined community recognizes common obligations and upholds common values. Appeals to this community are typically made by those suffering from a repressive regime or in danger of being overwhelmed by an external force or some natural disaster. They may also be led by leaders on behalf of the oppressed by those unwilling to act themselves but seeking to position themselves as worthy of confidence. Given the nature of the minimalistic response of this amorphous community to such appeals, it is readily understandable that there is little faith in the capacity of any such "community" to act promptly, whether or not token responses are subsequently made by particular countries or agencies.

**Faith in pledges of development aid and debt relief:** Whether they are made by national leaders as part of the political process, by the "international community", or by intergovernmental bodies, it has become clear that such pledges are typically made as public relations gestures with very little intention of fulfilling the implied commitment. Pledges and promises are easily made, they have no status in law - even by comparison with a promise of marriage which may be subject to legal redress if breached in some jurisdictions. A recent flagrant example is noted by Larry Elliott (G8 summit communiqué drops Gleneagles pledge on aid to Africa, The Guardian, 4 June 2010):

> The west's seven richest countries are planning to abandon a pledge to double aid to the poorest countries in Africa by this year, the Guardian has learned. A leaked draft communiqué for this month's Canadian-hosted Muskoka summit contains no mention of the commitment made at the 2005 Gleneagles Summit to provide an extra $25bn (£17bn) a year for Africa as part of a $50bn increase in financial assistance.
The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight international development goals that all 192 United Nations member states and at least 23 international organizations have agreed to achieve by the year 2015. They derive from earlier international development targets, and were officially established at the Millennium Summit in 2000, where all world leaders present adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration, from which the eight goals were promoted. After 10 years the lack of progress was the focus of an EU statement (Getting the Millennium Development Goals back on track: a twelve points EU action plan, Brussels, 21 April 2010).

The characteristic failure to honour government pledges made with much publicity is illustrated by the fact that six months after the disaster that killed 220,000 people and left more than 1.5 million homeless, only $506m of $5.3bn raised at an international donors’ conference in March 2010 has been handed over, according to the United Nations Development Programme. (Richard Luscombe, Bill Clinton gets tough as donors fail to honour $5bn Haiti pledge, The Guardian, 15 July 2010).

Faith in multinational corporations: Despite the social, economic and environmental problems engendered by such corporations, repeatedly highlighted through the World Social Forum, for example, they have long been seen as a key to development. As such their role has notably been promoted with respect to the hopes associated with the globalization agenda, notably by the World Economic Forum. Indeed it was in that context that the UN Global Compact framework was announced in 1999 as a means of encouraging “corporate social responsibility”. The continuing irresponsibility of many corporations has effectively been dramatically highlighted by the financial crisis and the problematic implications of the globalization agenda. The impact of the economic consequences, with massive layoffs, notably of long-term employees, has highlighted the lack of social responsibility. It has also become apparent that many supposedly “socially responsible” corporations have been highly successful in avoiding payment of tax, as documented in the case of the UK, for example (Firms’ secret tax avoidance schemes cost UK billions, The Guardian, 2 February 2009). After a lengthy period of denial and problematic diplomacy, further attention has been drawn to the challenge by the final admission of corporate bribery by BAE Systems, a British arms maker having considerable support from the UK government (BAE to pay $400m fine over conspiracy charge, New Statesman, 2 March 2010).

Faith in technology: There is increasing recognition of the risks associated with dependence on technology, notably when proposed by multinational corporations, and especially when the possibility of such risks is minimized in enthusiastic proposals for use of new technologies to counteract old and emerging problems. There are many examples of the failure of major projects (such as large dams) in which environmental and other risks have been neglected. Such risks are central to the debate on the use of nuclear power, given the possibility of nuclear accidents and the extremely long radioactive half-lives of nuclear waste products and the challenge of their disposal. Examples are evident in major (nation-wide) computer facilities, notably in support of governance. A striking example has been provided by the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill (2010), especially in the light of the negligence and cost-cutting which is alleged to have resulted in the disaster -- factors which have drawn attention to the manner in which regulatory oversight by government agencies has been waived in practice by the Minerals Management Service (MMS), an agency of the United States Department of the Interior charged with the management of the renewable energy, oil and gas, and mineral resources. Enthusiastic proposals in the pipeline for geoengineering remedies to global warming are usefully seen in this light.

The questionable credibility of technocrats is illustrated by the fact that the director of the film Avatar (2009), James Cameron, is being officially consulted on the Deepwater Horizon Oil disaster, as variously reported by Marina Hyde (Only the captain of the Titanic can save us now / James Cameron: can the king of the world save us all? The Guardian, 3 June 2010). But as Hyde concludes: But if James Cameron and Kevin Costner are among our best answers, one can’t help feeling the relevant authorities were asking the wrong questions at some crucial point earlier in the process. In what other domains might this conclusion currently apply?

Faith in business: Especially as a consequence of the financial crisis of 2008-2009, the question of the inequalities engendered by current business practice have become a focus of attention. As noted by Charles Tilley (For fair pay, see Plato: the bonus culture has fostered mistrust in business, The Guardian, 3 June 2010):

Plato said the income of the highest paid in society should never amount to more than five times that of the lowest paid... The chief executives of the UK’s 100 largest companies overall earned 81 times the average pay of full-time workers in 2009, against a ratio of just 47 nine years earlier.... It is, of course, in banking that the scale of rewards has become most out of kilter...

My worry is that scepticism about the world of high finance is spilling over into other sectors: the public is questioning the very nature of business and its benefits for the wider community. Why, the public will ask, should we continue to support a business structure where bosses simply see the aim as enriching themselves, with little regard for the environment or society generally? The public is also starting to grasp that the misalignment of bonuses with corporate strategies is threatening businesses’s very survival.

Faith in collective intelligence: Irrespective of the challenge faced by national intelligence services focused on the defensive security of their country, it is appropriate also to recognize the progressive erosion of faith in collective intelligence as represented by scholarly, religious, political or activist constituencies and their leaders. The rudiments of such intelligence are to be found in the many international gatherings deliberately assembling such people. Institutions may partially formalize them in occasional “Councils of the Wise”. Particular examples include the InterAction Council of Former Heads of State and Government, or the Global Elders. Despite such efforts over past decades, it is unclear that the insights of such gatherings transcend the limitations of their participants and the backgrounds they represent. People have rightly lost faith in the emergence of collective wisdom, irrespective of the wisdom of the individuals gathered together in this way. Efforts to enable higher orders of collective intelligence through innovative software and facilitation have not as yet proven to be fruitful or relevant to current challenges (Enabling Collective Intelligence in Response to Emergencies, 2010).

Faith in leadership: Much is made of the potential role of leadership in the face of a challenging future. Great hopes are projected on to each new leader emerging through various processes. Characteristically however, there is widespread recognition of the demonstrable
inadequacies of such leaders, whether in terms of their duplicity, the repressive measures they introduce or condone, or their failure to respond to the needs of those who place most hope in them. Symptomatic of the inadequacies of leaders as exemplars have been their double standards, notably with regard to complicity in dubious financial dealings, their sexual proclivities, or their abuse of power. Any erosion of faith is naturally aggravated when these phenomena are only too evident amongst the leadership assembled at G8 summits, represented in the UN Security Council or heading UN Specialized Agencies.

*Faith in internet and web services:* Wide publicity has been given to breaches of privacy by Facebook and by Google which has caused the European Union (EU) to seek stronger privacy rules to give internet users more control over how social-networking sites or search engines use their personal information (Justyna Pawlak, *Google, Facebook to face tougher EU privacy rules*, Reuters, 4 November 2010):

- **Facebook:** The social networking facility's privacy policies have been an issue, and the safety of their users has been compromised several times. Claims have been made that Facebook collects data from affiliate sites even when the user opts out and even when not logged into the Facebook site -- contrary to public claims and policy statements (Stefan Berteau, *Facebook’s Misrepresentation of Beacon’s Threat to Privacy: tracking users who opt out or are not logged in*. CA Security Advisor Research Blog, 29 November 2007). Many of its most popular applications, have been transmitting identifying information, in effect, providing access to people's names and, in some cases, their friends' names, to dozens of advertising and internet tracking companies (Emily Steel and Geoffrey A. Fowler, *Facebook in Privacy Breach, The Wall Street Journal*, 18 October 2010).

- **Google:** Several countries have questioned the invasion of individual privacy by Google's street cameras collecting personal data, including full emails and passwords from unsuspecting internet users and from unencrypted wireless networks (Josh Halliday, *Google committed 'significant breach' over Street View, The Guardian*, 3 November 2010; *Google 'taken by surprise' by Street View row*, *The Guardian*, 26 October 2010). In apologizing, the internet giant claimed that this had been done inadvertently, adding that it had no use for the data, had never used any of it in its products or services, and was seeking to delete it as quickly as possible.

It is an unfortunate coincidence that the rise to worldwide dominance of Google from 1996 coincided with the demise of the US government funded Total Information Awareness program (defunded by Congress in 2003), following public criticism of its development and deployment of technologies that could potentially lead to a mass surveillance system. However, several associated projects continued thereafter to be funded under different names. Google moved to its current offices in 2003 after outgrowing two other locations. Similarly unfortunate is the coincidental growth of Facebook from 2003–4. It is unclear how it could be proven that data inadvertently collected had in fact been deleted rather than copied elsewhere. Would the US government bother to deny that it had access to the data of such US corporations under some Homeland Security provisions? Who would believe otherwise? Why does the FBI request "backdoors" only now? (Charlie Savage, *F.B.I. Seeks Wider Wiretap Law for Web*, *The New York Times*, 16 November 2010).

*Comparability of cases*

This is written in the aftermath of the financial crisis, with governments forced to respond to the economic consequences, notably in the form of bankruptcies, unforeseen falls in GDP, and extraordinary levels of unemployment -- all of which are expected to continue. In the case of the UK, however, the focus on these matters has been completely obscured by the crisis regarding abuse of the system of expenses by Members of Parliament.

What is most curious is that the language explaining the abuses within the banking system, which led to the financial crisis, has many similarities to the language used to explain the abuses by Members of Parliament. Both resulted in a massive loss of public confidence in institutional systems considered to epitomize trustworthiness.

- **system:** responsibility for these crises (in both cases) is mainly held to be that of a "system", whether in their respective regulatory failures, or the inadequacy of the rules
- **natural disaster:** the crisis, notably in the case of the financial crisis, is depersonalized by use of meteorological metaphors: "hurricane", "storm", etc so as to benefit from a framing as a "natural disaster", even implying an "Act of God" (for those of religious disposition), consequently beyond any human responsibility (an ironic strategy with regard to collapse of a financial bubble when a major policy issue is "global warming" and the storms it is likely to engender, as a consequence of human activity)
- **culture:** emphasis is placed (in both cases) on the emergence of a regrettable "culture", the "bonus culture" in one case, and a laissez-faire tendency to charge any conceivable expenses in the other -- the role of greed is emphasized in commentaries on both
- **self-regulation:** arguments had long been made in both cases in support of their self-regulatory capacity -- with the added implication of the inherent trustworthiness of those in the banking system or those in the Houses of Parliament, whose Members are entitled to be addressed as "Honourable Members" (a privilege now challenged)
- **exemplars:** in addition to the assumed trustworthiness of the institutional systems, those involved had long been upheld as exemplars of trustworthiness (recognized by awards, etc) and involved as such in leading roles in prestigious societies (business circles, churches, synagogues, freemasons, etc), possibly as women or "men of faith" -- worthy of every admiration. The case of Bernard Madoff has been salutary in this respect.

But although the language concerning the crises is very similar, and those using such language may well be the same (such as UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown), no mention is made of the degree of comparability of such cases. They are barely mentioned in the same context. No mention is made of the fact that it was those in the UK Houses of Parliament who had effectively cast a blind eye on the potential problems of the financial system prior to the crisis and then were intimately involved in remedial policy-making in its immediate aftermath -- prior to emergence of their expenses crisis.

Potentially more curious, at the time of writing -- just prior to the election of European Members of Parliament (MEPs) -- is that there is no implication that a similar situation might obtain in the European Parliament or in the European Commission itself (as mentioned above).
In the latter cases there is a long track record of anecdotal criticism of perks, abuses and absenteeism, and of the extent to which decision-making may be influenced through the "10,000 lobbyists" -- whose business it is to exert such influence by any means possible. Not to be forgotten is that the European Commission was forced to resign in its entirety in 1999, as noted, because of such abuse. There has been a massive lack of transparency with regard to perks accorded in both cases -- funded by the taxpayer. Most curiously, much publicity was given to problematic submission of expenses by the MEPs prior to the current revelations in the UK (David Charter, MEPs 'expenses abuse' hushed up by Brussels, The Times, 21 February 2008). This gave rise to no questions at that time with respect to any equivalent problem in the UK.

As with the case of the Catholic clergy, evident abuses in the cases of the financial system and of parliamentary expenses, are treated as total exceptions. Isolated scapegoats may be suitably identified. Although it is claimed that it is "the system" that is at fault, the question of the extent to which the abuses are to be considered "systemic" is not addressed -- nor the responsibility for the complicity in sustaining such a system without question. Curiously it might be said that those on whose watch such abuses occurred have been rewarded -- financially in the case of the financial crisis and by canonisation in the Catholic case.

What is increasingly striking is the increase in public anger and social unrest as a result of these breaches of confidence. Curiously, given the trivial amounts involved in the abuses by Members of Parliament, is the degree of anger to which these abuses have given rise in the UK, exceeding by far that associated with the "ill-gotten" gains of the beneficiaries of the financial crisis and the associated bailouts. Both of course are to be paid by the taxpayer.

**Evidence management to avoid challenge and change**

A curious situation has emerged in which it has become increasingly evident the degree to which those in authority seek to manage evidence -- whilst claiming to act with the highest integrity which it is insulting to question.

- **Marketing**: It is understandable that evidence questioning claims made about a product should be minimized or shown (authoritatively) to be invalid. This approach is associated with the same mindset that solicits positive endorsements (for a fee), whether from celebrities or from academic authorities. It is difficult to challenge any such claims. Ben Goldacre offers examples:
  - Newly released information regarding deliberate infection with sexual diseases by the US of asylum inmates in the 1940s -- raising questions about participation in medical trials today (The unacceptable face of medical research, The Guardian, 23 October 2010)
  - Pharmaceutical company settlement of claims for compensation for misleading the public (Drug firms hiding negative research are unfit to experiment on people, The Guardian, 14 August 2010)
  - Even those carrying out formal academic research are guilty of twisting scientific facts to suit their purposes (Don't like your findings? Spin them away, The Guardian, 24 July 2010)

- **Government policy**: Policies are readily formulated with the full weight of authorities, suitably selected for their willingness to offer weighty arguments in support of such initiatives. Unfortunately this follows the same pattern as with respect to the endorsement by authorities of products for sale, with little capacity to question the integrity of those doing so. More extraordinary, however, is the contrast between the "evidence" sought and offered in the marketing case compared to that sought and offered in formulating government policy. An excellent example is provided by claims by the pharmaceutical industry and government health authorities that there is "no evidence" in support of the health claims for many forms of complementary medicine. However, when it comes to evaluating proposed remedial government policy in many areas of collective welfare, the quality of "evidence" advanced can only be said to be as "inadequate" as in the case of complementary medicine -- by the standards of proof that government considers appropriate with respect to individual health.

- **Religion**: The practice of organized religions to "manage" evidence calling into question any aspects of their activity is well-recognized. This has now been extensively documented in relation to the policies of the Roman Catholic Church in responding to "evidence" regarding sexual abuse by clergy over decades (Geoffrey Robertson, The Case of the Pope: Vatican accountability for human rights abuse, 2010).

- **Science**: As a consequence of the Climategate controversy, attention has again been focused on questionable practices within the scientific community and complicity in protecting those involved over decades. This is extensively documented in relation to scientific fraud and misconduct. It is evident in the practice of funding scientific institutions to prove a political point, rather than requiring objective clarification of the validity of that point in relation to some alternative. Evidence is selectively collected and processed to that end, as notably documented by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway (Merchants of Doubt: how a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming, 2010). The wider community, even when aware of the practice, is effectively complicit in it. A striking example is of course "scientific whaling" and the various procedures comparable to it.

With respect to the climate change issue, the matter has been given sharp focus by the resignation of Harold Lewis from the American Physical Society ("A Physicist's Climate Complaints", interview by Andrew Revkin, New York Times, 15 October 2010; Climate change 'fraud' letter: a Martin Luther moment in science history, an editorial by Anthony Watts, Christian Science Monitor, 19 October 2010). The resemblances to the behaviour of organized religion are all the more striking in that, when fraud is finally demonstrated unequivocally after a period of denial, arguments are then advanced that the system as a whole is self-correcting (Michael Shermer, When Scientists Sin: fraud, deception and lies in research reveal how science is (mostly) self-correcting, Scientific American, 23 June 2010).
**Military/Security**: The exaggeration of supportive "evidence" for security threats was well-recognized during the Cold War. This has been widely documented in the case of the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (Jamie Doward, *Iraq war inquiry: former UN expert accuses Whitehall of cover-up*, The Observer, 25 July 2010). It is now a characteristic of evaluation of threat levels associated with terrorism. It has now been recognized in efforts to escalate inappropriately fears of terrorism, reported as "nonsensical" by European intelligence services -- with non-specific US warnings, which despite their vagueness led Britain, France and other countries to raise their overseas terror alert levels (Simon Tisdall and Richard Norton-Taylor, *Barack Obama accused of exaggerating terror threat for political gain*, The Guardian, 7 October 2010; *British intelligence denies US terror warnings sparked by new info*, The Guardian, 3 October 2010). This was understood to be a politically motivated attempt to justify a recent escalation in US drone and helicopter attacks.

The secret Iraq war logs released by WikiLeaks reveal the extent of previously unlisted civilian deaths, and denial of violent abuses by the military and by security contractors:

-- Robert Fisk, *Torture, killing, children shot - and how the US tried to keep it all quiet*, The Independent, 24 October 2010

Curiously, if not cynically, the claim is made that release of such information places the lives of coalition forces at risk (Amy Fallon, *Iraq war logs: disclosure condemned by Hillary Clinton and Nato*, The Guardian, 22 October 2010). There is no reference to the lives of civilians already terminated in secret in that arena by those forces. Presumably the price is acceptable as notoriously declared by Madeleine Albright's response, as US Secretary of State, to a query as to whether the death of 500,000 Iraqi children was justified in order to further US policy (60 Minutes, 12 May 1996). She indicated: "the price is worth it" -- an attitude that has been the subject of commentary in relation to the 9/11 attacks. For 9/11 conspiracy theories, that attitude would be consistent with the argument that the attacks were either intentionally allowed to happen or were a false flag operation orchestrated by an organization with elements inside the United States government.

As noted by Simon Jenkins (*A History of Folly -- from the Trojan horse to Afghanistan*, The Guardian, 22 October 2010):

> By recording failure in meticulous detail, the logs mock the moral basis for so-called wars among the peoples. Like Vietnam's TV images, they leave the Iraq and Afghan conflicts as bloodthirsty killing fields, devoid of rational justification. The war logs are not so much sensational as relentless. Most of the material was known. It is the detail that bears devastating witness. Afghanistan 2001 now enters firmly into the pantheon of folly, from the wooden horse to Napoleon in Moscow to Vietnam. Indeed it bears the added crassness of coming two decades after the Russians committed the exact same folly in the same place.

In 1971 the Pentagon papers revealed the deception of the Johnson and Nixon governments during the Vietnam war. The papers were credited with collapsing US morale as the war drew to a close. The Afghanistan logs convey a different message. They show George Bush, Tony Blair and their generals to be so dazzled by their massive military (and intellectual) firepower that they thought they were invincible against a tinpot Taliban.... Like puppets dancing to manufactured fears and dreams of glory, these leaders have lost their grip on Plato's "sacred golden cord of reason". Until that grip is restored, the folly revealed by the war logs will continue.

It is unfortunate that policy in relation to security, notably the threat of terrorism, is now completely unable (or unwilling) to offer any credible proof of such threats -- by the conventional standards of proof demanded in other contexts (notably with respect to pharmaceutical remedies). The approach taken is either to claim the need for secrecy as a protection for national security and (secret) exchange agreements with other security forces or to claim that incidents are incontrovertible evidence of such threats. Whether those incidents have been fabricated for that purpose, as false flag operations, cannot be proven and is not raised as a credible question. A highly questionable recent sequence of events is offered by the coincidence of the following:

3 October 2010: US State Department issued an alert stating: "current information suggests that al-Qaeda and affiliated organisations continue to plan terrorist attacks". It warned American citizens to take safety measures when travelling in Europe, particularly on public transport or at tourist sites.

7 October 2010: A US terror alert issued this week about al-Qaeda plots to attack targets in western Europe was politically motivated and not based on credible new information, according to senior Pakistani diplomats and European intelligence (Barack Obama accused of exaggerating terror threat for political gain, The Guardian, 7 October 2010).

14 October 2010: Terror alert defended despite lack of evidence (US state department defends Europe-wide terror alert, The Guardian, 14 October 2010). The hardcopy version of the article was titled US knew of no specific plot to justify October terror warning -- only indicated in the body of the online version.

27 October 2010: The UK's largest airport owner has backed calls for an overhaul of Britain's aviation security regime after the chairman of British Airways attacked "redundant" anti-terror measures (BAA backs call to end 'redundant' airport security checks, The Guardian, 27 October 2010).

29 October 2010: Suspicious package detected on cargo plane from Yemen to the USA (Terror alert: how the hunt for the packages unfolded, The Guardian, 29 October 2010; Bomb plot highlights differences between US and UK cargo...
The outcome of such abuse is well highlighted by the crisis over the Iranian scandal. This assumption is very shaky. This might also be said of the various inquiries into alleged abuses by scientists associated with the "business-as-usual" mindset of those that they have the benefit of the doubt and becomes how the credibility of professional complicity, challenge to honourability, loss of credibility.

A new situation arises when incontrovertible proof of abuse is presented and documented by the many documented miscarriages of justice are typically due to the (mis)treatment of evidence, as extensively documented by Gareth Peirce (Dispatches from the Dark Side: on torture and the death of justice, 2011) Justice: The many documented miscarriages of justice are typically due to the (mis)treatment of evidence, as extensively documented by Gareth Peirce (Dispatches from the Dark Side: on torture and the death of justice, 2011)

Professional complicity, challenge to honourability, loss of credibility

It is of course the case that abuse is occasionally to be expected in every domain. Matters become more complex when those aware of it fail to draw attention to it, or to call for appropriate constraints on it -- possibly feeling impelled by collegial loyalty to practice some form of professional omerta.

But the complexity increases when others draw attention to the presence of that abuse -- implying that there is some degree of complicity by those not directly involved. Those implicated in this way then frame such accusations as inappropriately impugning their personal and professional honour -- possibly to be considered as insulting in the extreme. The accusations are treated as ridiculous. Each of the above provides examples of this. That of the previously distinguished members of the financial community is one of the most recent examples, notably the negligent response of the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to the evidence produced over years regarding the practices of Bernard Madoff. The treatment of evidence of abuse by the Catholic Church offers another.

A new situation arises when incontrovertible proof of abuse is presented and a degree of abuse is widely recognized. The question then becomes how the credibility of any pronouncement by authorities in the domain is to be assessed. Those authorities continue to assume that they have the benefit of the doubt and that, fundamentally, their good faith is not in question. The aftermath of the financial crisis (and the "business-as-usual" mindset of those complicit in engendering it), and that over political expenses (in the UK), show that this assumption is very shaky. This might also be said of the various inquiries into alleged abuses by scientists associated with the Climategate scandal.

The outcome of such abuse is well highlighted by the crisis over the Iranian elections of 2009. The highest Iranian authorities blame...
"foreign influence", notably agents of the UK. This is of course vigorously denied. The difficulty is that "vigorous denial" is now "standard operating procedure", as was evident in relation to complicity of European countries in rendition. The key question then becomes whether it is possible to distinguish between:

- a situation where there is **indeed no involvement**, despite there having been a pattern of such abuse in the past (as with the now proven complicity of the UK Government in "enhanced interrogation"). Clearly vigorous denial would be appropriate, but would naturally be suspect. How naive and gullible are people expected to be?
- a situation where there is **indeed such involvement**, possibly in conformity of a pattern of past abuse. Clearly vigorous denial would be attempted as part of "standard operating procedure". Why should it be assumed that the Iranian authorities were misrepresenting the situation? On the other hand, why would they not?

**Authorities are now in the very problematic situation that if they have the power of misrepresentation, it becomes impossible for them to prove that they are not using it as a means of concealing abuse.** This becomes even more evident with the appointment of so-called "independent" commissions of inquiry -- whose mandates and composition are carefully "gerrymandered" to fabricate the desirable authentication of the authoritative position desired. Unfortunately authorities are no longer in a position to demonstrate that this is not the case. The so-called "cloak of authority" is readily confused with the ability of authority to "cloak" its actions and agendas -- as implied by so-called "stealth" technology. Unfortunately one method of cloaking is the abuse of the highest values, through the intimate association of authority with such values. Any challenge to authoritative pronouncements can be then be treated as a totally inappropriate challenge to those values. Honour is then held to have been impugned as previously discussed (*Honour Essential to Psycho-social Integrity: challenge to the nameless of dishonourable leadership, 2005*).

Worse still is that it is becoming a legitimate simple question how much it would cost (in financial or other terms) to undermine the most honourable, credible, independent authority -- and whether that expenditure has been considered and paid in any particular instance. It has become "scientifically" impossible to prove that this has not been done. If Assertion A is rejected as false or misguided by Assertion B, appeal to authority to adjudicate can no longer be proven to give rise to an unquestionable resolution of the matter.

Uncertainty regarding any degree of abuse is exacerbated by the nature of any condemnation arising from such adjudication -- commonly characterized as a "slap on the wrist". There is an increasing sense that authorities are complicit in a culture of impunity when obliged to respond to flagrant abuse by those with authority. This is most evident in the response to documented violence by police, security services and the military, as strikingly demonstrated by inquiries into police violence against demonstrators at G8/G20 summits (*Genoa, 2001; London, 2009*), complicity in torture, and civilian deaths resulting from military action (notably in Iraq and Afghanistan).

Curiously the misinformation in which so many were complicit in relation to the financial crisis of 2008 provides a valuable metaphor through which to comprehend the loss of credibility and trust from which authorities now suffer. In a sense authorities are no longer able to prove that they are not trading in "toxic" assets -- now in the form of information. They are trapped in trading in dubious "derivatives" -- whether or not this should also be considered as an indicator derivative thinking.

It is of course the case, as in finance, that trading in such dubious information may offer higher yields -- as with speculative high-yield debt or so-called junk bonds. Whereas authorities may assume that there honourability is such that their "word is their bond" -- and should be treated as such -- the situation is increasingly one in which such "bonds" should (with some probability) be considered to be "junk". The financial crisis has usefully highlighted the various aspects of this. The crisis in the "confidence" in which the financial community dealt, and on which it depended, is now evident more generally in relation to all authorities.

As discussed separately, authorities are now permanently trapped between the conditions described by the *Emporer's New Clothes* and the *Boy Who Cried Wolf* (*Entangled Tales of Memetic Disaster: mutual implication of the Emperor and the little Boy, 2009*). The Emperor's "clothes" are then to be understood as the Emperor's "cloak".

**Irresponsibility -- whilst obeying rules and orders**

The "system" in question in each case is necessarily associated with some form of "rules", whether articulated as laws, rules, or orders of superiors. In the disastrous loss of faith in the cases cited above, the most frequent exculpatory claim has been that the individual was not infringing such rules. It is worth distinguishing such claims:

"**Within the law**: The argument in this case is that the action was not illegal and no evidence could be advanced that it was infringing any law. This has been a powerful argument in the case of the sale of toxic assets and in persuading buyers to engage in contracts where there was a significance risk of inability to pay. It has not been possible to demonstrate that this infringed any laws relating to fraudulent trading practices, mis-selling, or misleading advertising. In a further irony, those responsible for such actions have been rewarded richly according to the provisions of the obligations of the contracts signed with them (as legal documents)

"**Within the rules**: Where regulatory provisions had been established, whatever the degree or formality of their articulation, again it has not been possible to demonstrate that any but isolated cases constituted infringement of such rules. Remarkably however, reference is now being made to infringement of the "spirit" of the rules, whatever the respect accorded to the "letter" of the rules. However, whilst this may now be held to justify opprobrium from those on higher moral ground, it is not a cause for any action against the individual.

"**Obeying orders**: Within the banking system, traders have claimed that they had received orders to engage in potentially rewarding high risk trades and were awarded bonuses according to their success. Interestingly this is held to be the justification for not prosecuting those who engaged in "enhanced interrogation" (aka torture) on behalf of the US intelligence services. There is no suggestion that those who ordered the traders to take such risks should be formally sanctioned in any way since they can argue that they were acting "within the law" or "within the rules". The question of whether those ordering the torture can be held criminally responsible is still under review
The challenge to comprehension: gullibility or through calculated self-interest? The famous tale of the Emperor's New Clothes comes to mind as a succinct illustration of the challenge to comprehension:

- The role of the "tailors" is clearly taken up by those who designed, packaged and consciously sold the problematic assets -- possibly to be understood as including those who gave legitimacy to that role, such as those gathering at the World Economic Forum. They are notably not subject to any form of prosecution or censure.
- The role of the engaged audience is clearly taken up by the gullible public purchasing those assets, whether directly or indirectly.
- Perhaps a role not specified in the tale might be added in the form of the fashion critics expressing enthusiasm for the quality of cloth and the design of the garment worn by the Emperor as he paraded before them all. Would these be the financial journalists and the economic experts of international financial institutions -- with perhaps the IMF and the World Bank as "leading fashion houses" in the metaphor? Or should the World Economic Forum be seen in this light?

As many commentators have remarked with regard to the financial crisis, there has been a degree of complicity on the part of major institutions in what can only be said to be a confidence trick -- a massive Ponzi scheme of historically unprecedented proportions. What has yet to be clarified is the extent to which promotion of "development" and "growth" is a feature of the process whereby this Ponzi scheme was sustained. Perhaps most ironically, "sustainable development" is in some measure to be seen as a process of sustaining the Ponzi scheme -- being promoted as such with the greatest cynicism.

There are of course many commentators with contrasting views variously critical or supportive of "development" and "growth" as it has been framed as essential to the process of globalization. Many "developments" can be said to be indicative of the justification of strategies of "growth" and "development". However the promoters of "globalization", notably through the World Economic Forum, are now faced with the consequences of that commitment as a result of the financial crisis. It is quite unclear how to avoid "throwing the baby out with the bathwater" given the interplay of vested interests all very challenged with respect to their objectivity.

Especially interesting is the difficulty in distinguishing between widespread efforts to "rebuild confidence" in the financial system and efforts made to rebuild the abuse of confidence associated with a lucrative Ponzi scheme. Many of those who might be expected to comment insightfully on the matter are precisely those who have been complicit in sustaining the abuse of faith over the past decades. Of particular interest is the degree of complicity of institutions furnishing the expertise to sustain any such abuse of confidence. An embarrassing example is the case of the schools of management and business, many considered prestigious to the highest degree -- in which the culture of greed was cultivated and the ambitions associated with it were lauded. Indeed to what extent are business schools' MBA courses responsible for the global financial crash, as explored by Peter Walker (Who taught them greed is good? The Observer, 8 March 2009)?

But what exactly is the nature of this culture or bubble of confidence in which so many were complicit -- whether through naive gullibility or through calculated self-interest? The Emperor's New Clothes is in some measure to be seen as a process of sustaining the Ponzi scheme -- being promoted as such with the greatest cynicism. The Blair Years (2010) and Peter Mandelson (The Third Man: Life at the Heart of New Labour, 2010) and Alastair Campbell (The Blair Years, 2007). In a cautionary comment on the future credibility of political journalism in the light of the latter publications, Mark Lawson (Warning: you are about to be dazzled by a flash minister, The Guardian, 16 July 2010) notes that many reported conversations were in fact charades appealing to the credulous. The accounts confirm long-held belief that the public utterances of politicians are an exercise in dissembling. Lawson argues:

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Much more intriguing however is the role of the Emperor -- and possibly of the Little Boy. The Emperor of the tale is narcissistic in the extreme and full of his self-importance -- necessarily with a judgement assumed to be superior to all. But, within the tale, he it was who was most completely conned by the "tailors". It is of course tempting to attribute this role to the discredited George W. Bush as indeed aspiring to be considered emperor of the world -- whose policies were so discredited by the financial crisis as to significantly influence the election of Barack Obama. Is Bush then to be considered as having been "conned" by the "neocons"? But it would probably be more appropriate to fill the role by a collective, such as members of the G7 Group or even the G20 Group -- then to be understood as completely conned by a process of groupthink enabled by the "tailors". Members of such bodies do indeed have a marked tendency to strut before the court of public opinion at summits of exorbitant cost. Gordon Brown, for example, was remarkable for extolling the marvellous benefits of the globalization process.

The role of the Little Boy is probably well filled by the many marginalized critics -- increasingly disseminating news over the web -- together with the activists gathering at the World Social Forum, for example. Their message in 2009 was a simple "We told you so".

**Misleadership?**

The various forms of abuse of faith indicated above point to a dangerous degree of global misleadership.

Is the role of the Emperor then to be understood as what is loosely termed the leadership of the "international community" (described above)? Does this imply the effective existence of a "misleadership council" of some form, as discussed separately in *Emergence of a Global Misleadership Council: misleading as vital to governance of the future?* (2007) under the following headings:

- Essential ambiguity of leadership and misleadership
- Strategic leadership as essentially a "shell game" with potential opponents, followers and dissidents?
- Avoidance of reference to misleadership
- Unrecognized phenomena?
- Criteria of misleadership
- Exemplars of misleadership
- Framing the interplay of leadership and misleadership
- Framing the interplay of (mis)leadership and (mis)followership
- Humanity's need for great misleadership?
- Appropriate celebration of "misleadership" -- and "misfollowership"?
- Emergence of a Global Misleadership Council?

As noted above, the pattern of "damage limitation" by governance in response to any harder evidence of abuse is to narrow concern onto isolated incidents ("scapegoats") or geographical zones ("Ireland") and to prevent, or avoid, any implication that the abuse may be systemic. The "system" may however be blamed where it may be held to be beyond individual or collective responsibility. This pattern has more dangerous implications. If a problem is identified as worthy of focus by governance, an unsolved question is whether it has been so selected as a form of "scapegoat" to avoid consideration of systemic issues. A simpler problem may then be a surrogate for more complex problems.

A challenge such as "climate change" is a very convenient surrogate. Much of the "blame" may be held to be systemic and an array of token remedial measures may be promoted. Such a framing neatly avoids consideration of the challenge of ever increasing population size -- driving climate change and a whole array of "shortages" that are likely to reach catastrophic proportions long before those of climate change.

An appropriate metaphor to illustrate the challenges of governance is that of bullfighting -- with any system of governance as a group of *toreros* in the bullring faced with the massive force of the bull (namely some concerned public constituency). The art of bullfighting by a *matador* is then appropriately to attract the attention of the bull -- by waving a traditional cape (the "red flag") and irritating it -- to orient it appropriately and exploit the energy of its potentially fatal movements in order to exemplify that skill. The matador, as the principal toreador, is assisted by *picadors* and *banderilleros* -- well-represented in any system of governance. Within this metaphor, the "red flag" is of course any "problem" branded by the matador as the challenge for the bull, to get it moving --(to "mobilize" it) -- stimulated by the picadors and banderilleros. The "contest" continues until the bull is exhausted and is gracefully killed off to general appreciation of the "resolution" of the conflict. Another bull may then be brought in order to continue the pattern. Current controversy over the ethics of bullfighting might be usefully considered as a way of exploring the fate of issues of public concern.

The metaphor might also be instructively reversed in that the challenge for any concerned public constituency -- as a relatively disempowered minority -- is to act as a "matador" faced with the "bull" of all-powerful governance. "Bullfighting" is then the art of asymmetric engagement with governance or its agencies -- until the "bull" is exhausted and can be gracefully terminated without prejudice. A notable example of such a bullfighter at the time of writing has been Joanna Lumley in her vigorous successful encounter with UK government agencies over the issue of Gurkha veterans (Gurkha Justice Campaign). Another excellent example is the continuing capacity of television host Jon Stewart to reframe the "bull" of governance.

**The "unsaid"" -- and the associated twisted logic**

The various forms of abuse of faith noted above flourish best in a context in which many things are left "unsaid". This is currently most evident in the case of the expense abuses of UK Members of Parliament -- which would be trivial were it not apparently so systematic. The extent of such abuse is clearly recognized by the considerable efforts made by some to prevent such information becoming widely available, as noted above.
Heather Brooke, the journalist instrumental in a programme that US officials made that same argument every time there was a potentially embarrassing leak: in the Vietnam War, is sceptical of whether the government really believes that lives are at stake. He told the BBC's World Today:

“If you want to claim to defend universal values and peace in the interests of all, when in fact this is the abuse of faith in governance is the logic of official reaction by the USA:

- the former US ambassador to Russia, James Collins told CNN the disclosure "will impede doing things in a normal, civilised way" that lives are at stake as a result of the silences and the release was described by US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, as an attack not only on the US but on the international community, placing at risk the lives of many people who have communicated with American diplomats. More specifically she indicated:
  - It is an attack on the international community, the alliances and partnerships, the conversations and negotiations that safeguard global security and advance economic prosperity.
  - there is nothing laudable about endangering innocent people, and there is nothing brave about sabotaging peaceful relations between nations on which our common security depends
  - with respect to "endangering innocent people", it is appropriate to note the above-mentioned US policy articulated by Madeleine Albright on ensuring the death of 500,000 Iraqi children, as well as the level of civilian deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the recent decision "gloves off" policy in process of implementation in Afghanistan
  - with respect to "sabotaging peaceful relations between nations", it might be asked when the US has restrained itself from doing so if destabilizing countries and regions was in its interests
  - with respect to "our common security", there is widespread recognition of the manner in which US foreign policy undermines common security -- as previously articulated by Hillary Clinton: You're either with us, or against us
- the White House press secretary, Robert Gibbs, said it was "a criminal act" and that measures would be taken to seek the prosecution of those involved
- the question of course is what exactly is the criminal act, and how to distinguish the criminality and irresponsibility exhibited by WikiLeaks from that exhibited by the US, notably in the espionage operation (authorised by Hillary Clinton) targeting the leadership of the United Nations whose inviolability is protected by international treaties to which the USA adheres; the UN is already investigating to what extent that espionage constitutes a treaty violation
- perhaps most extraordinary in its triviality is her authorisation for the obtaining of biometric information on the UN Secretary-General (including DNA samples) -- is it planned to clone him, to design a disease to which he would be specifically vulnerable, from what sordid imagination does that need arise?
- a senior lawmaker, according to CNN, warns that it could lead to "a catastrophic breakdown of trust between nations."
- the issue is of course the nature of that trust and how it is ensured -- given the behaviours (including "bullying") exhibited by the US cables, of which the security services of many other countries are presumably aware.
- it might be asked to what extent the financial policies promoted within the US and elsewhere, leading to the financial crisis of 2008-2009, were not far more damaging to confidence in the financial system and to relations between nations

The twisted logic lies in the effort by the US to claim to defend universal values and peace in the interests of all, when in fact this is immediately reframed (even unconsciously) as doing what is best for the USA and for its own values. It is considered to be a self-evident truth that universal values are identical with the values of the US -- despite the manner in which it chooses to do business and advance its own interests at the expense of others.

For Daniel Ellsberg, the former military analyst who in 1971 released the Pentagon Papers which detailed government lies and cover-ups in the Vietnam War, is sceptical of whether the government really believes that lives are at stake. He told the BBC's World Today programme that US officials made that same argument every time there was a potentially embarrassing leak:

The best justification they can find for secrecy is that lives are at stake. Actually, lives are at stake as a result of the silences and lies which a lot of these leaks reveal...The same charges were made against the Pentagon Papers and turned out to be quite invalid. (Katie Connolly, WikiLeaks warrant 'issued to UK', BBC News, 1 December 2010).

The journalist instrumental in a "leak" which lead to similar condemnation -- the expenses abuses of UK Members of Parliament -- Heather Brooke (WikiLeaks: the revolution has begun - and it will be digitised, The Guardian, 30 November 2010) argues:

-Leaks are not the problem; they are the symptom. They reveal a disconnect between what people want and need to know and what they actually do know.
- Politicians, see themselves as parents to a public they view as children - a public that cannot be trusted with the truth, nor with the real power that knowledge brings.
The mystery of the "unasked question"

The curious characteristic of each form of abuse of faith in governance is that it would seem to be associated with, or centered on, an "unasked question." Abuse of faith can then be sustained provided that question is not asked. If faith may be fruitfully considered as a form of strange attractor, as argued elsewhere (Generic Reframing of the 12 Tribes of "Israel", 2009), the unasked question might be thought of as somewhat analogous to a black hole at its centre -- engendering a characteristic dynamic. It is the black hole that sustains the event horizon constraining receipt of information from beyond the domain of that faith.

The unasked question, as with the un-nameable of any sanctum sanctorum, functions as a kind of central pillar sustaining both what is valuable about the faith dynamic and what is problematic about it. It is perhaps the fundamental justification for "unsaying" as discussed separately (Being What You Want: problematic kataphatic identity vs. potential of apophatic identity? 2008). In that sense, for any form of governance, the "unsaid" might be seen as fundamental to both "sustainable development" and to the "sustainable illusion of development" -- corresponding to the ambiguous relationship between leadership and misleadership.

This framing highlights the possibility that the unasked question is associated with an "inconvenient truth" -- the notion promoted in relation to climate change by Al Gore (An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It, 2007). The challenge associated with this framing is that the successful identification of a singular "inconvenient truth" (as with climate change) engenders a form of faith that it is the singular and most important strategic focus for governance.

Climate change, for example, is then promoted as the most important problem facing humanity and its survival -- as was terrorism before it, and others to come (Promoting a Singular Global Threat -- Terrorism Strategy of choice for world governance, 2002; Terror as Distractant from More Deadly Global Threats: bewitching world of definitional game-playing, 2009). However, at the core of the faith in this framing is an unasked question.

More generally, therefore, the unasked question is intimately related to engagement with inconvenience (An Inconvenient Truth -- about any inconvenient truth, 2008)

"Putting the Question"

The curious cognitive status of an unasked question is indicated by the appropriateness of "holding a question" on some issues of importance, without seeking premature closure on an answer. This "bracketing" of the world phenomenological epoché -- the moment where all belief in the existence of the real world, and consequently all action in the real world, is suspended.

There is a degree of recognition of this with those suspected of heresy being "put to the Question" (namely tortured) by the Inquisition -- a tradition seemingly continued in Guantanamo Bay with respect to those suspected of terrorism. There is a curious parallel between the two in their efforts to defend their respective "faiths" through a system of special tribunals. However there is a case for considering what form "Putting the Question" might take with respect to various faiths and belief systems in their most generic sense.

Faith-centered questions: One approach to clarifying this possibility is to endeavour to identify the unasked question in each of the cases reviewed above. In the case of the financial crisis, this might have been associated with the unquestioning acceptance (by the financial community and those complicit in its agenda) of the Gaussian cupola on the basis of which assets were repackaged to conceal their toxicity. This has been usefully explained by Felix Salmon (Recipe for Disaster: the formula that killed Wall Street, Wired, 17.03, March 2009). In the case of expenses of Members of Parliament, this might be the unquestioning acceptance of their integrity and trustworthiness.

Discipline-centered questions: There is the intriguing possibility that each discipline is centered on a unique and characteristic question that it avoids asking by every means possible. To the extent that the array of disciplines purports to encompass the dimensions of knowledge society, and the advance of knowledge, how might those questions be understood as systematically configured in relation to one another? How is it that disciplines are so pathetic in addressing their collective failure to address the challenges of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity -- at a time when humanity is in desperate need of such integrative insight? Something about the incommensurability of black holes?

Institution-centered questions: As with disciplines, there is a case for envisaging the manner in which each key institution -- especially those with governance responsibilities -- is itself centered on a question that it avoids asking. Approaches to such consideration are to be seen in the courageous debates of some bodies on whether they should continue to exist or should dissolve themselves -- rather than continue as memorials to obsolete problems and strategies, endeavouring still to attract scarce resources in their support. Such dissolution amounts to a form of "institutional euthanasia" -- unusual for governance.

That aside, what for example might be the question that UNESCO carefully avoids addressing? How would it differ from that avoided by WHO or the FAO? In the case of the EU, faced with a degree of popularity accorded to the Eurovision Song Contest at a time of expected total citizen apathy for the European elections, what is the question it fails to address? This is notably ironic because of its effort to get citizens to address questions to the EU in anticipation of those elections through a Choice Box -- without having any ability to process them. A related valuable case is provided by Tony Blair, allegedly promoting his candidature as a future president of Europe, but currently has established as his institutional base the Tony Blair Faith Foundation. Given his role in misrepresenting the challenge of Iraq, and his faith that he acted correctly in engaging in military intervention, what
migh be the unasked question on which any faith in his foundation is based?

Strangely the financial crisis makes it only too evident that very large amounts ("trillions" of dollars) could be rapidly made available to bail out financial institutions and corporations -- funds which had never previously been available to bail out (indebted) developing countries, despite commitments to do so. One unasked question was how this had been possible.

Also curious during the development of the crisis was where these hitherto unimagined was where these hitherto unimagined bailout resources were coming from. This question had been carefully avoided although it became apparent that was future generations of taxpayers who were the generous providers, not "the government".

**Sectoral-centered** questions: For purposes of governance, industry and business, society is understood as divided into an array of economic and industrial sectors -- variously targeted for "stimulus" by the taxpayer as a result of the financial crisis. Much is made of the overriding importance of "growth" on a planet with significant resource constraints. Are there particular unasked questions associated with each industry? A useful example might be the question that the major automobile manufacturers failed to ask in 2008 -- before the oil crisis and the financial crisis -- unexpectedly transforming them within months into basket-cases and beggars. They claimed naively not to have been aware of their vulnerability -- equipped as they were with the highest expertise considered appropriate by business schools. Potentially more interesting is whether "jobs", as conventionally associated with such sectors, might fruitfully be understood as centered on an unasked question -- a question vital in a time of social turbulence.

**Religion-centered** questions: Most interesting perhaps, from a theological perspective, are the questions that each religion fails to ask. It is of course through that failure that each is challenged by other religions. Most tragic, given the dedicated sophistication of much theological thinking, is the total incapacity to address the poverty of interfaith dialogue in creatively addressing their differences which impact so violently on society as a whole. Does the secret to further progress in this respect lie in more attentive recognition of the questions they each refuses to ask?

**Problem-centered** questions: The major challenges of society, as noted above, might be fruitfully understood as based on an unasked question in relation to the faith that each has been correctly framed. Especially interesting in this respect are questions relating to the "frozen categories" intrinsic to such framing, as discussed separately with regard to a number of such problems (Framing the Global Future by Ignoring Alternatives: unfreezing categories as a vital necessity, 2009).

As one example in the current period when unemployment is a major issue for many, it is intriguing how there is very little question of whether the very concept of "job" or "employment" could be fruitfully rethought. These are frozen categories that have been effectively commodified to the satisfaction of the discipline of economics and the strategies of governance based on such commodification. In a society that lauds "innovation" such categories are not themselves open for innovation -- especially since there is a massive legislative and statistical apparatus that would be disrupted by any fluidity in that respect. "Labour mobility" refers to physical relocation and movement between sectors, it in no way implies a conceptual dynamic in reframing what a "job" might be.

**WH-questions**: Another approach is to apply an array of WH-questions to each domain of faith on the assumption that it is not sustained by a single question alone. WH-questions are those associated with who, where, when, why, what, which, and how. As discussed elsewhere, these may together offer a radical insight into cognitive engagement with potential crises -- against which the "faith" acts as a protective envelope, or cognitive "bubble" (Conformality of 7 WH-questions to 7 Elementary Catastrophes: an exploration of potential psychosocial implications, 2006).

This approach has been envisaged in terms of identifying questions of a "higher order" appropriate to the complexity by which governance is increasingly challenged (Engaging with Questions of Higher Order: cognitive vigilance required for higher degrees of twistiness, 2004). Experiments have been tentatively undertaken to this end (Generating a Million Questions from ULA Databases: Problems, Strategies, Values, 2006; Preliminary NetMap Studies of Databases on Questions, World Problems, Global Strategies, and Values, 2006).

If the central question in each case is such that it cannot be asked for fear of completely undermining the integrity of each undertaking -- whether its "sustainable development" or the "sustainable illusion of development" -- are there ways of refining understanding of the set of questions and engagement with them? Buddhism, for example, uses the metaphor of a mirror to refer to one aspect of this challenge. To the extent that the question is addressed to a mirror (as in the Snow White fairy tale), one possibility is that the mirror requires polishing. Is the issue one of eliciting an unasked question of higher quality, dimensionality or self-reflexivity? Does the question have an inherently paradoxical quality to it, as with the traditional Zen koan and the learning to be derived from it?

Also of relevance is that each year the World Question Center (initiated by The Edge) formulates a question that is submitted to a network of people of appropriate eminence in a relevant field. For example, the Edge Annual Question of 2007 is as follows: What are you optimistic about? Why? This is clearly of interest in a society vulnerable to hope-mongering. The possibility of moving beyond such limitations is discussed separately (In Quest of Optimism Beyond the Edge -- through avoidance of the answering process, 2008).

**Neglected systemic questions**

There is a natural tendency to set aside as irrelevant to immediate challenges the consideration of unasked questions. The strategic focus of any form of governance is on action -- on the most "concrete" possibility (and often literally so). As the premier management
cybernetician, Stafford Beer is noteworthy for his (adapted) version of Le Chatelier's Principle -- relevant to any discussion of complex adaptive systems:

Reformers, critics of institutions, consultants in innovation, people in short who "want to get something done", often fail to see this point. They cannot understand why their structures, advice or demands do not result in effective change. They expect either to achieve a measure of success in their own terms or to be flung off the premises. But an ultra-stable system (like a social institution)... has no need to react in either of these ways. It specializes in equilibrad readjustment, which is to the observer a secret form of change requiring no actual alteration in the macro-systemic characteristics that he is trying to do something about. (Stafford Beer on Le Chateliers Principle as applied to social systems: The Cybernetic Cytoblast - management itself. Chairman's Address to the International Cybernetic Congress, September 1969)

Such an observation would suggest the need to be attentive to the associated unasked questions to avoid the traps they imply --bearing in mind the observation of a pioneering policy scientists Geoffrey Vickers: "A trap is a function of the nature of the trapped" (Freedom in a rocking boat: changing values in an unstable society, 1972).

Recent and more general studies of relevance to the neglect of such questions, now highlighted by the financial crisis, include the following:

- Jared M. Diamond. Collapse: how societies choose to fail or succeed (2005)
- Paul Ormerod. Why Most Things Fail: evolution, extinction and economics (2005) [extracts].
- Joshua Cooper Ramo. The Age of the Unthinkable: why the New World Disorder constantly surprises us and what we can do about it (2009)
- Nassim Nicholas Taleb. The Black Swan: the impact of the highly improbable (2007) [contents]

The unasked question in relation to increasing population?

Any exploration of problem-centered questions, as suggested above, might extend to the systemic relations between problems -- as notably promoted in 1972 through the report to the Club of Rome (Donella H. Meadows, et al., Limits to Growth, 1972). Intriguing in that respect has been the manner in which such pioneering efforts to analyze the evolution of the world problematic have themselves been undermined in an academic context (consistent with Beer's version of Le Chatelier's Principle). As shown by Graham Turner (A Comparison of the Limits to Growth with Thirty Years of Reality, CSIRO 2007), the original study provoked many criticisms which falsely stated its conclusions in order to discredit it. Despite the repeated substantiation of its conclusions, including warnings of overshoot and collapse, recommendations of fundamental changes of policy and behaviour for sustainability have not been taken up. One of its principal areas of focus was population.

It is now somewhat ironic to note the number of major problem areas in which catastrophic consequences are envisaged, many framed as "shortages" (of food, water, land, commodities, etc.). There is seldom more than a passing mention, if any, of the manner in which such "shortages" are directly engendered by explosive growth in population. As remarked above, it is noteworthy that such growth was confidently predicted to stabilize naturally in the near future -- by the economists most complicit in sustaining faith in the financial system prior to its collapse in 2008. Had numbers been lower, and not been increasing, "shortages" would not be arising.

"Shortage" has become a politically correct euphemism to avoid reference to the inconvenient truth about exploding population growth -- which rapidly negates any short-term success in dealing with such shortages.

The issue is then how do the unasked questions relating to "shortage" problems interact? How does the focus on each such shortage as "the dramatic problem facing humanity" effectively obscure consideration of a potentially much more fundamental unasked question in relation to population? This has been discussed separately (Institutionalized Shunning of Overpopulation Challenge: incommunicability of fundamentally inconvenient truth, 2008; Root Irresponsibility for Major World Problems: the unexamined role of Abrahamic faiths in sustaining unrestrained population growth, 2007).

Conclusion

With respect to the financial crisis of 2008, and other crises of faith indicated above (such as the expenses crisis of UK MPs), emphasis is now placed on the need to "rebuild trust", to "rebuild confidence", etc. The question is what this is expected to mean and how this is expected to be achieved. The challenge is ironically echoed by that in places like Afghanistan and Iraq where an emphasis has been placed on the war for "hearts and minds" as a means of "rebuilding community" and of "nation building". The special difficulty is that the processes whereby efforts are typically made to repair abuses of faith in governance are precisely those in which faith has now been lost. People have lost faith in the gestures made to that end which are now readily characterized as "tokenism" and "spin" -- of which it is prudent to be highly suspicious. Briefly, processes of governance have "shot themselves in the foot".

The "illusory" bubble, which governance has proven so complicit in sustaining (for good or for ill) at a time of multiple "real" crises, can indeed be understood in terms of the tale of the Emperor's New Clothes. A key question is however the cognitive condition of the "Little Boy" who asked of his mother in the tale: "Why is that man not wearing any clothes"? The current challenge for governance is the world
population of "Little Boys" who are becoming increasingly restless in the face of the bizarre incompetence of governance. This is already engendering widespread despair, cynicism, nihilism and social unrest.

But the "Little Boy" suggests other insights from the tale of the Little Boy Who Cried Wolf -- especially when combined with the previous tale (Entangled Tales of Mомetic Disaster: mutual implication of the Emperor and the Little Boy, 2009).

It is intriguing that the focus of remedial action in "rebuilding confidence" to counter unrest is framed in terms of eliciting "investment" and "lending". These operations are readily framed in financial terms -- easily losing the insight, highlighted by the financial crisis, that what is being invested or lent is "confidence" and "faith". Any (desperate) plea for resources can therefore be fruitfully explored as a plea for "confidence" and the subtle engagement this implies.

As noted, the financial crisis provides an admirable example in the light of the innovative formula of David X. Li with regard to the Gaussian copula function -- as described by Felix Salmon (Recipe for Disaster: the formula that killed Wall Street, Wired, 17.03, March 2009) -- or on the title page of the issue as The Secret Formula that Destroyed Wall Street. As Li had indicated in 2005 "Very few people understand the essence of the model" (Mark Whitehouse, Slices of Risk, The Wall Street Journal, 12 September 2005). As Salmon points out, the great merit for those who inadequately understood it -- from a lower dimensionality -- was that the formula:

... made it possible for traders to sell vast quantities of new securities, expanding financial markets to unimaginable levels.... And it became so deeply entrenched -- and was making people so much money -- that warnings about its limitations were largely ignored... people used the Gaussian copula model to convince themselves they didn't have any risk at all, when in fact they just didn't have any risk 99 per cent of the time. The other 1 per cent of the time they blew up.

This makes very clear when an "unasked question" may be dramatically relevant -- if only 1 per cent of the time. Similarly any medical intervention may have a probability of succeeding 99 per cent of the time, as with any strategy. The question is implicit in the focus of the study by Nassim Nicholas Taleb (The Black Swan: the impact of the highly improbable, 2007) and in Donald Rumsfeld's "unknown unknowns" (Unknown Undoing: challenge of incomprehensibility of systemic neglect, 2008).

The role of the "unasked question" -- in the absence of the "Little Boy" -- is especially interesting for any of the "faiths" identified. To what extent does failure to recognize and address such a question constitute for that faith effectively "living a lie" -- possibly even in the sense explored by Scott Peck (People of the Lie: the hope for healing human evil, 1983)? As a metasystemic challenge, this suggests that the "end times" of religious faiths may intimately related to such a question (Spontaneous Initiation of Armageddon: a heartfelt response to systemic negligence, 2004).

It might be assumed that the "unasked question" can be effectively addressed by "thinking the unthinkable", as originally recommended by futurist Herman Kahn. It remains a recurring theme for the intelligence and security communities. Current examples, consistent with some understandings of the lack of constraint on global policy implementation, might include:

- unilateral indulgence in a geo-engineering initiative reminiscent of Dr Strangelove
- using a nuclear strike to eliminate the Taliban in the Swat valley
- launching a pandemic to resolve population pressures on scarce resources

It is no longer a question of "thinking the unthinkable" in relation to governance but rather of "expecting the unthinkable" from governance. Given the revelations via WikiLeaks regarding the cover-up of matters in Iraq -- systematically denied over years by the coalition powers -- the key question is now what else remains classified, and systematically denied, of equivalent (or greater) significance? Who could be trusted to affirm that matters of such consequence are not concealed?

There are many indications that society is increasingly ungovernable as conventionally understood. Given his proven leadership track record and his promotion of "faith" in relation to leadership through his foundation, there may be a case for encouraging the election of Tony Blair to high office, perhaps as future president of Europe. Rather than invite child-like faith in appropriate governance, his appointment would avoid disillusionment and elicit an attitude of healthy vigilance in expectation of deception, as previously explored (Liberating Provocations: use of negative and paradoxical strategies, 2005). Blair might then prove to be a welcome cherry on the cake of 21st century democracy.

| Trust in government has "suffered a severe breakdown"
| (BBC News, 23 January 2012)

Public trust in government has suffered a severe breakdown across the world, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer.

Governments have been blamed for the financial and political chaos of 2011. In 17 of 25 countries surveyed governments were now trusted to do what is right by less than half those questioned. Overall trust in government fell by nine percentage points to 43%. Trust in business also fell, from 56% to 53%

References

Jared M. Diamond. Collapse: how societies choose to fail or succeed, Penguin, 2005