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Sins of Hot Air Emission, Omission, Commission and Promission **the political challenge of responding to global crises**

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Produced on the occasion of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (Copenhagen, 2009)

Introduction

Politically the issue of global warming, culminating in the [United Nations Climate Change Conference](#) (Copenhagen, 2009), is essentially focused on emissions engendering hot air. It has become increasingly obvious however that what is significant to the political response is what is omitted in framing the challenge. Rather than **hot air emissions**, in political discourse it is now a question of **hot air omissions**. What factors are deliberately ignored in debate regarding the challenge? Is there a danger of groupthink -- as in the response to weapons of mass destruction and the associated intelligence failure?

The issue of global warming is increasingly dividing the world into "believers" and "sceptics" in a manner reminiscent of the division into religious believers and unbelievers. Even climate change scientists are now labelled as believers or sceptics with regard to an issue framed by some as the greatest challenge currently facing humanity and civilization as it is known. Failure to agree with the global consensus as framed is held to be a betrayal of that cause -- but as yet to be criminalized.

This is however also true of the considered response to other global issues, variously claimed as vital to the future of humanity and the planet.

The concern here is with what might be termed the "politics of omission" in the face of urgent issues of global governance -- as exemplified by the UN Climate Change Conference. The question is to what extent "climate change" will prove to be another example of this pattern.

Hot air omissions

At the time of writing, a number of dramatic global crises are the the focus of debate within the international community. Each raises issues regarding what may have been omitted in political presentations of the problem. Examples include, in no particular order:

- **Fresh water shortage:** On the initiative of the [World Political Forum](#), the Copenhagen Conference is being challenged to take account of fresh water. The challenge is formulated as follows:
 - Excluding water problems as such from the negotiations of the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) has been a serious historic error on the scientific, politic and social level. The same holds true for the exclusion of biodiversity. (Riccardo Petrella, [The Water Challenge to Copenhagen](#), 2009)

- **Bonus culture in the financial community:** Concern remains regarding the challenge of regulating the financial community to avoid future crises of economic destabilization (*European Union agrees super-regulator to head off financial crises*, *The Guardian*, 2 December 2009). Various proposals are currently made to alleviate the problematic consequences of the bonus culture considered to have been a factor in engendering the crisis through a pattern of ill-considered risk-taking (*Bankers told: join the real world on pay*, *The Guardian*, 3 December 2009; *Mandelson urges banks to show 'restraint' on pay*, *The Guardian*, 3 December 2009).

The principal justification advanced by interested parties for sustaining the bonus culture is that failure to do so would result in loss of skilled expertise essential to generating revenue in a highly competitive financial market. This argument fails to clarify to which unregulated institutions people with such skills would transfer if bonuses were not supplied, and why (given the recent controls over tax havens) such environments should not also be regulated to prevent a future crisis. It also fails to clarify why others with adequate skills are not available, especially since it was those receiving the bonuses whose incompetence has been rewarded for engendering the financial crisis and whose institutions have had to be bailed out with taxpayer funds.

This preoccupation is of course in the aftermath of a period in which few politicians or economists expressed any reservations regarding the financial derivatives, later demonstrated to be toxic, or the mis-selling whereby the gullible were persuaded to acquire mortgages they could not afford. On the contrary, as a feature of the culture of financial globalization promoted through the World Economic Forum and other bodies, these processes were specifically praised through what can only be described as hot air omission.

Given his formal regulatory role in the UK Government, what level of omission characterized the speech of [Gordon Brown](#) on 20 June 2007, as quoted by Will Hutton (*High Stakes, Low Finance*, *The Guardian*, 2 May 2009):

This is an era that history will record as a new golden age for the City of London," Brown intoned. "I want to thank all of you for what you are achieving." Just weeks later the financial catastrophe burst, creating the "great recession" and leaving the UK taxpayer with a one-sided exposure of £1.3 trillion in loans, investments, cash injections and guarantees to the banking system, of which over £100bn may be lost for ever. Brown went on to hymn the City's "creativity and ingenuity" that had enabled it to become a new world leader. In language so purple it could make a cardinal blush, he praised London's invention of "the most modern instruments of finance" -- the very instruments that were to bring it and the western banking system down.

- **Nuclear programme of Iran:** Intense negotiations continue within the international community with regard to the nuclear programme of Iran and its failure to respect international resolutions on the matter. Curiously mention is rarely, if ever, made regarding the undeclared and uninspected nuclear arsenal of Israel. However, for the first time in 18 years, a 150-nation resolution overrode western objections to such criticism in 2009 (*Israeli nuclear capabilities: Resolution adopted on 18 September 2009 during the tenth plenary meeting*, IAEA, General Conference, 2009; *IAEA conference criticizes Israel's nuclear program*, *The Washington Times*, 19 September 2009; *U.N. body urges Israel to allow nuclear inspections*, *Reuters*, 18 September 2009).

The question is why western nations are so focused on the principles from which they criticize Iran and so reticent to apply the same principles to Israel. Commentary on this matter is rare, notably in western media (*If Israel can ignore the IAEA, why should anyone else listen?* *The Daily Star*, 2009).

- **Corruption undermining democracy in Afghanistan:** Much has been made of the corruption undermining the legitimacy of the elections in Afghanistan and of the resulting government. Corruption has been a major consideration in envisaging the strategy of future military action in Afghanistan, most notably by the USA and NATO. Curiously however little weight is attached to criticism of democratic processes in western countries and to the extent of corruption and its impact on democracy (even within EU decision-making processes).

This is currently evident in the European Union where promised referendums have been denied to various countries, where Ireland has been called upon to vote a second time on an issue ("to get it right"), and where the "President of Europe" has been "elected" through a process widely held to be non-transparent and following an interview by the [Bilderberg Group](#) (Robert Bridge, *Bilderberger and closed-door meetings: European Union gets medieval with ultra-secret elections*, *Global Research*, 19 November 19, 2009). The group has been described as a 'shadowy global freemasonry of politicians and bankers who meet to discuss world affairs in the strictest privacy, spawning innumerable conspiracy theories' (Ian Traynor, *Who speaks for Europe? Criticism of 'shambolic' process to fill key jobs*, *The Guardian*, 17 November 2009). Traynor indicates that immediately prior to his "election" the candidate "attended the Bilderberg session to audition for the European job". Curiously the initiator of that group, [Joseph Retinger](#), was also the initiator of the EU (*The EU: Fathered by Bilderberg-Capitalism*, *Euro-Med*, 3 August 2008).

It is appropriate to recall the accusations of corruption which resulted in the [resignation of the European Commission](#) in 1999.

- **Complicity in torture:** Debate continues within European countries, the USA and Canada, regarding past use of "torture" -- or complicity in torture through knowingly benefitting from its use, or through casting a blind eye on processes of rendition involving their sovereign air space. The debate has been characterized over the past years by a systematic pattern of official denial. It is only very recently that evidence has emerged confirming a degree of complicity, questioning the veracity of the responsible services and politicians.

Such complicity makes it extremely difficult for such western countries to claim that they do not engage systematically in torture when convenient -- however "torture" is reframed to distinguish it from forms claimed to be reprehensible in condemnation of the practices in other societies. How do western governments prove that they do not regularly make use of such practices when there is an array of evidence to the contrary?

- **Arms trade:** It remains curious that the 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council (marked P, in the following), should be amongst the top 11 arms exporters as indicated by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute: USA (P), Russia (P), Germany, France (P), Ukraine, Netherlands, UK (P), Israel, Italy, South Korea, China (P) (see *Wikipedia list of World's largest arms exporters*). It is perhaps also curious that those having the *World's largest defence budgets* are: USA (P), China (P), France (P), UK (P), Russia (P).

Clearly any political discourse regarding the desirability of disarmament, nuclear or otherwise, is severely undermined. No mention is made of the unique opportunity Afghanistan represents to test new weapons on a worthy opponent and to train personnel in their use on live targets -- whilst cultivating a culture of terror in democratic societies to ensure support for such policies (in anticipation of any need to deal with internal unrest). In relation to "hot air omission", there is an irony to the use there of [thermobaric weapons](#) and [Hellfire missiles](#). Symptomatic of the political discourse is the widely publicized commemoration of the individuals killed in the execution of such policies -- with no indication of the number or degree of innocence of those they had previously killed and the consequences for their families.

- **Abuse by clergy:** Revelations regarding sexual and others forms of abuse by clergy, previously upheld (through what might be said to be hot air, with the threat of hellfire) as providers of the most trustworthy guidance to the faithful in many communities, have been especially harmful to people of religious faith. The significant omissions have taken the form of avoidance and cover-up of the issue within religious hierarchies and their framing of it in terms of isolated cases. 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). A second report documents abuse of children by clergy from 1975 to 2004, highlighting the manner in which church and security services colluded to cover up the scandal (*Henry McDonald, Irish church and police covered up child sex abuse, says report*, *The Guardian*, 26 November 2009). Perhaps more significant however is the manner in which such reports are obliged necessarily to focus on the situation in one country (although the religious orders implicated function worldwide) and to avoid reference to the implication of the global authority to which the clergy are responsible.

What other factors might be subject to similarly problematic cover-up from that mindset?

- **Existence of evil:** Prior to attending the UN Climate Change Conference, in his acceptance speech on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, President Barack Obama asserted that: *For make no mistake: evil does exist in the world*. He specifically invoked the concept of "just war" in order to defeat evil. Whilst the term "evil" is frequently used in discourse, even in parliamentary discourse, this assertion would appear formally to recognize greater substance to evil than in its rhetorical use. Such acceptance raises the question why greater attention is not given to it in governance itself and in other institutions -- in educational systems and research centres. Given past difficulty in defining aggression, terrorism, and torture, where are official efforts made to clarify the nature of evil? Why have there been no proposals through the United Nations for international conferences on the matter? Is it the case, with the degree of commitment to faith-based governance, that such clarification has been effectively "outsourced" to religious institutions as in past centuries? However, in a multi-denominational, multi-faith society it does not appear that such clarification has been forthcoming. More problematic is the fact that many of those religions convinced of the existence of evil, and responsible for its identification, have long been characterized by the extent to which they detect evil in other religions.

The painful debate in relation to climate change focuses on evidence for the existence of global warming and standards of proof. Seemingly there is no need for such debate with regard to evil. It suffices to believe in the assertion that evil exists -- and to act on that belief (as with the justification for UK intervention in Iraq, currently the subject of the [Iraq Inquiry](#)). Is there any more solid proof for the existence of evil than for the existence of al-Qaida? Where is that proof? Is it the case that proof of the nature and existence of evil has to be classified as secret for security reasons, as with the proof of the existence of al-Qaida -- but not with the proof relating to climate change?

The tricky matter is that any faith-based system of governance tends to perceive and accuse systems of governance based on other faiths as "evil", typically using descriptors such as "satanic". [Demonization](#) is a characteristic process of propaganda in framing "just war". The problem is deeper when driven by the dictum: *"You're either with us, or against us"* -- with "us" readily confused with "US" in the USA. It is then used to reframe disagreement with "us" as necessarily evil, for "we" are necessarily good. Those we kill because they dissent are then necessarily evil, as with those that kill us. However, just as the definition of "evil" is elusive, so is the definition of "good" even though we associate that value with ourselves, possibly such as to exclude the existence of that quality in others who disagree with us. More problematic, otherness in the form of any alternative (perceived as dissenting from our worldview) then becomes conflated with evil -- justifying whatever action is taken to eliminate it.

How are the dynamics to be distinguished from the deprecated practices of those with doctors who take any disaster to be evidence of evil -- justifying their call for unprecedented resources and the savagery of any action taken with their use? Under

such circumstances it is unclear why governance does not ensure a clarification of the nature of evil rather than cultivating the impression that any action taken by government or its agents is "by definition" good. The questionable framing by Obama is examined in greater detail by Johan Galtung (*A Nobel War Prize Speech by a War President*, *Transcend Media Service*, 14 December 2009)

- **Overestimation of oil reserves:** It has been made clear that oil reserves have been systematically overestimated in the *World Energy Outlook* produced annually by the competent intergovernmental authority, the *International Energy Agency* (Terry Macalister, *Key oil figures were distorted by US pressure, says whistleblower*, *The Guardian*, 9 November 2009). This is expected to further constrain capacity to grow adequate supplies of food (George Monbiot, *The one thing depleting faster than oil is the credibility of those measuring it*, *The Guardian*, 16 November 2009).

This suggests the need to ask what other statistics of significance to governance are similarly "massaged" -- as suggested in 2003 when 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.

- **Swine flu:** Considerable concern has been expressed regarding the potentially pandemic proportions of the global outbreak of *swine flu*, a new strain of influenza A virus subtype H1N1. A vaccine has been produced and has been made widely available. Concerns have been widely expressed about the side-effects of the vaccine itself, the degree of obligation to be vaccinated, and the fact that many (notably in the medical profession) refuse to be vaccinated -- if given the choice. Further concerns have been expressed about the complicity of governments, pharmaceutical companies and the World Health Organization in engendering a degree of panic response -- seemingly totally disproportionate in comparison with other causes of death. Some recall the last *swine flu vaccine panic in 1976*, when the vaccine caused more deaths than the flu itself. Many claims are made about the false information variously disseminated and the motivation for doing so.

The challenge for government and politicians lies in the extent to which they are perceived to be complicit in a campaign of misinformation -- a politics of omission -- and how they can demonstrate otherwise following the assertions variously made. Of potentially greater significance is the manner in which handling of swine flu can be seen as a test of public response to politically-defined urgency in the future, with government placed in the position of the classic tale of *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* (*Entangled Tales of Memetic Disaster: mutual implication of the Emperor and the Little Boy*, 2009). To what extent is climate change to be seen in this light?

- **Unemployment:** A major consequence of the financial crisis of 2008 has been a massive rise in unemployment. It is curious that the main solution envisaged is one of making available jobs -- even in the case of those who have acquired the expertise of a Master of Business Administration.

In contrast to "job centres", there is little evidence of initiatives to facilitate the capacity of individuals (including MBAs) to engender employment on their own initiative. This is an approach on which many in developing countries are obliged to depend, as well as the desperate obliged to sell their bodies or their organs. Engendering employment is not part of the skill set of any MBA programme and it is unclear where this skill set is cultivated -- and why the possibility does not figure in political discourse (*In Quest of a Job vs Engendering Employment*, 2009). There is no "Master of Employment Creation" programme.

These issues are not necessarily closely interlinked, although they are prominent in the complex of issues which national and global governance is obliged to address. Aside from extent of hypocrisy and double standards, frequently raised by non-western countries, they suggest that framing climate change in terms of "emissions" may well be used as a fig leaf to disguise other agendas -- including those deemed hazardous to political livelihoods (*Overpopulation Debate as a Psychosocial Hazard: development of safety guidelines from handling other hazardous materials*, 2009).

The most obvious candidate agenda is the commercial interest in promoting geoengineering as a viable Plan B when Copenhagen fails to deliver (*Geo-engineering Oversight Agency for Thermal Stabilization (GOATS)* 2008). Similarly, the World Summit on Food Security (Rome, 2009), failed to deliver binding aid commitments, and did not set a target date for the eradication of hunger currently experienced by 1 billion people. It is to be expected that Plan B in this insistence will be further genetic modification of foodstuffs, primarily for the benefit of certain commercial interests and irrespective of problematic side effects -- as with geoengineering.

Questions regarding omissions from strategic consideration

The questions to which these omissions give rise include:

- **why** is the systemic interlinkage between problematic issues not clarified to a greater degree, rather than presenting each in isolation?
- **which** issues significant to debate on any one issue are omitted from consideration?
- **how** do significant factors get designed out of consideration?
- **who** is responsible for neglecting significant issues in any supposedly coherent systemic response?
- **when** are omitted factors liable to undermine the efficacy of any supposedly coherent response?
- **where** is the range of potentially significant factors taken into consideration without prejudgement?
- **what** presentations of information are required to hold the network of interrelated issues such as to facilitate debate?

Systematic failure to address such questions leads to a situation in which the capacity to identify alternative strategic possibilities is severely reduced (*Framing the Global Future by Ignoring Alternatives: unfreezing categories as a vital necessity*, 2009).

Reframing the challenge of governance

Various approaches to these questions have been explored in previous exercises focusing on:

- credibility of governance:
 - *Credibility Crunch engendered by Hope-mongering*, 2008
 - *Abuse of Faith in Governance: mystery of the unasked question*, 2009
 - *Emergence of a Global Misleadership Council: misleading as vital to governance of the future?* 2007
- remedial capacity:
 - *Recognizing the Psychosocial Boundaries of Remedial Action*, 2009
 - *Globallooming -- Strategic Inflation of Expectations and Inconsequential Drift*, 2009
- group think and intelligence failure:
 - *Groupthink: the search for Archaeoraptor as a metaphoric tale*, 2002
- unstated factors:
 - *Global Strategic Implications of the "Unsaid"*, 2003
 - *Unknown Undoing: challenge of incomprehensibility of systemic neglect*, 2008
- designing around omission:
 - *Lipoproblems: Developing a Strategy Omitting a Key Problem*, 2009
- civilizing governance:
 - *Governing Civilization through Civilizing Governance: global challenge for a turbulent future*, 2008

Identification of missing factors

Much is made by governments of the vital need for databases and surveillance for security purposes -- defined in terms of crime and terror. Little attention is given to the need for corresponding databases on perceived problems and advocated solutions. There is no "Interpol" for the global problematique nor for the global resolutique, whatever their importance to global security (*From ECHELON to NOLEHCE: enabling a strategic conversion to a faith-based global brain*, 2007). In fact political discourse would seem to apply the "divide and rule" principle to separating those issues and initiatives which are distinguished into bureaucratic niches and ensuring the incapacity of those services to process any information that is not within a narrowly predefined mandate.

The technology of course exists to hold in systematic form the complete set of challenges of governance -- as previously demonstrated with the databases of the [World Problems Project](#) and the [Global Strategies Project](#). The challenge is to use such facilities, as *Wikipedia* has demonstrated, to elicit preoccupations and advocated responses prior to political discourse regarding what should be included in any strategy of governance (*Global Solutions Wiki*, 2009).

Such transparency would increase the credibility of political discourse in a period when it is increasingly suspect and is virtually unable to prove it's case for developing a generic methodological argument to promote the detection of missing factors vital to any appropriate simulation of the challenges of governance. This was the approach taken in an earlier experiment (*Towards a Generic Global Issue Statement: evoking an instructive pattern of unquestionable responses*, 2009). That experiment used the controversy of "racism" as a template for the purpose (*Racism example*, 2009).

There is a case for applying a similar method to the above-mentioned text of the World Political Forum (*The Water Challenge to Copenhagen*, 2009), using "water" as a template to highlight the systemic status of a missing factor. The approach had previously been used with the statement regarding *Australia's Low Pollution Future: Launch of Australian Government's White Paper on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme* (2008). It was "adapted" through that process to frame hypothetical arguments for *Australia's Low Population Future: Launch of Australian Government's White Paper on the Population Reduction Scheme* (2008). The point to be made is that Australia does **not** have a water shortage problem, rather it has a water demand problem resulting from excessive exploitation of limited water resources by unchecked and ever-increasing numbers of people. The same might be said of the inability elsewhere for populations to live sustainably within available resources otherwise claimed to be inadequate.

The method could be fruitfully applied to the editorial published "in 56 newspapers around the world in 20 languages" on the occasion of the first day of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (*Copenhagen climate change conference: 'Fourteen days to seal history's judgment on this generation'*, *The Guardian*, 7 December 2009). Substituting "overpopulation" for "climate change", an early sentence then reads *Unless we combine to take decisive action, overpopulation will ravage our planet, and with it our prosperity and security*. Of course it also reads well if one substitutes "water shortage", "food shortage" or "energy shortage". However in such cases it is "overpopulation" which trumps them all. Humanity can adapt resiliently to climate change if there are less people, but not if there are more -- many of whom are expected to die as a result of such shortages (as they are already doing).

Overpopulation as a key missing factor in climate change discourse

In what follows it should be stressed that the assertion here is **not** that overpopulation is a primary factor in climate change. The assertion is that **the relation of overpopulation to the challenges of climate change is effectively (if not deliberately) ignored in such discourse** -- whether or not it is in fact of no significance as some constituencies argue and believe. As such this constitutes a primary example of omission in such discourse about hot air emissions -- effectively rendering political discourse into a process of hot air omission.

The argument has previously been developed from the following perspectives:

- **Overpopulation as exemplifying a controversial topic for political discourse:** There is clearly a case for exploring systematically the manner in which highly controversial topics are handled, before endeavouring to engage in such discourse. Faced with incompatible belief systems, the issue is how, rationally, to hold the variety of perspectives and concerns, respecting the weight attached to them by different constituencies. This may be understood as the challenge of the politically "hazardous" debate between distinct worldviews (*Overpopulation Debate as a Psychosocial Hazard: development of safety guidelines from handling other hazardous materials*, 2009; *Guidelines for Critical Dialogue between Worldviews*, 2006).
- **Strategic consequences of avoidance of the overpopulation factor:** Whether in the case of climate change or the range of existing and foreseeable resource constraints, there is a need to discover how avoidance conditions and determines both political discourse and the viability of strategic initiatives (*Climate Change and the Elephant in the Living Room*, 2008; *United Nations Overpopulation Denial Conference: exploring the underside of climate change*, 2009)
- **Overpopulation as exemplifying a topic to be designed around, rather than addressed:** Avoidance may well be politically unavoidable to some degree. The challenge is then how to take account of it (*Institutionalized Shunning of Overpopulation Challenge: incommunicability of fundamentally inconvenient truth*, 2008). If such is the case, the question is whether there is some relevant strategic art to be discovered (*Lipoproblems: Developing a Strategy Omitting a Key Problem*, 2009).
- **Overpopulation as exemplifying a boundary to effective action:** There is a case for recognizing the manner in which a range of poorly recognized factors undermine achievement of strategic objectives and implementation. Overpopulation is indicative of the challenge (*Recognizing the Psychosocial Boundaries of Remedial Action: constraints on ensuring a safe operating space for humanity*, 2009)

Questionable framing of population issues in relation to climate change

Curiously, in the days immediately prior to the UN Climate Change Conference two indications regarding the significance of population growth for climate change have been published:

- the [United Nations Population Fund](#) published the *State of World Population* (2009). For the first time the UN draws a link between demographic pressure and climate change (Bronwen Maddox, *Taboo is Broken: it's time for action on population, backed for once by the US*, *TimesOnline*, 19 November 2009). The report notes:

Slower population growth... would help build social resilience to climate change's impacts and would contribute to a reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions in the future.

However **the timing of this unprecedented acknowledgement ensures that the link cannot be effectively considered in either the climate change models on which the Copenhagen negotiations are based or in the months of negotiations preceding the event.** Were the implications of the link too "hot" to handle? (Maria Cheng, *UN: Fight climate change with free condoms*, *Associated Press*, 18 November 2009; Ben Webster, *Birth control: the most effective way of reducing greenhouse gas emissions*, *TimesOnline*, 19 November 2009; (Natasha Gilbert, *Curbing population growth crucial to reducing carbon emissions*, *Nature*, 18 November 2009).

- the [Optimum Population Trust](#) announced on 3rd December 2009 a *Ground-breaking carbon offset project will put population on the Copenhagen agenda*. It has been named the [PopOffsets](#) project. It seeks to enable people to offset their carbon footprint by making on-line donations to OPT to support family planning. It is argued that **family planning is eight times cheaper as a way of tackling global warming than solar power and four times less costly than wind power**, according to the sponsors of the radical new carbon offset initiative. (John Vidal, *Rich nations to offset emissions with birth control*, *The Guardian*, 3 December 2009).

Such considerations can usefully be seen in the context of the decades subsequent to the interdisciplinary consideration of world dynamics that gave rise to *The Limits to Growth* (1972) study in which the population factor had been included. Thereafter that systemic approach was successfully marginalized as irrelevant, if not deprecated, as described by Graham Turner (*A Comparison of the Limits to Growth with Thirty Years of Reality*, CSIRO, 2007). By whom and why?

Converging Challenges

alienated relatives destined to meet -- but when?



Hidden in the shadows
of collective unconsciousness



Focus of conscious
public concern

Brothers differently engendered
by the unmentionable "other end"?

Sins of emission, omission and commission?

As noted above, calls to subscribe to the global climate change consensus are now framed in religious terms with its "believers" and "sceptics" -- and even with what might be recognized as religious hysteria. [Michael Crichton](#) (*Environmentalism as Religion*, Commonwealth Club, San Francisco, 15 September 2003) argued that:

Environmentalism seems to be the religion of choice for urban atheists. Why do I say it's a religion? Well, just look at the beliefs. If you look carefully, you see that environmentalism is in fact a perfect 21st century remapping of traditional Judeo-Christian beliefs and myths. There's an initial Eden, a paradise, a state of grace and unity with nature, there's a fall from grace into a state of pollution as a result of eating from the tree of knowledge, and as a result of our actions there is a judgment day coming for us all. We are all energy sinners, doomed to die, unless we seek salvation, which is now called sustainability.

Sustainability is salvation in the church of the environment. Just as organic food is its communion, that pesticide-free wafer that the right people with the right beliefs, imbibe. Eden, the fall of man, the loss of grace, the coming doomsday -- these are deeply held mythic structures. They are profoundly conservative beliefs. They may even be hard-wired in the brain, for all I know.... Increasingly it seems facts aren't necessary, because the tenets of environmentalism are all about belief. It's about whether you are going to be a sinner, or saved. Whether you are going to be one of the people on the side of salvation, or on the side of doom. Whether you are going to be one of us, or one of them.

As a "belief system", climate change science is effectively trapped in the pattern of which science had previously accused religion -- with the huge irony that appeals are now being made on behalf of science to religion (Suzanne Goldenberg, *Al Gore's Inconvenient Truth sequel stresses spiritual argument on climate*, *The Guardian*, 2 November 2009). Such an emphasis on faith is of course consistent with the faith-based governance variously promoted by the Abrahamic religions (*Future Challenge of Faith-based Governance*, 2003).

Given the current influence of faith-based governance and the classic distinction between sins of omission and sins of commission, this suggests the value of using such language to distinguish between:

- **Sins of emission:** These are of course the primary preoccupation of the campaign against climate change -- as brought to a focus in the UN Climate Change Conference. Should this then be understood as analogous to a [Parliament of the World's Religions](#) in its effort to formulate a *Global Ethic*?

The statistics on emissions by different countries and industries are used to distinguish the greatest "environmental sinners" (Chuck Colson, *Environmental Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God*, *OrthodoxNet.com Blog*, 17 September 2009). The USA is typically cited with such terms, as with coal burning. So understood, these are fruitfully framed as sins of commission (*The Catholic Church has confessed it is one of the biggest carbon emission sinners in Australia*, *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 July 2009).

As summarized by Nathalie Rothschild (*'We need a supernatural being to punish eco-sinners'*, *Spiked*, 8 September 2009), the atheist president of the British Science Association, [Lord May](#), has suggested that:

-- 'religion had historically played a major role in policing social behaviour through the notion of a supernatural 'enforcer', a system that could help unify communities to tackle environmental challenges' (*Leading scientist calls on religious leaders to tackle climate change*, *Guardian*, 7 September 2009)

-- 'religion may have helped protect human society from itself in the past and it may be needed again...A supernatural punisher may be part of the solution' (*Maybe religion is the answer claims atheist scientist*, *Telegraph*, 7 September 2009)

-- 'punishment was much more effective if it came from 'some all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful deity that controls the world', rather than from an individual person' (*Fundamentalism will damage society, says top scientist*, *Independent*, 7 September 2009)

It is of course also useful to understand "emissions" metaphorically as the emission of hot air by politicians and others. Many have

used this metaphor in relation to global summitry, as previously discussed (*Conversion of Global Hot Air Emissions to Music Aesthetic transformation and instrumentalization of vaporware*, 2009; *Globooning -- Strategic Inflation of Expectations and Inconsequential Drift*, 2009). Especially problematic are various forms of spin and disinformation (*Credibility Crunch engendered by Hope-mongering*, 2008), notably as highlighted by Barbara Ehrenreich (*Bright-Sided: how the relentless promotion of positive thinking has undermined America*, 2009; see review).

Much has been made, and will be made, of the **emission of e-mails between climate change researchers** and whether this is indicative of any "massaging" of data to reinforce the desired consensus. This could be construed as a sin of omission reminiscent of the "dodgy dossier" constructed to confirm the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. There are already echoes of the slogan "If you are not with us, you are against us". Whether or not data massaging took place, the incident has been, and will be, used by political sceptics to undermine the evidence for global warming. Disinformation is another sin of omission.

With respect to the population factor, there is considerable irony in the fact that this is appropriately understood to be engendered by carbon "emissions" of another kind. Such emissions may also be appropriately said to engender exponentially increasing quantities of waste -- emissions beyond the absorptive capacity of the environment. More generally it may then be said that humanity is indeed faced with an "**emissions problem**" however those emissions are to be distinguished.

- **Sins of omission:** According to Catholicism an **omission** is a failure to do something one can and ought to do -- doing good. In considering the challenge of climate change and how to act in response to it, this would appear to apply to the omission of factors such as water, biodiversity, and population. If such omission happens advertently and freely, it is considered a sin. Any understanding of sinful omission is especially relevant to the role of religion and faith-based governance in promoting unchecked population growth, regardless of its consequences (*Root Irresponsibility for Major World Problems: the unexamined role of Abrahamic faiths in sustaining unrestrained population growth*, 2007).

For Catholicism the degree of guilt incurred by an omission is measured like that attaching to sins of commission, by the dignity of the virtue and the magnitude of the precept to which the omission is opposed as well as the amount of deliberation -- or "premeditation".

Presumably factors such as population were indeed omitted "advertently and freely" by the scientific communities concerned -- and to a lesser degree by the politicians they advised, given the early acknowledgement of such factors by the *Limits to Growth* study (as noted above). Using that language, it is therefore appropriate to speak of a "sin of omission" in the case of climate change. There is of course the possibility that the factors were omitted inadvertently -- out of ignorance -- by some scientists and by some politicians, possibly encouraged by groupthink.

The sins associated with emissions (above) notably include those of omission but merit analysis in terms of the other sins identified by **critical thinking** -- especially in a collective setting (*Societal Learning and the Erosion of Collective Memory*, 1980; Daniel Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers*, 2001).

Of particular interest is the deliberate omission of information -- justified by the desire to avoid public panic. However, at what point does withholding information on certain factors constitute a sin of omission? Given the examples of "hot air omission" cited above, it would appear that humanity is indeed faced with an "**omissions problem**", however these are to be distinguished. In avoiding recognition of this, humanity might indeed be described as having its "head in the sand".

- **Sins of commission:** In religion this is understood as some form of transgression of the will of God or the gods, as revealed in the moral code laid down by a particular religion -- effectively an unethical act, or doing evil. Translated into the current global environmental context, and the challenge of climate change, that God might be understood by some as **Gaia**. The "will" of God would then need to be understood in terms of the necessary systemic or cybernetic control processes which sustain the environment -- echoing the sustaining processes of the biblical Garden of Eden for those of religious persuasion. From that perspective, it might be said that humankind is now engaged in a second "**fall from divine grace**". Unfortunately any such edenic metaphor also suggests the possibility that "climate change" may well be a "fig leaf" to avoid confronting the "sin of commission" engendering the challenge of overpopulation. This might be considered implicit in the misdirected focus on numbers at the UN Climate Change Conference -- 2 "degrees" through cap-and-trading (although 1 would be better), rather than 2 "children" per family (although 1 would be better).

The **Abrahamic religions** differ in their understanding of the nature of sin. Catholicism distinguishes between **mortal sins**, potentially resulting in eternal damnation and **venial sins**. In Islam, the unforgivable sin of **shirk** is denial that Allah is the only god. Judaism also recognizes national sin, whereas neither Christianity nor Islam have any sense of collective sin. All such notions merit consideration in relation to respect for the global environment as the embodiment of any understanding of omnipresent deity, if only in the form of Gaia. Early examples of this framing are now evident (Ruth Gledhill, *Priest offers festival-goers the chance to confess their green sins*, *The Times*, 30 August 2007). Ulrich Beck (*World Risk Society*, 1999) argues that "We are all environmental sinners".

Curiously the political world, notably at the international level, is confronted by a challenge of "commissions" in the form of inducements offered to decision-makers with respect to major contracts (or in the form of "**cash-for-questions**" to parliamentarians offered by lobbyists). Such commissions (as a feature of "business as usual") are supposedly to be distinguished

as more honourable than the "corruption" that is currently of such concern in Afghanistan.

The disproportionate presence of representatives of commercial interests at global conferences, such as that on climate change, is an indication of the challenges (and opportunities) faced by policy-makers in reaching any decision. It is extremely difficult for policy-makers to prove that they have not succumbed to such inducements -- as in the case of the [oil lobby's promotion of climate change scepticism](#). Proposals for a geoengineering remedy to global warming by interested industries, enthusiastically supported by eminent sectors of the scientific community, will be especially suspect in this respect. Such a remedy may well prove to be the ultimate sin of commission -- as blinkered technological fixes have previously demonstrated (*Geo-engineering Oversight Agency for Thermal Stabilization (GOATS)*, 2008).

Action on climate change is currently framed in terms of the urgency of getting governments and people to "commit" -- of eliciting "commitment" to a collective remedial initiative with language reminiscent of the well-worn patterns of missionary calls for conversion. Unfortunately those sceptical of the hot air representation of spirituality by the Abrahamic religions will not readily buy into political agendas borrowing missionary zeal so questionably -- effectively a sin of commission. Such "atheists" expect a more existentially challenging formulation before they make a genuine commitment -- as is the case in interpersonal relationships. As with any marketing pitch, with which many are necessarily familiar, the urgent sincerity of any pleas for commitment ring hollow and are tainted by omission -- perhaps to be well-named as the "Blair Syndrome of Governance" (cf *Urgent Need for Blair as President of Europe: maximizing early collective learning in anticipation of future crises*, 2009).

Again, however, the evident collective incapacity with regard to major projects (especially on a global scale) makes it appropriate to acknowledge that humanity has a major "**commissions problem**" (*Recognizing the Psychosocial Boundaries of Remedial Action*, 2009).

Given the faith-based framing of climate change, there would appear to be a case for a functional exploration of any traditional set of [seven deadly sins](#) and the vices leading to such sin in the case of the environment (*Towards a Logico-mathematical Formalization of "Sin": fundamental memetic organization of faith-based governance strategies*, 2004). Politicians of faith have already taken steps in this direction (Nicholas Schoon, *Gummer identifies the seven deadly environmental sins*, *The Independent*, 22 July 1993). Environmental sins of politicians have also been widely recognized (*Katharine Mieszkowski, Bush's seven deadly environmental sins*, *Salon*, 8 November 2008).

Sins of "promission"?

The term "promission" does not exist in English. The English term "promise" derives from the French, but the term is only used in French to refer to the [promised land](#) (*La terre de promission*) as originally cited in *Genesis 12:7*. And yet political discourse is primarily about the "promised land" to be reached by pursuing an advocated strategy. Promises are made to electorates with respect to reaching that desirable place if the political party or politician is endorsed. An electoral manifesto might then be said to be a document of promission. With its associations to the "promised land", the term is clearly consistent with faith-based discourse.

What then might be the sins of promission? These are unfortunately only too evident in the failure to fulfil what is promised, as the following indicate:

- **broken electoral promises:** These are typically a focus of opposition parties in the light of the electoral commitments of the party elected. There is however then no equivalent to the [breach of promise](#) with respect to marriage or the [breach of contract](#). Much has been made of the breach of commitments in various European countries to hold referenda on the Lisbon Reform Treaty. As an electoral commitment, the [broken pledge](#) of George Bush with regard to further taxation was a significant factor in the 1992 presidential campaign.
- **broken pledges to developing countries:** Summit meetings of the G8 and G20 have been widely noted for their broken pledges, especially to developing countries (Ronald Labonte, *Promises Kept and Broken, Right or Wrong*, International Development Research Center, 2004; *G20: Pledge by pledge*, *BBC News*, 27 September 2009). The issue has been raised with respect to the recent summit on food security, to achievement of [Millennium Development Goals](#) and to aid (Richard Owen. *World leaders at UN summit vow to aid farmers in bid to help starving [though past record of assistance has been dismal]*, *Times Online*, 16 November 2009; Thalif Deen, *Development: broken aid promises dim hopes for MDGs*, *IPS News*, 6 December 2009; Nigel Morris, *Britain's 'broken pledges on aid costs poorest nations £9.5bn*, *The Independent*, 29 July 2004).
- **broken commitments on human rights:** Amnesty International, *Broken Commitments to Human Rights* (1 May 1995, EUR/39/01/95). The biblical notion of the promised land continues to be fundamental to the claim of precedence by Jews on lands settled by Palestinians. The Puritans who disembarked in Massachusetts in 1620 believed they were establishing the New Israel. Indeed, the whole colonial enterprise was believed to have been guided by God; promised land imagery figured prominently in shaping English colonial thought with pilgrims identifying themselves with the ancient Hebrews. The New World was seen as the New Canaan -- justifying the claims of precedence over the indigenous peoples (Roy H. May, Jr., *Manifest Destiny: America the New Israel*, 1997; F. B. Meyer, *Joshua: and the Land of Promise* 1893). November 2009 witnessed the promise of Barack Obama to put an end to the US government's 200-year history of neglect and broken promises (many enshrined in treaties) towards the Indian tribes of the USA. The pattern has been repeated in South Africa and Tasmania.
- **breaching the social safety net:** Under conditions of national financial constraint, [safety nets](#) in the form of long-standing social security commitments (including pensions and health care) may well be set aside or otherwise rendered ineffective (Brink

Lindsey, *Social Insecurity*, Cato Institute, 2002; *Breaching the Safety Net: the harsh impact of social security penalties*, Australian Council of Social Service, 2001).

- **broken commitments on affordable housing:** The mis-selling to hundreds of thousands of people of [high-risk mortgage loans](#), through questionable lending/borrowing practices, was enabled by promises for affordable housing. This led to the [subprime mortgage crisis](#) and triggered the financial crisis of 2008. Approximately 80% of U.S. mortgages issued in recent years to subprime borrowers were adjustable-rate mortgages. The process resulted in multiple foreclosures and repossessions, rendering unprecedented numbers homeless.

Such sins of promission are of great relevance with the official indication in November 2009 that there is little chance of a "legally binding agreement" emerging from the United Nations Climate Change Conference. Emphasis has been switched to the possibility of a "politically binding agreement". Commenting upon this, Lumumba D-Aping, chair of the G77 group of developing countries, noted: *Tell me of any politician who delivers a politically binding agreement*. The chief negotiator for the EU indicated: *It is a Catch-22 situation. People are waiting for each other so it is difficult to blame anyone*. Such an agreement might be said to be only of value for public relations purposes -- as with any electoral promise.

In endeavouring to identify sins of promission a case could be made for including inappropriate "compromise". As argued by [James Hansen](#), dealing with climate change allows no room for the compromises that rule the world of elected politics (Suzanne Goldenberg, *World's leading climate change expert says summit talks so flawed that deal would be a disaster*, *The Guardian*, 2 December 2009). In Hansen's view:

This is analagous to the issue of slavery faced by Abraham Lincoln or the issue of Nazism faced by Winston Churchill...On those kind of issues you cannot compromise. You can't say let's reduce slavery, let's find a compromise and reduce it 50% or reduce it 40%.

Any dysfunctional political compromise between the parties with incompatible views on climate change might also be explored in the light of the:

- **Historic Compromise** (Italian: "*compromesso storico*") most commonly refers to the "accommodation" between the Italian Christian Democrats (DC) and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in the 1970s, after the latter embraced eurocommunism under Enrico Berlinguer. The 1978 assassination of DC leader Aldo Moro put an end to it.
- **Belgian Compromise:** The possibility of an agreement might be sought in the light of an analysis in the *Principia Cybernetica* regarding this special Belgian approach to problem solving (now of greater relevance given the nationality of the new President of Europe, a practitioner of that art). Typical solutions derived in this way are such that complex issues are settled by conceding something to every party concerned, through an agreement that is usually so complicated that nobody completely understands all its implications.

Again humanity might be said to be faced more generally with a major "**promissions problem**" however its various forms are to be distinguished. In one sense humanity might be understood to be fundamentally "compromised".

Flat-earth mentality?

In the days immediately preceding the Copenhagen summit, an extraordinary mix of metaphors and imagery seems to have emerged -- triggered by almost religious schism between the climate change believers and the sceptics (reinforced in their convictions by the e-mail scandal). The front page headline in *The Guardian* highlighted the chorus of condemnation against "flat-earth" climate change sceptics (Damian Carrington and Suzanne Goldenberg, *Gordon Brown attacks 'flat-earth' climate change sceptics*, *The Guardian*, 4 December 2009). *With only days to go before Copenhagen we mustn't be distracted by the behind-the-times, anti-science, flat-earth climate sceptics*, Brown told the Guardian. *We know the science. We know what we must do. We must now act and close the 5bn-tonne gap. That will seal the deal*.

Presumably Brown is referring specifically to the science of climate change -- failing thereby to take account of the other sciences that might claim to understand other facets of the challenge. On the other hand he may be referring there to the "science of ignoring", well-known in political circles (cf *Unknown Undoing*, 2008; *The Art of Non-Decision-Making*, 1997; *Framing the Global Future by Ignoring Alternatives*, 2009; *Institutionalized Shunning of Overpopulation Challenge*, 2008).

On the same occasion, [Ed Miliband](#), the UK Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, described the sceptics as "dangerous and deceitful". He declared:

The approach of the climate saboteurs is to misuse data and mislead people. The sceptics are playing politics with science in a dangerous and deceitful manner. There is no easy way out of tackling climate change despite what they would have us believe. The evidence is clear and the time we have to act is short. To abandon this process now would lead to misery and catastrophe for millions.

In the event of failure, it will clearly be convenient for the believers to blame the sceptics for delaying critical decisions by casting doubt over "the science" at a time when momentum is claimed to be gathering towards a historic agreement. This has of course been the pattern in religious discourse down the centuries.

The language of mutual accusation is remarkably reminiscent of religious discourse at the time of any schism. The believers are notable

in their self-righteousness with no sense of doubt concerning the merits of their cause. **Unfortunately for Gordon Brown, he was equally lacking in doubt with regard to the global financial system prior to the recent crash -- as noted earlier. He might then have also declared: *We know the science.*** Who might he then have accused of having a "flat-earth mentality" in offering his praise for London's invention of "the most modern instruments of finance" -- the very instruments that were to bring it and the western banking system down?

Use of the "flat earth" metaphor in relation to the current global condition has been much confused by the work of [Thomas L Friedman](#) (*The World Is Flat*, 2005). This received the first *Financial Times* and Goldman Sachs Business Book of the Year Award in 2005. The "business as usual" of the globalization agenda was understood there as intimately associated with a process of "earth flattening" -- a process presumably corresponding to Gordon Brown's thinking. More relevant to climate change, Friedman has followed it with *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution -- And How It Can Renew America* (2008).

The metaphor is especially confusing in a context of faith-based governance -- recalling the obsolete mindset of religions in their tardy recognition of the discovery of the global form of the world by science. Its controversial use has been criticized (*Irresponsible Dependence on a Flat Earth Mentality-- in response to global governance challenges*, 2008; *In Quest of Optimism Beyond the Edge*, 2008; *Memory Challenges at the Edge of the World*, 2008). The metaphor is however more interesting in helping to understand the cognitive challenge for believers in relation to emission, omission, commission and promission:

- **emission:** A "flat earth" offers the sense that those on it are similarly upright, necessarily right, and that any alternative orientation is necessarily wrong. It is the place of groupthink. There are no bounding horizons and therefore a sense of lack of constraint -- with the implication that those thinking otherwise would necessarily fall off the edge. (Edward de Bono, *I Am Right-You Are Wrong: from Rock Logic to Water Logic*, 1992). There is little sense of systemic neglect.
- **omission:** From a "flat earth" perspective, what is omitted is necessarily "over the horizon" and therefore "out of sight, out of mind" -- perhaps even an "underworld". It is necessarily unmentionable (*Global Strategic Implications of the "Unsaid"*, 2003). There dwell those of alternative orientation, perhaps appropriately to be described as "dangerous and deceitful", and possibly "demonic", for their disagreement with the consensus of the "good". The adherents of the different Abrahamic religions have this perception of each other -- frequently using labels such as "satanic" -- inhabiting as they do quite different parts of a globe whose flatness is an illusion to which they variously subscribe.
- **commission:** In this case a joint enterprise is promoted to take its adherents from one place on the "flat earth" to a place of hope - - an imagined promised land. The commission implies comprehensive, unquestioning adherence to the enterprise by the community if it is to be successful. It is an exercise in hope.
- **promission:** This is the hopeful articulation of life in a better place. On a "flat earth" it is necessarily distant, perhaps only to be seen as a mirage. As such it is conducive to betrayal. Promises made by hope-mongering leaders on the quest may not be fulfilled. An ultimate battle with unbelievers and sceptics may be necessary to reach it (*Spontaneous Initiation of Armageddon: a heartfelt response to systemic negligence*, 2004).

In the case of Gordon Brown, there is irony in implicitly appealing for recognition of globality from a flat earth perspective in which everyone is expected to sing from the "same hymn sheet" -- a mode characteristic of his Christian religious conditioning as a "son of the manse". This excludes the possibility of the polyphony of a richer music appropriate to a change of climate (*A Singable Earth Charter, EU Constitution or Global Ethic?* 2006; *All Blacks of Davos vs All Greens of Porto Alegre: reframing global strategic discord through polyphony?* 2007). The mode locks thinking into oversimplistic geometry inadequate to requisite complexity of any viable response to global challenges (*Metaphorical Geometry in Quest of Globality -- in response to global governance challenges*, 2009).

Great Commission, Great Promission, Great Omission?

In his sequel to the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) [Al Gore](#) has adapted his fact-based message into a book *Our Choice: A Plan to Solve the Climate Crisis* (2009). This engages with the Christian, Muslim and Jewish perspectives (Suzanne Goldenberg, *Al Gore's Inconvenient Truth sequel stresses spiritual argument on climate*, *The Guardian*. 2 November 2009). It's publication has been timed for impact at the United Nations Climate Change Conference.

In a context of faith-based governance, it is however appropriate to note the fundamental injunction of the **Great Commission** in the Christian tradition to spread the teachings of Christianity around the world through missionary work. As a driving commitment it bears comparison with the **Aleinu** as the fundamental expression of duty in Judaism and with the commitment of Islam to extending *sharia* through *jihad*. Through these mutually competitive injunctions each of these Abrahamic religions stresses an early historical understanding of a global perspective. In doing so, however, they ignore insights relevant to a larger global understanding from other cultures, such as those of India, China or from indigenous peoples (Susantha Goonatilake, *Toward a Global Science: mining civilizational knowledge*, 1999; [Darrell Posey](#), *Cultural and spiritual values of biodiversity: a complementary contribution to the Global Biodiversity Assessment*, 1999). The question is how such injunctions can respond to any global challenge, both separately and together.

Of particular interest is the promise implicit in any global commission responding to a global crisis like climate change -- as framed by its believers and articulated by such as [Al Gore](#) and [Gordon Brown](#). An indication of this is the confidential "*Danish text*" formulated by a secret "circle of commitment" including the USA and the UK ([John Vidal](#), *Copenhagen climate summit in disarray after 'Danish text' leak*, *The Guardian*, 8 December 2009). This is reminiscent of the mindset that resulted in the **Coalition of the Willing** for intervention in Iraq. The promise of the purportedly crucial agreement at the United Nations Climate Change Conference might then be understood as corresponding to a "Great Promission".

The concern with respect to any Great Promise, presented to the nations of the world in this way, is the possibility of a Great Omission from the Great Commission. What indeed might be omitted -- deliberately or inadvertently -- from comprehension of the commission and its promise? How dangerous might be that omission for the fulfillment of any Great Commission? From any belief perspective, understood in relation to global understanding, the omission might bear comparison to *shirk* in Islam as the most fundamental form of denial. The use of the term in English, in shirking obligations, is also suggestive.

Global remission?

Achieving remission from systemic disease: A global crisis, such as global warming, can be understood as a systemic disease. The planetary environment is faced with a challenge to its health. This raises the question whether it may be useful to consider how the planet might recover from such a disease following the treatment implicit in any Great Commission emerging from the United Nations Climate Change Conference.

A relevant term used to describe such recovery is "remission" as in the case of cancer and other potentially terminal diseases. Remission is then to be understood as a period of time when the incidence of global warming is responding to treatment or is under control. The expression used is "in remission". There are different types of remission:

- **Complete remission** would mean that there are no longer any signs or symptoms of the disease. This could then mean that global warming had been contained, or that its problematic consequences are still present to some degree.
- **Partial remission** is indicative of a condition when the signs and symptoms of global warming are reduced to some degree, with a noticeable decrease of sources engendering global warming. (A remedy for global warming might offer the opportunity for a "**Mission Accomplished**" banner, like that of George Bush on 1st May 2003 on the *USS Abraham Lincoln* -- with its partial success in Iraq indicated by an equivalent to the uncontrolled [subsequent suicide bombings](#) there)

A remission in the human body can last anywhere from several weeks to many years. Complete remission from global warming might then go on for years and over time be considered as a successful cure. However the remission may be temporary, with the recurrence of the process of global warming. Another remission may then be possible with further remedial treatment.

Of relevance to any global crisis like climate change, following remedial treatment, is the degree of extension of the life of civilization thereby achieved -- in the form in which it is currently known. Also of relevance is the quality of that life following such treatment. As with "loss of hair" typical of chemotherapy, loss of biodiversity may be an only too evident consequence of the remedial treatment of the globe required by global warming.

Remission from a planetary disease does not necessarily mean the life of civilization and the planet has been saved -- avoiding collapse and death (also termed "die-off" in the case of the planet). The planet may be successfully treated for global warming -- but environmental systems and civilizations may collapse from other causes, as noted by several authors ([Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, 2005](#); [Thomas Homer-Dixon, *The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity, and the Renewal of Civilization*, 2006](#); [Karen A. Cerulo, *Never Saw It Coming: cultural challenges to envisioning the worst*, 2006](#)).

Remission of sins: The "sins" of hot air emission, omission, commission and promise described above might be fruitfully understood, changing metaphor, as "diseases" characteristic of an information-based society or a knowledge-based society. They are the diseases that prevent appropriate engagement with the challenges of the planet and of global civilization. Fundamentally global civilization may be faced with a "memetic disease" -- whereas the Roman Empire, as analyzed by Homer-Dixon, was faced with an energy distribution "disease" ([Memetic and Information Diseases in a Knowledge Society: speculations towards the development of cures and preventive measures](#), 2008; [Emerging Memetic Singularity in the Global Knowledge Society](#), 2009).

At least in terms of the Christian perspective of relevance to faith-based governance, there is the possibility of "remission of sins". The question is whether and how this fundamental process is meaningful in respect of the sins described above. Is it appropriate to speak of a remission of sins with respect to humanity and a global civilization? How does humanity achieve "forgiveness" for planetary wrongdoing? What form does the necessary "repentance" need to take for that remission of sins to occur?

The difficulty in a global society, riven by a clash of faith-based civilizations, is that each faith subscribes to some equivalent of the Latin phrase central to Christian doctrine, *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* -- meaning "Outside the Church there is no salvation", nor any remission of sins. As understood here in relation to the global environment, this exclusive phrase is unfortunately also characteristic of any way of knowing -- including the belief systems characteristic of the many sciences and other disciplines variously held to be relevant or irrelevant to the challenge of global crisis.

Sins of remission? Curiously there is a degree of ambiguity relevant to the understanding of remission with respect to global challenges. The "penance" considered fundamental to any remission of sins is indicative of acknowledgement and payment of obligations -- echoed in the process of payment of [remitances](#), namely the transfer of funds by a foreign worker to a country of origin. A quantitatively more problematic "sin" of remission is that associated with the remission of profits by multinational corporations from the developing countries in which they are active -- as noted in the past by Andre Gunder Frank ([The Underdevelopment of Development](#), February 1991):

By my calculation, this loss of capital from South to North has been on the order of US \$100 billion per year. The flow was over US \$ 500 billion from 1983 through 1986. \$ 200 billion were through debt service, over \$ 100 billion through capital flight, \$ 100 billion through the 40 percent decline in the South's terms of trade, and \$ 100 billion through normal remission of profits and royalty payments. Since then, this South to North capital flow has been another \$400 billion or so.

Arguably, for humanity to achieve remission from its currently diseased condition, there are obligations in relation to the natural

environment to be acknowledged -- and dues to be paid, if not debts. The extreme public indebtedness of many countries might even be considered as indicative of what is due to the planet as a whole.

On the other hand there is a sense of remission of dues, namely when any such obligations are absolved -- as in the remission of sins. This is currently most evident in efforts to achieve the [forgiveness of debt](#) in the case of [Third World debt](#). In theology an [indulgence](#) is the full or partial remission of temporal punishment due for sins which have already been forgiven. Is it appropriate to compare the [carbon emissions trading](#) approaches to climate change with the [abusive sale of indulgences](#) -- as "sins of remission"? (*Global Market in Indulgences: extending the carbon trading model to other value-based challenges*, 2007). Should the past failure to forgive the debt of developing countries, and the recent willingness to forgive the debt of banking institutions and major corporations, also be considered as "sins of remission"? In the light of such comparisons, it remains necessarily unclear how indulgent Gaia will prove to be as the effective lender of last resort.

Global remission: Again it would seem that humanity is faced by a major "**remissions problem**". Achieving any form of global remission therefore calls for a reframing of the cognitive challenge of engaging with globality (*Metaphorical Geometry in Quest of Globality -- in response to global governance challenges*, 2009; *Existential Embodiment of Externalities: radical cognitive engagement*, 2009).

Is there a mysterious potential convergence of Abrahamic and other perspectives in relation to the global environment -- currently obscured by what can best be described as "subunderstanding"? ([Magoroh Maruyama](#), *Polyocular Vision or Subunderstanding, Organization Studies*, 2004). As a cognitive challenge, is the subtlety of their relationship mirrored in comprehension of [quarks](#) as the fundamental constituent of matter -- whose nature is only known through their composite manifestation in [hadrons](#)? Current pursuit of the [God Particle](#), with the [Large Hadron Collider](#) at [CERN](#), may not be the waste of resources it would otherwise appear to be -- leading instead to more fruitful engagement with nonduality and colliding values, as speculated

[elsewhere](#).



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