Credibility Crunch engendered by Hope-mongering

"Credit crunch" focus as symptom of a dangerous mindset

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Introduction

The drama of the financial crisis and "credit crunch" -- sufficient cause for grave concern -- is presented here as exemplifying underlying cognitive patterns that should be cause for even greater concern. It presents a case for looking at environmental overshoot "through" the cognitive framework of the financial system -- the systemic role of its actors, instruments, concepts and dynamics, as well as how long and short-term risk is managed in a context of both fear and hope-mongering, as engendered by fact and rumour, and variously exploited. [The implications are also explored in a subsequent document: Systemic Crises as Keys to Systemic Remedies: a metaphorical Rosetta Stone for future strategy? (2008)]

As what history may see as a foretaste, the financial crisis is therefore to be understood as a magnificent, only too realistic, metaphor of institutionalized approaches to international risk management at this time, notably as articulated just before the full crisis in The Economist (Confessions of a Risk Manager, 9 August 2008). Despite the overshoot possibilities indicated by the Club of Rome in Limits to Growth (1972), the opening sentences read:

In January 2007, the world looked almost riskless. At the beginning of that year I gathered my team for an off-site meeting to identify our top five risks for the coming 12 months. We were paid to think about the downsides but it was hard to see where the problems would come from. Four years of falling credit spreads, low interest rates, virtually no defaults in our loan portfolio and historically low volatility levels: it was the most benign risk environment we had seen in 20 years.

The remedies to emergent crises, as failures of risk management, may also be seen as metaphors of strategic propensities. In this case emphasis has been placed on "injection" of liquidity from a source that in some ill-defined way is "meta" to the system in crisis -- a curious term in a society with a pervasive drug problem in which "injection" may indeed be framed as a remedy. More curious is the widespread belief that humanity can be "bailed out" by extra-systemic processes, whether by "God" (framed by some as the "opium of
the people") or by "human ingenuity" (of the quality that gave rise to the crisis in the derivatives market). These issues are epitomized by the fact that there is indeed a risk that the next president of the country exemplifying these propensities will be someone who welcomes the possibility of complete civilizational collapse as a means of evoking a divine "bailout".

Much is made of doom-mongering -- of which the legendary Greek Casandra is confusingly proposed as an archetype, embodied in such terms as Casandra Syndrome. This label is applied in situations in which valid warnings or concerns are dismissed or disbelieved. Such situations are readily, and even deliberately, confused with situations in which articulating warnings is used to attract attention and to manipulate others to the advantage of the doom-monger. This is epitomized by the tale of the Boy Who Cried Wolf. It has notably been used to justify budgets for large public projects, ranging from defence to physics experiments.

In both situations people are challenged to work out what credibility is to be given to the warnings. This challenge is exemplified in the current promotion of terrorism as a threat -- supposedly exceeding in significance many other situations faced by humanity and the planet (Promoting a Singular Global Threat -- Terrorism: strategy of choice for world governance, 2002). Casandra, given her knowledge of future events, has effectively been taken up as the mascot of the international futures movement for such reasons.

The focus here is on a complementary challenge, however, namely how to determine the credibility of those who engage in hope-mongering for which there is no convenient Greek archetype, nor any well-remembered tales -- although the tailors in the tale of Emperor's New Clothes might be understood to exemplify the activity of hope-mongerers. Hope-mongering may of course be used as a counter-measure to the doom-mongering of modern Casandas.

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Hope-mongering: blowing bubbles of confidence and trustworthiness

This is a relatively little used term, despite the frequent occurrence of the phenomenon to which it refers. Tentatively it might be defined as the process whereby efforts are made to ensure that people rely on hope that all will be well, despite the difficulty of the circumstances they are experiencing -- and seem to have every probability of continuing to experience for an indeterminate period.

There is of course a valid aspect to the process of such encouragement for those seemingly without hope. Building and sustaining hope clearly have their place, notably in response to desperate conditions -- as do boosterism, puffery and positive news management. Hope-mongerers may even be understood to be "lenders of last resort" -- offering access to reserves of trust and confidence. A notable example is the invocation over centuries by the Jewish people at the conclusion of the Yom Kippur service and the Passover Seder: Next year in Jerusalem. The question in what follows is how is appropriate reliance on hope to be distinguished from dysfunctional and abusive hope-mongering (Being Positive Avoiding Negativity: management challenge of positive vs negative, 2005).

If development, whether personal or collective, is in some essential way dependent on "blowing bubbles" of hope and confidence in the future, then great care is surely required in distinguishing the conditions when creating such dependency becomes dangerous -- if not potentially disastrous. Bubbles tend to burst, especially when they exceed critical dimensions of sustainability.

In a period when the world is challenged by global warming, it may ironically be appropriate to focus on the dangerous levels of "hot air" associated with hope-mongering and the bubbles of hope it engenders.

The challenge is determining at what point is the process of hope-mongering being deliberately, or inadvertently, abused to ensure reliance on a mindset or belief system which constitutes an unhealthy response to the condition. Especially problematic is when this is deliberately undertaken in the interest of those proposing hope -- who thereby derive advantage from the enhanced confidence in which they are then held by those who have no other source of hope.

In its problematic sense, hope-mongering is therefore an abuse of confidence and trust. However, given the intangible nature of trust, there are few conditions in which such abuse is clearly recognized and rightfully condemned. The following section (which readers might choose to scan or skip) provides an overview of the variety of forms of hope-mongering in order to identity a dangerous underlying pattern discussed thereafter.

The question is, other than the traditional economic bubbles and the financial bubble that recently burst, what are the other bubbles on which concern might be usefully focused? What other bubbles are being "blown"?

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Varieties of hope-mongering

These are considered under the following headings. Readers may choose instead to go directly to the discussion of the nature of a dangerous underlying pattern discussed thereafter.

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God as a focus of hope-mongering

Irrespective of arguments regarding the problematic consequences of belief in any invisible deity (cf Richard Dawkins, The God Delusion, 2006; Christopher Hitchens, God Is Not Great: how religion poisons everything, 2007), more challenging is the politicization of religious belief -- especially by those who seek religious credibility by condemning those who articulate secular views. Again it is not a question of whether or not politicians acknowledge the merit of spiritual belief but rather the deliberate use of that belief for political ends, to achieve power and to elicit support from those who sincerely hold such beliefs.

Such problematic use might be seen as taking three forms:

- **claims made by politicians** that advocated policies or outcomes are a justification for hope because they are in some way pursuant of the will of deity or have the blessing of deity, notably by invoking that blessing. This invocation ranges from formulaic use of "God Bless America". Under this cover, politicians may then engage in killing on a massive scale, as has been evident in the faith-based positions taken by George W. Bush and Tony Blair in occasioning hundreds of thousands of deaths -- as a means of implementing God's will. The implication may be that whatever the outcome, taken in the name of God, it necessarily has the benediction of deity and is therefore a basis for hope.

- **claims made by religious authorities** to elicit similar support by raising hopes that actions, or lack of actions, are consistent with the will of deity who will then necessarily ensure a beneficial outcome -- in the longer term if not immediately.

- **claims condoned by religious authorities** that certain otherwise questionable actions are in accordance with the will of deity and therefore justification for hope irrespective of the outcome. These may range from incitement to kill as made by Reverend Pat Robertson (calling for the assassination of the president of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez on 23 August 2005), or by Sheikh Salih Ibn al-Luhaydan, the most senior judge in Saudi Arabia (declaring in 12 September 2008 that the killing of owners of immoral satellite broadcasting channels to be permissible [more]). It may be evident, by implication, in failure by religious authorities to condemn such initiatives on the part of other religious authorities. On a larger scale this is to be seen in the religious approval of crusades or jihads against suitably demonized unbelievers.

The general implication is that "all will be well" and that there is no justification for abandoning hope -- unless one is an unbeliever. This forms part of the pattern of binary logic: you are either with with us (as a believer) or against us (as an unbeliever). Within this framework, provided the blessing of deity is suitably invoked, hope is held to be appropriate -- whether or not any effective action is taken. It may be within this framework that religious conversion is exorted -- offering the hope that the person's soul will then be saved and a place in heaven will be assured (cf Strategic Opportunities of the Twice Born: reflections on systemic camouflage of mass decepcion, 2004; Varieties of Rebirth: distinguishing ways of being "born again", 2004).

This pattern is notably evident in the calls for hope on the part of the faithful by supreme religious authorities such as the Pope. In July 2008, for example, the Pope called for "a new age in which hope liberates us from the shallowness, apathy and self-absorption which deadens our souls and poisons our relationships" [more]. In September 2008, the Pope indicated that the Virgin Mary 'invites us to live like her in invincible hope, refusing to believe those who claim that we are trapped in the fatal power of destiny' [more].

The expectations so evoked may be suitably conflated with framings of the life hereafter -- and expectations thereof by the faithful, as has been so fundamental since Ancient Egyptian times. Any form of suffering, effectively condoned by religious authorities, may then be reframed in terms of a later compensatory reward in heaven. Indeed suffering may then be treated as an appropriate, even desirable, religious discipline when undertaken deliberately (as in mortification of the flesh) or as an opportunity to be welcomed in the hope of acquiring merit for a future life.

Of special concern is the manner in which hope is raised in truly desperate situations in which there is every case for abandoning hope -- as in the final phases of a terminal illness or in the face of imminent disaster. How appropriate is it then to encourage people to "cling to hope" rather than envisage some other course of action?

Incitement to sacrifice as hope-mongering

A particular manifestation of hope-mongering is the promotion of the expectation that by sacrifice, whether of oneself or others, hope for the future may be suitably engendered.

Again this is evident amongst the authorities of several sectors:
• politics: in the case of politicians, and their leadership, the argument is that sacrifice is a means of defending and advancing the values of a country. A sacrifice for the fatherland or motherland, whether of oneself or others, is promoted as a means of engendering hope for future generations. This may be done with the greatest of cynicism, deliberately eliciting hope that the sacrifice is justified.

• religion: in the case of religious authorities again, the argument is that this is a means of advancing "God's plan". In this sense martyrdom is to be welcomed and praised. In many religions sacrifice, even human sacrifice, has been seen as a means of placating divinity and as a justification for hope in a favourable response. Incitement to suicide bombing may be framed in this way -- possibly with the argument that one will go "directly to heaven", possibly also to enjoy the pleasures of "72 virgins".

• military and security services: those in the military are expected to sacrifice themselves, when necessary, in defence of their country and its values -- and possibly irrespective of any collateral damage or the unfortunate need to use "dirty tricks" or inhumane treatment. Such a sacrifice is promoted as worthy in terms of the hope it engenders for those in whose name it is undertaken.

• business: the successful launch of any enterprise, and its development under challenging circumstances, is typically associated with calls for sacrifice -- notably amongst the workforce in terms of their working conditions or the need to sacrifice through downsizing in order that it should remain viable. Business also may justify its use of "dirty tricks" in terms of hopes for a fruitful outcome -- if only for shareholders.

In each case the benefits of sacrifice may be promoted in terms of the hopes, beyond immediate suffering, for better conditions for the next generation -- achieving "belt-tightening" on the part of others for the immediate benefit of hope-mongers.

Hope-mongering in expectation of intangible values

Other than the religious justification, the actions taken in the cases above may be variously undertaken in the name of intangible values framed by terms such as "democracy", "peace", "happiness" or "freedom". These purport to indicate hoped-for conditions of individual or collective well-being, even though their significance in practice has proven to be inherently elusive. In its own right "hope" may be considered in the same terms. Their elusive quality lends them to description in terms of complexity theory as "strange attractors" (Human Values as Strange Attractors, 1993). Just as hope-mongering implies that hope may be "bought", it is also appropriate to explore whether other values might be bought and sold (Human Values "Stock Market": investing in "shares" in a "value market" of fundamental principles, 2006).

It might be said that, like deity, this elusive quality is highly conducive to the actions taken in their name -- which are thereby beyond question. As with the Peter Principle, the highest values would seem to be articulated and defended by those whose respect for them in practice is seemingly both questionable and beyond question. Upholding these values as a focus for hope, and defence of them, becomes a means of disguising initiatives which detract from them.

Of particular interest is the case of "development" or -- better still -- "sustainable development". As with other intangibles, reams are written about it and the conditions indicative of it. It is somewhat ironic that sustainable development is now associated with the "dematerialization" of the economy. As is evident in its financial underpinning processes, it is increasingly "virtualized" -- effectively acquiring the virtual nature of "democracy", "peace", "freedom" and "happiness". All of these are confusingly conflated into a sense of well-being in the name of which various initiatives are hopefully promoted. Given the questionable results in practice, "veloping" might even be creatively explored as an alternative (Veloping: the art of sustaining significance, 1997).

This cynical hope-mongering is especially evident in the case of the promises made -- and systematically broken -- in response to the extreme development challenges in regions such as Africa. The example of the G8 is striking in this respect.

Technical hope-mongering

Many of the challenges currently faced by humanity are reframed as challenges with which it is hoped that technology may be expected to deal -- as evident in the case of global warming, the food crisis and the energy crisis. Much is made of "human ingenuity" and its capacity to respond to such crises.

Technocrats, and representatives of industries associated with relevant technologies, are articulate in promoting such possibilities and in encouraging reliance on the remedies to hand, in the pipeline or which may yet be discovered -- especially when they constitute an unthinking extension of current business models. Obvious examples are genetically modified food products, geo-engineering and nuclear fusion. The focus on solutions, calling upon existing expertise and predispositions, is significant in the manner in which it precludes debate on other possibilities challenging existing mindsets.

It is however useful to recognize the extent to which "investment" in such technologies can be appropriately recognized as an exercise in hope for a fruitful outcome. In this sense promotion of such solutions, which often evoke controversy, needs to be understood as a form of hope-mongering often with little consideration for the Precautionary Principle. Specifically those accepting such approaches are called upon to hope that:

• they will indeed produce what is promised -- despite considerable experience with problematic implementation of large-scale projects involving new technologies, whether in terms of delivery delays, cost-overruns or unforeseen difficulties

• there will be no unforeseen downstream effects on the environment -- despite considerable experience with such difficulties, as
The pattern of hope-mongering is more widespread however, as indicated by the following examples:

- the arguments made are indeed well-made and not simply a means of disguising other agendas
- the technologies will not result in problematic synergistic processes with other such solutions, notably as a consequence of the increased dependency on higher degrees of complexity whose implications it is a challenge to understand, whether or not such understanding is sought
- the technologies that receive funding do indeed constitute optimal responses and have not simply been selected through dubious project evaluation processes -- despite considerable experience of the problematic processes through which projects are selected and the manner in which the evaluation process may be distorted in support of other agendas

Such hope-mongering is associated with a call to believe increasingly complex chains of argument justifying theories in support of technical solutions -- some of which may even require hundreds, if not thousands of pages, even challenging their credibility in the eyes of other specialists, as discussed elsewhere (Credibility of connectivity: how much "moonshine" in any conjecture?, 2007).

Perhaps the most fundamental feature of technological hope-mongering is the confidence attributed to future human ingenuity -- which few would choose to question even if they were able to do so. This has been best articulated by Thomas Homer-Dixon (The Ingenuity Gap: how can we solve the problems of the future? 2000) with a call to wake up to the fearful possibility that blithe trust in science and technology map be misplaced. For him, human ingenuity may indeed not be capable of coping with the emerging crises of population growth and environmental despoliation.

None of this is to deny the capacity to produce technical solutions in response to uncertainty and complex dilemmas. The question is how inappropriately and prematurely. This is best characterized in well-known phrases such as that of Myron Tribus "There is a simple answer to every question and it is usually wrong" or that variously attributed to Will Rogers and H L Mencken 'There is a simple solution to every problem - and it is always wrong". This has in turn been variously paraphrased, for example: "For every human problem there is a solution that is quick, simple, inexpensive -- and wrong".

Some solutions may well constitute a potential exemplification of the Postcautionary Principle -- as variously evident in the compilation by the Edge Foundation (Are You Optimistic About?: Today's Leading Thinkers on Why Things Are Good and Getting Better, 2007).

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<td>We lean ever more heavily on experts.  But who can we now trust?  Corporate PR has become so sophisticated that it's almost impossible for most people to tell the difference between genuine science and greenwash, or real grassroots campaigns and the astroturf lobbies concocted by consultants. PR companies set up institutes with impressive names which publish what purport to be scientific papers, sometimes in the font and format of genuine journals. They accuse real scientists of every charge that could be levelled at themselves: junk science, hidden funding, undisclosed interests and inflated credentials. (George Monbiot, The Guardian, 23 September 2008)</td>
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Military and security hope-mongering

This may be partially seen as a form of technological hope-mongering. The most striking historical example is provided by the ongoing military intervention, and related security activities, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Much has been made of the incredible sophistication of the military technology deployed in those arenas and the vital and unquestionable importance of further development of such technology to ensure control of future insurgencies of any kind. Security and surveillance systems have been implemented worldwide as a consequence -- incidentally undermining radically those individual freedoms that were the basis for the claims that such deployment has been in defence of those very freedoms.

It is indeed the case that the initial intervention in Iraq, through use of such technology, achieved its immediate objective. It is however also the case that those promoting the use of such technology have proven to be challenged beyond all expectations in "building the peace" thereafter. Much has indeed been made of the fact that the mightiest military power in human history has been prevented from achieving its wider objectives by a bunch of under equipped primitives in one of the most impoverished regions of the world. Despite the allocation of unprecedented financial resources to the task, the initiative has been unable to win the "battle of hearts and minds".

The different phases of this process have been witness to every form of hope-mongering -- ranging from early claims for immediate success, to cautious claims for a continuing degree of success, to promotion of the notion that the only hope lies in a permanent foreign military presence. As noted by military historians, the early arrogant "gung ho" claims with respect to Afghanistan offer a magnificent example of failure to learn the lessons of history.

The question is whether this form of hope-mongering offers lessons for arrogant technological hope-mongering in other arenas -- or will these too turn out to be "Afghanistans"?

Mis-selling and misrepresentation as hope-mongering

The examples are indicative of an underlying mindset of mis-selling (or over-selling) and misrepresentation. In the case of the military this has long been a characteristic of arguments made in support of defence appropriations.

The pattern of hope-mongering is more widespread however, as indicated by the following examples:
• building construction: this is best exemplified by the manner in which hopes are built into construction projects for the Olympic Games. Typically initial proposals, hopefully presented to elicit approval, have subsequently resulted in cost overruns of such dimensions as to place the host city in financial difficulties for years, if not generations, to come. Other projects have later proven to have been completed using faulty technology leading to collapse of the buildings or the early need to replace them

• information technology: there are numerous examples of massive computer projects, hopefully promoted by government with the complicity of the contractors, which have proven to be a disaster, requiring either their cancellation or unforeseen further investment over a period far beyond what was initially indicated

• medical research: solicitation of funds, notably private funds, for health research is notably framed as offering hope for loved one's and the vulnerable. In many cases this solicitation has been demonstrated to be associated with questionable -- even cynical -- agendas on the part of medical research laboratories. Other cases demonstrate the traditional process of promoting the sale of "snake oil" remedies to the hopeful -- perhaps the clearest example of hope-mongering.

• insurance: this has always offered striking examples of mis-selling to those hopeful of protecting themselves against unpredictable disasters, typically leading to the discovery that the risks were not as effectively covered as claimed (due to exclusions "in the small print"). This highlights the need to recognize the "small print" implicit in any initiative sustained by hope-mongering.

• advertising: this has always constituted a focus of mis-selling and misrepresentation. The business of advertising might even be said to be selling hope. As exemplified in an ad of the past: Buy a Buick -- something to believe in. The advertising industry is however also quote sensitive to the counter-productive consequences of hope-mongering.

Of special interest with respect to hope-mongering are so-called pyramid selling or Ponzi schemes in terms of the manner in which hierarchies of hope are effectively constituted to drive the process, as discussed elsewhere (Presenting the Future: an alternative to dependence on human sacrifice through global pyramid selling schemes, 2001).

Political hope-mongering

The promises made by political parties in seeking election offer numerous examples of hope-mongering. It is the essence of campaigning for election to make promises in response to the hopes of people for a better life and an appropriate response to the injustices they experience.

It could be argued that politics is an invitation to hope extended to the electorate, despite the absence of guarantees -- or the intention to address that hope after election. Hope may figure explicitly in framing a candidacy, as in the case of Barack Obama (The Audacity of Hope: thoughts on reclaiming the American Dream, 2006).

Politicians could readily counter the charge of hope-mongering if their track record on achieving power did not provide so many examples of broken promises. They may indeed have good arguments for failing to fulfil promises made -- reasons which they chose not to foresee in making their original commitments to the electorate. Despite the absence of guarantees -- or the intention to address that hope after election. Hope may figure explicitly in framing a candidacy, as in the case of Barack Obama (The Audacity of Hope: thoughts on reclaiming the American Dream, 2006).

This tendency is even more problematic in the case of statesmen representing their countries in international fora where commitments are made to assist those in need. The prime example is provided by the failures of the G8 to fulfil solemn commitments to assist developing countries, notably those in Africa. The G8 might well be framed by many as an archetypal hope-mongering institution given the manner in which it so successfully manipulates expectations.

Other examples are provided by programmes of intergovernmental agencies, deliberately evoking hope -- notably those promising "health for all", "jobs for all", "education for all", etc., even with commitment to a specific date ("by the year 2000"), provided it is beyond the mandate of those making that commitment. Progress on the UN's Millenium Development Goals (2001) offers further examples.

Again it might be said that the essence of the leadership offered by statesmen is intimately associated with hope-mongering -- providing every justification for accusations of misleadership, as argued elsewhere (Emergence of a Global Misleadership Council: misleading as vital to governance of the future?, 2007). Ironically, much has been made on the web of the "neocon" abbreviation for neoconservatism in relation to "con artist" and "confidence trick". The probability is however as great that their hope-mongering was as much a matter of self-deception -- as illustrated by the much-cited quote reported by Ron Suskind (Without a Doubt, The New York Times, In The Magazine, 17 October 2004):

We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality -- judiciously, as you will -- we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.'

It would indeed be instructive to compare the kinds of hope-mongering offered by extreme examples of modern statesmen, as with the following:

• George W. Bush: there is no question about the degree of hope that he engendered, notably to his faith-focused constituency in the USA. This was a major factor in sustaining hopes for the successful outcome of intervention in the Middle East, with the aid of the Coalition of the Willing. His primary commitment to the war against terrorism (as articulated in September 2008 to the UN
The challenge is evident in cases such as the following: interest the very existence of these initiatives is presented systemic initiatives may. Clearly government does successfully implement a wide range of institutional hope-mongering for some. It is no wonder that those "beyond hope" then resort to "terrorism" -- then Irish "No" vote exemplifies the challenge. By contrast a major challenge in the various proposals made by the alternative movements -- explicitly claiming to offer genuine hope for a sustainable future -- is the extent to which these too are characterized by a significant degree of hope-mongering. At what point does the hope-mongering in support of socio-economic alternatives lose its credibility -- by conforming to the triumphalist pattern of those whose policies it is hoped to replace? Is the "bubble blowing" capacity of the World Social Forum to be fruitfully compared with that of the World Economic Forum -- a delightful contest of competitive "bubble blowing"? (All Blacks of Davos vs All Greens of Porto Alegre, 2007).

The failure of one model in no way guarantees the adequacy of another for which people are enjoined to hope -- and in which they are then expected to invest as urgently as the calls for financial bailouts. Especially problematic however is the capacity of the "dark knights" to exploit hope-mongered situations to play with the confidence and hopes in alternative systems with as much efficacy as they do in conventional ones (The "Dark Riders" of Social Change, 2002). Hope may be transmuted into tragedy as suggested by a poetic adaptation of the The Charge of the Light Brigade (revised in celebration of current global strategic management initiatives).

### Dangerous pendulum: TINA and TINATTA

| Of special relevance at this time is the framing of any alternative to discredited approaches -- given the tendency towards binary logic and triumphalism, and despite the argument of Madeleine Bunting (Faith, Belief, Trust: this economic orthodoxy was built on superstition, The Guardian, 6 October 2008): |
| We are now witnessing the collapse of this absurd economic orthodoxy that has dominated politics for nearly 30 years. Its triumphant arrogance, its insistence on orthodoxy, has been comparable to Soviet communism in its scale. For two decades, we've been told "Tina" -- "There is no alternative". |

Whilst "TINA" may have been discredited, there is huge potential for a backlash of "TINATTA"; There Is No Alternative To The Alternative. It is the need for a binary, triumphalist pattern of arrogance that requires attention.

Especially problematic in a context of political hope-mongering in societies claiming to be democratic is the manner in which the population is encouraged to believe in an appropriate outcome to a "due process" which is typically designed to preclude such an outcome -- forcing groups to engage in undignified protests and demonstrations worthy of the Stone Age, framed as such, and repressed for that reason. The pattern of hope-mongering is notably evident in deliberate efforts to encourage feedback ("your voice will be heard") through mechanisms which have no hope of being able to process the volume of that feedback -- other than by arbitrarily selecting isolated items as a token indication that due consideration is being given to the "voice of the people". The institutional response to the Irish "No" vote exemplifies the challenge for European democracy.

It is no wonder that those "beyond hope" then resort to "terrorism" -- then to be carefully reframed as distinct from "legitimately" fighting for some form of freedom from injustice, as is praised in the historical processes of emergence of many current sovereign states.

### Systemic hope-mongering

Clearly government does successfully implement a wide range of institutional responses to the needs of people. These large scale systemic initiatives may indeed be considered successful by many who benefit. However it is important to recognize the way in which the very existence of these initiatives is presented both to evoke the hope that they will respond to those needs when called upon, and to deny or disguise instances where they fail to do so. For, as institutions requiring funding (typically by taxpayers), they have a vested interest in claiming success and continuing to monger hope where this may be less than appropriate.

The challenge is evident in cases such as the following:

- **Justice**: hope has been instilled in most people that, if there is ever the need, the system of justice will not fail them. As those with direct experience of the operations of this system frequently indicate, the justice they get is not what they had been led to expect. Issues may range from complete miscarriage of justice, to failure to incriminate those for which there is evidence of guilt, to failure to respond to perceived injustice. A sense of the degree of hope-mongering by representatives of the system of justice is to be recognized in the phenomenon of under-reporting of crime by those who do not expect to receive the justice promised.

- **Education**: formal education has been framed as a gateway to opportunity and as such has become a focus for the hopes of many. The reality for many has been that, irrespective of the years they devote to this process, it may not ensure them the access
to the opportunities they had been led to expect. Many with the highest degrees are underemployed or find their education unrelated to the realities with which they have to deal. To what degree is the system of education then to be understood as a process of hope-mongering -- promoting possibilities for many without consideration as to whether there is any possibility of realizing them in practice, other than for the few?

- **employment:** strong cases are made for employment opportunities, provided people conform to particular requirements -- whether education, experience, location, attitude, etc -- as a key to well-being and advancement in a world framed in economic terms. The continuing crises of severe unemployment and underemployment suggest that much of this discourse constitutes an exercise in hope-mongering.

- **health:** much is made of the marvels of health care. However it is very evident that a significant percentage of the population does not have effective access to these marvels. Health care systems are unable to respond to the level of need. The promotion of their capacity, especially when people are obliged to contribute to them without being able to benefit from them when in need, suggests that there is a high degree of associated hope-mongering.

- **pensions:** there are many pension schemes to which people may be obliged to contribute, or to which it may be strongly recommended that they do. The reality is however -- in a society vulnerable to inflation, failure of pension funds, or arbitrary government decisions with regard to them -- that pension security may be highly questionable, especially in a society vulnerable to high inflation. The promotion of such schemes, and the security they are expected to offer on retirement, may therefore also be seen as an exercise in hope-mongering.

- **utilities and emergency services:** the supply of water, electricity, gas and sewerage is readily assumed and promoted as a dependable feature of modern living as a consequence of economic development. The possibility that these services might not function due to shortages, accidents or politically motivated cuts is easy to forget. This is evident in the case of emergencies, such as flooding, where it is only too obvious that the response is inadequate. Recognition of future risks in this respect, such as those due to climate change, is also easily avoided. Any promotion of belief in the status quo -- especially when emergency preparedness is inadequate -- is therefore effectively a form of hope-mongering.

Given the increasing importance of public relations and news management for government institutions, it might well be asked to what extent their activity may usefully be understood as hope-mongering -- especially when budgetary constraints inhibit their capacity to fully meet recognized needs.

**Hope-mongering by the financial system**

The succession of increasingly dramatic crises in the financial markets, initially triggered by defaults on subprime mortgage loans in 2007, offers a glaring example of hope-mongering. As has been repeatedly declared, the financial system is based on confidence and trust -- notably in the guarantees traditionally offered regarding any "promise to pay", and the backing asserted to be associated with such guarantees. The focus at the time of writing is on "rebuilding confidence" in the financial system.

It is however useful to observe where hope-mongering took place -- and how it contributed to the breakdown in confidence in the financial system as it had been known to that point:

- **marketing of subprime mortgages:** it has been made clear that the process whereby cheap mortgages were offered to people in the USA, desperate for housing but unable to afford it, can be usefully described as hope-mongering. Purchasers were reassured by sellers, justifying their hopes, that they could safely engage in such transactions. It is now recognized that sellers were irresponsible (possibly criminally so) in failing to make purchasers more fully aware of the process in which they were engaging, or to be sufficiently diligent in refusing more risky mortgage loans -- as is the practice in many countries. This is a form of mis-selling.

- **development of the derivatives market:** financial derivatives have been an exercise in financial creativity of the highest order, reliant for their profitability on mathematical understanding accessible only to the few. The profitability was however obvious to those exposed to its potential, encouraging those responsible to enable engagement in that market to the fullest. The complicity between those with the understanding, together with fund managers, shareholders, financial journalists and academic commentators, was such as to develop and sustain a bubble of confidence in this process over an extended period. Who was hope-mongering to whom? Or is such a bubble best to be understood as a process of mutual hope-mongering -- necessarily rejecting any precautionary considerations?

- **risk management:** those directly engaged in investment of their own funds, or those of others, are necessarily intimately involved in the process of risk management in pursuit of maximum profitability. Whether in convincing themselves, or their clients, of the acceptability of a risk, there is necessarily a degree of hope-mongering. As best recognized when gambling, there is a process of self-persuasion whereby one is convinced -- possibly against the odds -- that the hoped-for profit will result from the transaction. Financial high-flyers -- as with free solo climbers who forego ropes, harnesses and other protective gear while ascending (relying only on physical strength, climbing ability, and psychological fortitude to avoid a fatal fall) -- are those capable of psyching themselves into confidence in navigating risks others would tend to avoid. Such self-directed hope-mongering is to be admired -- provided it does not exploit the resources of others, as so clearly demonstrated by Nick Leeson, whose unsupervised speculative trading in 1992 caused the collapse of Barings Bank, the United Kingdom's oldest investment bank.
It is evident wherever relationships are entered into with an intention that this is a particular, and widely recognized, example of hope-mongering through procrastination. The sense in which the relationship may be brought to fulfillment, and when, therefore offers many opportunities for hope-mongering as the following indicate. Hope-mongering through postponing fulfillment may be explicit or implicit. Obvious variants include:

- **procrastination**, notably as typical of politics, or individual requests for an increase in salary, calls upon hope-mongering skills. These are used to ensure that the desired future remains a credible possibility, whilst justifying the need for delay. Labour unions are especially sensitive to this form of abuse.

- **excuses for failure** in any task may also be fruitfully presented with the aid of hope-mongering skills, inspiring confidence that the task will be duly completed at some later time

- **having a child** may be seen as a means of guaranteeing a more fulfilling future, as the child ages into an adult (possibly as a source of care and assistance), whatever the immediate challenges of bringing it up. The question here is the degree of self-delusion associated with this process and the degree to which this is promoted and sustained by relatives and friends, irrespective of circumstances -- through hope-mongering.

- **acquisition of skills**, possibly through formal education (as discussed above), may be undertaken in the expectation that these will result in (competitive) advantages. Again this may be undertaken with hope sustained by others, including those providing the skills, in a manner usefully recognized as hope-mongering

- **use of certain products**, whether health and/or cosmetic products, stimulants, or recreational drugs, may be seen optimistically as a means of achieving a desirable condition, whether or not this is actively encouraged by others through a process of hope-mongering. This would also be true of cosmetic surgery and the fashion industry in general.

**Relationship hope-mongering**

This is a particular, and widely recognized, example of hope-mongering through postponing fulfillment. It is evident wherever relationships are entered into with an intention that may be explicit or implicit. Obvious variants include:

- **interpersonal relationships**: here the most typical example is offered by the dynamics of flirtation, courtship and the possibility of intercourse. This may well take the form of a mutually enjoyable game in which both parties indulge in various forms of hope-mongering, encouraging expectations of fulfillment, or indulging in fantasies about such fulfillment.

- **parental relationship with children**: as a special example of an interpersonal relationship, in which patterns of expectation and behaviour are formed. The process whereby children are invited to behave in a prescribed way with the prospect of future reward -- "if you are good" -- might be seen as the archetypal form of hope-mongering.
Hope-mongering through distraction

Entertainment, recreation and amusement offer a means in the moment of avoiding concern with conditions for which people otherwise yearn. This is the Roman insight into the merit of "circuses". Longer-term hopes are magically transmuted into immediate satisfactions. The challenge of longer-term hopes is met by their transformation into more easily supplied satisfactions through which the other desires are forgotten (if only for the moment).

Where the hopes are for relief from "bad things", entertainment is indeed a valued distraction through which they "go away". Recreational drugs and substance abuse may be seen in this light -- as with competitive sport, exemplified by the Olympic Games.

Of particular interest is the question whether the effort to focus on "good news" and to avoid attention to "bad news" is to be considered as effectively an exercise in hope-mongering. Related to this is the role of "yes men" in the entourage of people of authority -- offering them a cocoon of positive reporting on their achievements, popularity, future success and legacy.

Most challenging is the use of various distractions of this kind to facilitate forgetting historical parallels and the lessons that might otherwise be learnt from them. In this sense hope-mongering is the self-deluding process of promoting the illusion of triumphing over historical experience -- as is increasingly evident in Afghanistan.

Hope-mongering through reframing

This is illustrated by the well-known tale of the person searching under a lamplight in the street at night for keys that had been lost outside the lighted area -- because it was easier to look under the light. The real challenge, being more problematic, is consciously or unconsciously reframed -- but in such a way as to avoid its resolution. This might be termed personalized hope-mongering -- promotion of the hope that the keys are where it would be convenient for them to be.

This approach might be seen as characteristic of the use of many tools, models and strategies through which problems are tackled. It is exemplified by the adage: If all you have is a hammer, then any problem looks like a nail. Consultants may well adopt this approach -- hope-mongering to clients that the proposed approach is the most adequate and appropriate.

Specialization may be seen in these terms, framing the scope of a discipline or methodology to effectively exclude parameters that are problematic so as to transform the problem from a "hard problem" into one that is "amenable". Disciplines may even deliberately avoid hard problems for this reason -- and discourage attention to them -- at the same time promoting the appropriateness of the discipline.

This is then a form of hope-mongering. The very authority of the discipline, and those with its expertise, then engenders hope -- authority as hope-mongering through the expectations it engenders.

Of particular concern is the manner in which systemic issues -- requiring a comprehensive set of tools and insights -- are inappropriately reframed into narrower frameworks. This is indicative of situations in which, through a form of "conceptual gerrymandering", boundaries of relevance are inappropriately defined for convenience -- anything beyond the boundary then being understood implicitly as irrelevant to the challenge at hand.

For those faced with the challenge of governance of complex systems, the offerings of specific disciplines, and consultants with their particular models, poses a continuing problem of how to respond to their hope-mongering. On the other hand, for those seeking to avoid responsibility, use of a narrow range of expertise from the most eminent authorities may be readily used as an excuse for not responding more effectively to top more complex problems -- where the situation is beyond the capacity of such a limited skill set. Responsibility for what proves to be higher orders of complexity is thereby framed as deniable. Implicit denial of this possibility in governance, and the associated incompetence, then constitutes a form of hope-mongering by those claiming to be responding effectively to the expectations of the governed.

Exceptionalism as hope-mongering

A particular example of hope-mongering through reframing is evident in some forms of explanatory exceptionalism.

Most striking are cases where a set of similar problems is observed but these are deliberately, or inadvertently, framed as isolated cases with no systemic implications. Treated as "anomalies" there is then no case for other levels of explanation. Each is then considered to be appropriately treated on a "case by case" basis. This approach is especially helpful when there is a major need for "damage limitation" and avoidance of systemic implications.

Striking examples in recent years have been offered by:

- sexual abuse by clergy
- violent and inhumane treatment of civilians and prisoners by military personnel
- infringement of health and safety regulations by industry
• tax avoidance, tax evasion and exploitation of loopholes by the wealthy and corporations
• extinction of individual species
• certain forms of urban violence (knife crime, school shootings, etc)

In each case considerable effort may be devoted, during damage limitation, to ensuring that any cases are indeed seen in isolation. Hope is then engendered that they are indeed exceptions and that there is no cause for wider or deeper concern. The "reassurances" by relevant authorities under those conditions may then be usefully understood as hope-mongering.

The process through which a set of such exceptions is transformed into recognition of a previously unsuspected systemic challenge is worthy of attention. This is the domain of the poorly recognized discipline of "anomaly research" which specifically addresses the question as to whether an anomaly is an indication of a more systemic problem. Curiously, however, "anomaly research" has itself been marginalized by being associated primarily with the questionable preoccupations of the "alternative" and "pseudosciences".

**Dangerous neglect of underlying patterns**

The above indications point to the merit of considering how the current focus on the "credit crunch" and the major dramatic challenges to the financial system effectively obscure underlying patterns of systemic neglect -- of which the "credit crunch" is merely a symptom. Such underlying patterns are necessarily even more disruptive of cognitive equanimity and "business as usual".

**Frame control:** The crisis with regard to the financial system, and identification of who is responsible, is especially interesting as an illustration of contrasting responses to frame control:

- **exceptionalism:** as dramatically illustrated by the widespread incidence of sexual abuse by clergy over decades (if not centuries), this was most successfully framed in terms of exceptionalism and isolated "bad apples". Any implication of systemic problems, calling into question the authority of the church and its hierarchy, was successfully quashed in official inquiries and their recommendations -- whatever the conclusions drawn by the faithful and the wider population. It was the "bad apples" who were to be blamed in a process reminiscent of scapegoating.

- **systemic dysfunctionality:** any discussion to date regarding who or what is responsible for the financial crisis and the credit crunch has carefully focused on its systemic nature -- as emphasized, for example, by Jean-Claude Trichet, president of the European Central Bank. Some blame has been temporarily attached to traders who have engaged in short selling as a form of speculation that allows a trader to take a "negative position" in a company, although this process has been framed as necessary to ensure a healthy market. Ironically (by comparison with abuse by the clergy) the genuinely problematic transactions are termed "naked short selling" and those engaged in this process are to be held responsible (by implication only) for significant destabilization of the financial system, hopefully to be otherwise presented as healthy (whatever token regulatory measures are deemed appropriate). The process of providing disproportionately high rewards and bonuses to those responsible for the operation of the financial system, or complicit in its operation, is embarrassing (in dialogue with the uninitiated) but not considered indicative of culpability by those associated with the system. Although, as indicated by Nicolas Sarkozy, president of France, the very fact that certain individuals were so rewarded would seem to indicate very clear recognition of who was responsible for excesses in the system (from which many profited) and the disastrous consequences for others.

Despite the dimensions of the financial disaster, there is even a sense in which anything problematic in the organization of the system can be reframed in terms of system dynamics. Interesting in this respect is use of the judgement-free metaphor of "turbulence" in the market to describe the crisis (such as by Alistair Darling, UK Chancellor of the Exchequer). Such a metaphor frames the crisis as an act of nature, if not an Act of God, clearly beyond human responsibility, whether individual or collective -- possibly to be understood as a cyclic problem like exceptional flooding or hurricanes. As with one view (increasingly deprecated) of global warming, the financial crisis is then in no way to be considered a consequence of human activity.

In its own effort to relativize the dimensions of the crisis, The Economist (27 September 2008) compares the cost of bailouts from various recent financial crises as a percentage of GDP: USA (1988, 3.7%), Finland (1991 (12.8%), Sweden (1991, 3.6%), Mexico (1994, 19.3%), Japan (1997, 24.0%), S Korea (1997, 31.2%) -- the current crisis then being relatively trivial at an estimated 5.8%.

**Dysfunctional pattern of thinking:** However, as indicated above, the real challenge is not the particular crisis of the financial system. Many have commented on its problems, and their implications, over past decades -- and been completely ignored by those complicit in its processes or responsible for them. The real challenge lies in the pattern of thinking which sustained that particular system and denied its problematic nature -- in a massive act of hope-mongering. The question is whether that pattern of thinking is actively denying the existence of other systemic challenges and repressing consideration of their potential implications -- namely sustaining a pattern of hope-mongering in other areas.

In this sense, is the subprime crisis, and its consequences for the financial system as a whole, to be considered an indicator of a dysfunctional mode of thought in which humanity collectively engages at this time? Alternatively, should that crisis of confidence, framed as a "credit crunch", be seen as a metaphor for what might be better understood as a "credibility crunch" -- credibility being intimately related to creditworthiness? It is appropriate to note the repeated references to "confidence" and "building confidence" in relation to the financial crisis. The financial system, as with the monetary system, is indeed based entirely on the
confidence through which credit is accepted and "liquidity" ensured in an otherwise "frozen" system. Their analogues may prove especially significant for the future.

The justification for exploring such systemic parallels is indicated by comparison with issues relating to climate change as notably reported by Tony Macalister (Crisis must be turned to green benefit, The Guardian, 23 September 2008):

There were marked similarities between the lack of transparency and action on complex lending risks that had wreaked havoc in the banking community and the kinds of dangers being stored up by corporate and political inaction over global warming... governments and business leaders have massively underestimated the risks posed by rising sea levels and changing weather patterns -- any costs associated with moving to a low-carbon economy were... "negligible" compared with the costs of doing nothing. The banking crisis meant the rules of engagement by governments had changed completely... The same system of "force majeure" was needed to tackle climate change through new eco-taxes, and help to supplement carbon trading.

On the other hand Jim Kunstler (World Made By Hand, 2008) writes:

What the mainstream is truly missing here en masse is that another tsunami is building right behind the finance fiasco, and that it will render moot the whole reeking cargo of schemes and wishes that comprises the Great Bail-out. I am speaking of the global oil problem. In fact, the problems in banking and money currently roaring in the center ring of the world circus, can be described categorically as a product of the oil problem -- since oil is the primary resource of industrial economies and therefore the motive force behind our ability to generate "wealth." Without reliable and ever-growing supplies of oil, there is no industrial growth, and without industrial growth things like capital investment instruments lose their legitimacy. That is why the Frankenstein family of Ponzi securities was invented in the first place -- to compensate for the demise of industrial growth by creating wealth out of... nothing!

But, if the sophisticated economic and financial models, developed with no concern for cost by banking and investment institutions (including the IMF and the World Bank), were unable to predict the liquidity crisis and provide adequate warnings, how credible are the arguments of economists and others regarding other potential crises -- notably those relating to non-renewable resources and population overshoot?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>International Tribunal for Financial Crimes against Humanity?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Those who are held to have engaged in crimes against humanity typically act legally according to the laws of their own country. They helped make them. Those of the Nazi regime tried for war crimes in the Nuremburg Trials would not have been found guilty within their own legal system. The current financial crisis is being effectively framed as the responsibility of no one in particular -- although a few minor actors may be presented as scapegoats.</td>
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<td>Those who profited extensively by the processes that engendered the crisis are not held to be &quot;guilty&quot;, in fact the bailout will respect past contractual obligations to them however excessive their provisions may be. Were the contractual obligations of those tried at Nurmeburg respected? How much harm to humans is required before those deemed responsible are considered to have acted criminally against humanity? How is that determination made? Are they simply those who profited disproportionately by their complicity in concealing &quot;toxic&quot; risk? Does such misrepresentation not constitute a crime? Does incitement to such misrepresentation not constitute a crime?</td>
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<td>Given that $700 billion can be so readily found to bailout those whose business model has failed so disastrously, how come no such funds are available to those living dangerously below the poverty line -- in the USA or elsewhere? At what point does the failure to assist such people itself become a crime against humanity? How is that determination made? When there are millions of deaths by starvation?</td>
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<td>What other risks are being managed in a similar manner with similar arrogance? Should the current approach to such risk management now be considered criminal? How will bailouts be made when their disasters strike?</td>
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<td>How is it that so few parallels are drawn with the mortgage lending disaster in the USA in the 1980s involving the Savings and Loan Association -- for which the bailout cost a variously estimated $0.5 to 1.4 trillion?</td>
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Overpopulation shunning mindset: the most dangerous form of hope-mongering?

The case of overpopulation is especially interesting in the light of its parallels to the subprime crisis. As argued elsewhere (Institutionalized Shunning of Overpopulation Challenge: incommunicability of fundamentally inconvenient truth, 2008), imprudent religions encourage unchecked production of children by gullible parents -- when the possibility of sustaining their ecological footprint is increasingly risky. Through a process of hope-mongering, parents are effectively deluded into "financing" this endeavour through a form of "ecological mortgage" guaranteed by those religions (acting in the name of divinity). Populations are being encouraged to borrow non-renewable environmental resources beyond their probable means to repay -- or that of the generations they are thereby enabled to engender. As with irresponsible mortgage lending, no mention is made of caveat emptor.

Earth Overshoot Day, 23 September, marks the day in 2008 when humanity begins living beyond its ecological means. Beyond that day, humanity moves into the ecological equivalent of deficit spending, utilizing resources at a rate faster than what the planet can regenerate
in a calendar year. It is of course to be expected that in 2009 it will be earlier in the calendar year.

Like the financial institutions (prior to the subprime crisis), many religions offer every assurance that all will be well -- deprecating arguments to the contrary -- vigorously ensuring that they are not effectively debated (Begetting: challenges and responsibilities of overpopulation, 2007). Given the moral authority of those religions, and the support they elicit from voters, governments are also discouraged from questioning the quality of the "financial packages" so offered. The quality of those "instruments", in ecological terms, therefore goes totally unquestioned and unchallenged. Any argument for "transparency" is immediately challenged, as with the need for any form of "regulation".

The metaphor offers a final twist in that the mortgage pledge only ceases when the obligation of the borrower dies (hence "mort") -- either when the obligation is fulfilled or the property is taken through foreclosure. Presumably it will be Gaia (acting in the name of divinity), as the "lender of last resort", who will "foreclose" -- ejecting humanity from its environmental home as being ecologically uncreditable.

Of particular interest within this metaphor are the meanings that might be attributed to "prime rate", supposedly the rate of interest in lending to favoured customers. In environmental terms, it might it be understood as the rate appropriate to healthy system renewal -- to sustainability -- as opposed to the "subprime" rates at which populations are encouraged to borrow? When will the era of "population triumphalism" be challenged -- or by what form of force majeure?

Is the threat of a population crisis what the current focus on the financial crisis, or the climate change crisis, inadvertently obscures -- if not deliberately? This possibility is confirmed by the manner in which efforts to analyze the evolution of the world problematicae, as pioneered for the Club of Rome in 1972, are themselves undermined in an academic context. 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.

Ironically, in any comparison between the systemic financial crisis and the emerging resource crisis arising from unsustainable population levels, the repeatedly criticized short-termism of policy-makers may be usefully compared with short selling. As an analogue, the merits of such short-termism are appropriately to be contrasted with "naked short selling". This has yet to be clearly distinguished in policy terms -- perhaps as "blinkered" policy-making, irresponsibly avoiding systemic implications, and therefore worthy of immediate "regulation".

Given the implications of population overshoot and the manner in which they have been systematically denied, it is supremely ironic the urgency with which the US administration, notably through George W. Bush, repeatedly stressed that America has a terrible headache, but it seems that no one wants to cure it otherwise was to be dismissed as extreme.

As markets plunge, banks fail and traders panic, the core principles that have underpinned western economic and political culture for a generation have been thoroughly discredited. Less than a month ago the invulnerability and inviolability of unregulated global capitalism was common sense. The system that leaves half of the world living on less than a dollar a day, with some so impoverished that they are eating mud cakes and selling their children into bondage, was apparently working well. To suggest otherwise was to be dismissed as extreme.

But such orthodoxies can collapse even faster than markets... Good sense demands a thoroughgoing reappraisal of a system that's in a state of collapse; common sense requires we subsidise it in perpetuity for fear that it breaks down. That sounds like nonsense.

(Gary Younge, America has a terrible headache, but it seems that no one wants to cure it, The Guardian, 29 September 2008).

Conclusion

The question above concerns how appropriate reliance on hope is to be distinguished from dysfunctional and abusive hope-mongering.

Modelling credibility crises of the future: The current financial crisis and the associated credit crunch, triggered by subprime lending and accumulation of "toxic debts", help to make it very clear that humanity has gullied itself into a process of living on borrowed time. Attitudes to the population explosion and its implications for resource usage have been cultivated in a bubble of confidence continually reinforced by hope-mongering. This has encouraged a frenzy of unregulated speculation in pursuit of personal gain -- by some at considerable expense to others. The opportunities to exploit environmental resources have multiplied endlessly, enabled by ever-increasing ingenuity. This is usefully modelled by the development of the tremendous complexities of the derivatives market -- with its minimum transparency and its dissociation from any sustaining reality. These developments have engendered ecological deficits beyond the capacity of most to comprehend -- if any even considered it relevant to do so.

The dimensions of the sudden financial crisis have been totally unexpected by those most implicated in hope-mongering and denial of its possibility. They may well prove to be relatively minor by comparison with the probable consequences for human society of the imminent crash engendered by population overshoot and imprudent strategies of resource exploitation. It is appropriate to note that as with the crash of the financial system, this too has been widely predicted.

The current urgency of the pleas for a "bailout" is made by those most committed to a mindset of unregulated speculative use of limited resources. The proposed bailout -- and the effort to stampede decision-makers into approving it -- can be seen as presaging the manner...
in which any "solution" will be proposed to any future environmental crisis, whatever dramatic form it takes. It is therefore indicative of the nature of the response to the underlying emergent challenge, the highly problematic consequences of the simplistic remedies that will be available at the last minute, and the burden it will place on future generations.

As an indicative model of a future "credibility crunch", the "credit crunch" draws attention to consequences of a complete erosion of confidence and trust in the institutions and authorities that have been so complicit in the hope-mongering processes by which the crisis has been engendered. In this respect, the fact that both funds and markets have been "frozen" by the crisis is suggestive of how even non-financial and informational transactions would be "frozen" by any future more general crisis of confidence. The loss of "liquidity" now experienced in financial terms may then translate into a more dangerous loss of flexibility in both socio-economic and psycho-social systems -- with unpredictable consequences.

Recognition of dangerous underlying patterns: Beyond the financial crisis, it is therefore even more vital to identify other -- even more fundamental -- systemic processes that are also effectively based on "confidence". Are they vulnerable to a form of "subprime crisis" as a result of questionable "lending" -- through hope-mongering? A number of candidates for consideration are identified above. But the prime candidate, worthy of the most careful attention, is overpopulation -- in relation to the capacity of humanity to live within its planetary means, and especially in the light of the many analyses of "overshoot" and the manner in which such warning signals have been authoritatively considered to be of no significance.

Archetypal hope-mongering: It is with respect to any such systematically-denied underlying challenges that hope-mongering becomes most clearly evident in two distinct forms, whatever population levels are reached:

- **creative responsive of human ingenuity**: as noted above, the challenge with respect to this form of hope-mongering has been explored by Thomas Homer-Dixon (The Ingenuity Gap: how can we solve the problems of the future? 2000) who subsequently recognized the inevitability of collapse of civilization as it is currently known (The Upside of Down: catastrophe, creativity, and the renewal of civilization, 2006), as with Jared Diamond before him (Collapse: how societies choose to fail or succeed, 2005). For technocrats, as discussed elsewhere, this is the prime reason for optimism (In Quest of Optimism Beyond the Edge -- through avoidance of the answering process, 2007). Especially interesting in any comparison with the financial markets is the degree of creative ingenuity, of the highest mathematical order, that has been employed in the development of the derivative market -- held specifically to be one of the systemic factors that resulted in the financial crisis.

- **hope-mongering and rapture**: as noted above, equally significant if not more so, is the degree of influence on faith-based governance of the widespread belief in some form of rapture, or divine "bailout". Is this "bailout by God"? This is notably a factor in the US presidential campaign at the time of writing. In a sense the more fundamental or dramatic the complex of problems faced by humanity, the higher the probability of such intervention from a faith-based perspective. Responsible, rational strategic responses may therefore be readily set aside in a celebration of short-termism worthy of the financial markets. But what if it proves to be "bailout by Allah" as the lender of last resort -- with a different conception of "Wall Street"? The final crisis is both a matter of prophecy and to be welcomed for the future it will then enable, as discussed elsewhere (Spontaneous Initiation of Armageddon: a heartfelt response to systemic negligence, 2004). Is God appropriately to be instrumentalized as a sophisticated form of luck-cum-bailout device, responsive to praise and appeals?

Credibility: In whom should one have confidence when authorities have abused trust to such a degree -- and with a minimum of humility and self-criticism? The intellectual brilliance of the best and the brightest, and their supporting institutions, is now completed dissociated from the hopes that might otherwise be appropriately placed in them. It is their very "ingenuity" that engendered the crisis. It is in this sense that hope-mongerers need to be seen as operating like the mortgage brokers that engendered the subprime crisis through "toxic loans". To what extent do "lobbyists" perform a similar function -- as "pushers" of the hope-drug in a drug-dependent culture?

Given the role they are called upon to play, should the UNDP Human Development Report or the Human Development Index also reflect the degree of reliance on hope, the incidence of hope-mongering, and the extent of broken promises made to populations? A precedent has been set by industry in various countries having an "index of business confidence" or an "index of consumer confidence". Concerns with social capital have resulted in an "index of confidence in institutions" and an "index of confidence in the employment market".

After the bursting of the bubble engendered by the dynamics of an unregulated financial system, what other bubbles may soon burst -- equally unexpectedly and with what implications? Although a specialist in mathematical finance and an early pioneer of complex financial derivatives, the perceptions of Nassim Nicholas Taleb (The Black Swan: the impact of the highly improbable, 2007) are particularly relevant to the bursting of such bubbles. This argument has been further developed in an associated paper (Systemic Crises as Keys to Systemic Remedies: a metaphorical Rosetta Stone for future strategy? 2008).

| Editorial conclusion by The Economist, 20th September 2008: Ten short days saw the nationalisation, failure or rescue of what was once the world's biggest insurer, with assets of $1 trillion, two of the world's biggest investment banks, with combined assets of another $1.5 trillion, and two giants of America's mortgage markets, with assets of $1.8 trillion. The government of the world's leading capitalist nation has been sucked deep into the maelstrom of its most capitalist industry. And it looks overwhelmed.... |

This is a black week. Those of us who have supported financial capitalism are open to the charge that the system we championed has merely enabled a few spivs to get rich. But it helped produce healthy economic growth and low inflation for a generation. It would take a very big recession indeed to wipe out those gains. Do not forget that in the debate ahead.

The financial system has reached the point of maximum peril. After years of profligacy, banks have all but stopped lending to each other as the US Congress decides whether to extend support. If the unravelling of the banking system continues, the economic consequences will be dire. Yet there is an even greater risk: that the politicians now contemplating Wall Street's follies draw the wrong conclusions and take the wrong decisions, losing their confidence in markets altogether.

Is this bubble-blowing at its best -- under difficult circumstances? What level of economic disaster, if any, would induce The Economist to write an Apologia per vita sua -- as theologians used to understand it?

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