



laetus in praesens

Alternative view of segmented documents via Kairos

22nd June 2008 | Draft

Institutionalized Shunning of Overpopulation Challenge incommunicability of fundamentally inconvenient truth

-- / --

Introduction

Learnings from variants of shunning

- Shunning by religious groups | Political shunning | Public shunning | Media shunning | Moral shunning
- Economic shunning | Experience of shunning | Shunning pain and suffering | Discrimination

Learnings from denial

- Socio-political denial (and taboo) | Academic denial | Individual denial

Sustaining a consensual reality

- Faith communities | Academic peer review | Dynamically-gated communities | Premature closure and groupthink

Illustrative metaphors

- Emperor's new clothes | Stone soup | Carp pond | Elephant in the living room
- Seeking the key | Prudery | Airline weight reduction
- Countermeasures: camouflage and decoys | Not seeing the forest for the trees
- Taxation on the psyche | Non-proliferation treaty | Mortgage financing

The "unsayable" and the "unsaid"

Question avoidance

Systematic analysis of incommunicability

Intellectual dishonesty

Overpopulation

Strategic "cloaking" by surrogate problems: weapons of mass distraction

Religious terror

Transformative pressures: emergence of "new thinking"?

"Sustaining growth" as a Ponzi scheme?

Emergent psycho-cultural mirroring?

References

Introduction

This is an exploration of the possibility that the phenomenon of shunning, historically of great significance to the integrity of religious faiths, has effectively become omnipresent and fundamental to the maintenance of the integrity of the dominant socio-political worldview. However, rather than being focused on individuals and their behaviour from the perspective of religion, is it now to be found as a dynamic vigorously sustained with respect to conceptual analysis of the global problematique and any remedial possibilities? As such it might be expected to be inhibiting any effective coherent response to the latter.

The question is how cognition can be "ordered" -- in both senses of the term -- so as to avoid individual and collective exposure to that which is intuitively sensed to be threatening. How can cognition be "ordered" such as not to see? Specifically what can be learnt with respect to recognition of the challenge of overpopulation?

Learnings from variants of shunning

Shunning by religious groups: Shunning may be described as the act of deliberately avoiding association with, and habitually keeping away from, an individual or group. There is a well-documented array of techniques employed within various faiths, sects and secret societies, that can be related in some way to the process of shunning:

- **Shunning**, as notably employed by the **Catholic Church**, by **Anabaptists**, by various **Protestant groups**, and by **Jehovah's Witnesses** (following **Biblical authority**)

- [Excommunication](#), as notably employed by the Catholic Church
- [Disconnection](#), as employed by [Scientology](#)
- [Mark and Avoid](#), as employed by [The Way International](#)

Shunning, possibly associated with physical exclusion or threat, has notably been applied against those deemed to be "unbelievers" in the preferred worldview. For the Bah'ai, this is framed in terms of [covenant breaking](#). The treatment of oath breakers divulging secrets, as in the case of Freemasonry, is frequently cited.

Of relevance to the following exploration, the associated formal declaration of [anathema](#) pertains to the necessary avoidance of views held by those who may or may not be shunned. The Islamic equivalent is [haraam](#) and that in Judaism is [cherem](#) -- both may lead to some form of shunning.

Whilst these processes were more widely recognized in the past, they continue to play a very significant role within modern faith communities and are considered significant to their integrity and identity (see Alexandra Alter, [Banned From Church](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 18 January 2008; [Committee on Religious Shunning](#)). Curiously however, the backlash from sexual misconduct by clergy has resulted in parishioners being described as shunning the Catholic Church (Robert Anglen, [Shaken, Catholics shunning church](#), *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 30 August 2003).

The question here is **how are these processes are applied in relation to secular worldviews and collective identities -- especially as they impact on recognition of strategic priorities and options?**

Political shunning: The formal secular equivalent is of course the declaration of [persona non grata](#) as commonly defined in diplomatic practice -- an equivalent of anathema. In the current context the question is whether a fundamental challenge like overpopulation has been effectively declared to be [problema non grata](#) by a process of which few are aware. Appropriately one of the rare uses of this term is with respect to the problem of the unconscious, as analyzed by John Fizer ([The Problem of the Unconscious in the Creative Process as Treated by Soviet Aesthetics](#), 1963), citing [W. B. Yeats](#): *The more unconscious the creation, the more powerful*.

As remarked by the former Permanent Head of the Department of Science of Australia, John L. Farrands ([Don't Panic, Panic: the use and abuse of science to create fear](#), 1993):

In 1992 perhaps the largest collection of government representatives ever to assemble in one place met at Rio for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Known commonly as the Rio Summit... it was intended to address environmental issues of global concern. Effort was concentrated on so-called greenhouse emission gases by the developed world and the preservation of diversity of species, mostly in the Third World. Whatever the practical outcome, it is noteworthy that for whatever reason, religious or cultural, the problem of population was not addressed. Unbelievable. (p. 176)

Top European leaders, including the bulk of Europe's royals, will not attend the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing. The human rights controversies have caused many leaders to keep their distance. ([European Royalty, Politicians Shunning Olympic Games Ceremony](#), *Deutsche Welle*, 2 July 2008).

At the time of writing, an editorial in *The Economist* ([How to get him out](#), 28 June 2008) suggests with respect to the problematic president of Zimbabwe:

How to finish him off: The first and easiest act is to refuse to recognise any administration led by Mr Mugabe. The European Union, the United States and much of the rich world will ostracise him. Now is the time for Africa, especially the influential regional club of 14 countries known as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), to follow suit.

Is ostracism of this form effectively taken by such bodies with respect to problematic issues like overpopulation ? What other issues are ostracized in this way -- those that are "classified"?

On the other hand concern is expressed that voters are increasingly shunning politics itself, as argued by Gill Hoffman ([Shunning politics](#), *Jerusalem Post*, 12 June 2008):

When politicians are unpopular that's their problem, but when polls show that the public is increasingly estranged from the political system itself, it's everyone's problem. Think of "the system" as including all the variables associated with political life - institutions, players, even values. Yet no matter how serious the dissatisfaction, a political system's legitimacy is best judged by its ability to respond to citizen frustration. When too many people feel it doesn't deliver the goods and doesn't have the capacity to repair what's broken, legitimacy is at risk.

Public shunning: In the light of the previous comment, the manner in which public opinion shuns inconvenient truths -- like overpopulation -- is well illustrated by the following quote regarding the shunning of the embarrassment of 9/11.

<p>A great communal act of wishful thinking and purposeful amnesia? (Jonathan Raban, How US politics got personal, <i>The Guardian</i>, 14 July 2008)</p>
<p>Deep into 2007, people still lived in the "post-9/11" world. Now, by a great communal act of wishful thinking and purposeful amnesia, we seem to have willed ourselves into the period of post-post-9/11....</p>
<p>The stream of bad news about the sub-prime mortgage mess, job layoffs everywhere from Starbucks</p>

to General Motors, the crumbling dollar, the plummeting Dow Jones index, and the inflationary effect of the oil-price crisis on just about everything on the shelves of the local supermarket, holds our attention. Yet, whatever their political colours, Americans appear weirdly reluctant to talk about the most traumatic national event in living memory and the chain of world-altering actions that flowed from it -- actions that have hugely contributed to the rocketing price of oil and the grim state of the economy.

As the networks pull their correspondents from Kabul and Baghdad, the news from that part of the world is growing faint, almost to the point of inaudibility. You have to keep your eyes and ears peeled in order to pick out of the static the whispery information about suicide bombers killing scores at a time, assassinations, political stalemate, the insolent resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the interminable resurrections of al-Qaida in Mesopotamia, despite successive announcements of its final defeat.

Media shunning: Attention in the media to a shunning process in relation to population has focused on immigration policies. One example is that articulated by Tim Murray (*The Shunning of Immigration Critics by the BBC, ABC and CBC, The Voice*, 28 February 2008) who asks:

Is there something endemic in state broadcasting in the Anglophone world which makes the population question taboo and the pro-immigration stance the default position? Is there an intrinsic bias, and if so, where is it coming from? The journalists, the presenters, the researchers, the producers or the higher-ups? Is state media more captive of political correctness than the private media?

What might be said about the process whereby the overpopulation challenge is shunned? What issues is it sought to shun through asserting state control of media, even in countries that pride themselves on their democratic principles -- as with France in 2008?

The case is made with respect to the factors inhibiting response to the current food crisis by William Blum (*Food Riots, Spies, Duopoly, and Media Shunning of a 'Third Party'*, *Dissident Voice*, 2 May 2008).

Moral shunning: Concern has been expressed in the USA regarding "sexual fascism" (*Scapegoats and Shunning, Counterpunch*, 4-5 March 2006):

By the early 2000s, pedophile had become morphed with the still broader "sex offender," with even mainstream media free to refer to the feared and hated class as "pervs" and "perps" and "deviants." This scapegoating also requires public exposure and shunning, even of those who dare defend the civil liberties of pedophiles and sex offenders or challenge attacks on them... Nowhere is censorship and shunning greater than against those who would describe or depict childhood or adolescent sexuality, or mere nudity...The full force of this shunning and scapegoating is aimed at those who can be labeled pedophiles.

On the other hand, the extent of shunning is raised from a contrasting perspective by Jonathan Falwell (*Society Shunning Morality, Newsmax*, 1 February 2008).

Economic shunning: The transformation of religious ethical principles into human rights has been one factor in promoting a form of shunning against offenders. As noted by Patrick Keenan (*Financial Globalization and Human Rights, Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*):

This reputational approach, often referred to as naming and shaming, has long been the primary mechanism of enforcing human rights norms. Shaming was sometimes accompanied by a form of economic shunning, with countries who violated human rights norms finding it more difficult to find trading partners in the developed world.

Experience of shunning: Beyond formal description of the shunning process, of great interest is the actual experience of that process from both sides:

- **how one engages in "not seeing"**, whether in the case of someone declared by one's community as to be shunned, a person of a "lower" class (or a servant), someone of an unrecognized ethnic group, or a person visibly challenged by a disability -- or "losers" of all kinds
- **how one experiences "not being seen"**, as in any of those cases -- of being "invisible" and merely "part of the scenery" -- as exemplified by the experience of women down the centuries (cf [Elise Boulding](#), *The Underside of History: a view of women through time*, 1976).

Shunning pain and suffering: There are many examples of failure to recognize the pain of others, whether deliberately or inadvertently (see [Algosphere](#)). These include those suffering physically, socio-economically, and psychologically. It is most obvious in the indifference to the "collateral damage" of military intervention and the acceptance of collective violence under certain circumstances ("just war" etc). Violence is shunned from an early age in attitudes towards bullying, domestic violence, rape and street violence. The implications of violence are notably shunned in the case of the institutionalized, especially where this is known to involve torture or execution. [Structural violence](#) evokes the subtlest forms of shunning -- effectively dissociating observers from any need to empathize with those who suffer -- or to act out of that experience.

Shunning pain extends to that associated with hunting and slaughter of animals for food or pleasure. It might be understood as a

culturally cultivated indifference. The phenomenon is the focus of a study by Stanley Cohen (*States of Denial: knowing about atrocities and suffering*, 2001). The most general assessment of its nature is to be found in the understanding of *ahimsa* by Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, as discussed elsewhere (*Varieties of Terrorism -- extended to the experience of the terrorized*, 2004).

*Their lofty souls have telescopic eyes
Which see the smallest speck of distant pain,
While at their feet, a world of agonies
Unseen, unheard, unheeded, writhes in vain*
(from *The Ranter*, 1830, by Ebenezer Elliot, aka Corn Law Rhymer)

Discrimination: These examples highlight the extent to which some form of shunning is fundamental to the "art" and practice of discrimination -- and to the pain it may engender. It is indicative of the manner in which issues, rather than people, may be rendered "invisible" and widely treated as such -- a motivation for the problem profiling in the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential*. Of particular interest is the "visibility" associated with VIPs -- in contrast with the "invisibility" of others when "nobody" is declared to be present.

Many of these processes are addressed in concerns regarding "discrimination". Unfortunately efforts to alleviate "discrimination" do little to address the challenges of "discernment" with which they may be associated. In fact measures against discrimination may distract from efforts to increase discernment and the **critical thinking** required to elicit new thinking in response to the challenges of the times (*Web resources: Critical thinking vs. Specious arguments*, 2001).

Learnings from denial

Denial has been much discussed in recent years in relation to global warming. What can be learnt from this in relation to the challenge of overpopulation -- for which the degree of denial is rarely discussed?

Socio-political denial (and taboo): Whether from a more secular perspective, or as cultural norms strongly influenced by faith-based communities, people and behaviours may be declared or treated as **taboo**.

In overtly secular societies, **denial** may be institutionalized through **censorship** -- whether as moral censorship, military censorship, **political censorship** or **corporate censorship**. Typically this is done to ensure that there is no public exposure or consideration of issues deemed destabilizing to the collective worldview. In this sense it is a direct analogue to the practices adopted by faith-based groups. These may of course also develop distinct practices of **religious censorship**, as with the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* maintained until 1965 by the Catholic Church.

Whether or not there is any explicit or formal articulation of such taboo, the challenge to society is evident in the ongoing debates relating to blasphemy and pornography.

Especially relevant to the current exploration is the socio-political significance of "extremism" and recent efforts to conflate it with "terrorism" (*Norms in the Global Struggle against Extremism: "rooting for" normalization vs. "rooting out" extremism?* 2005). Perhaps even more challenging are the forms of denial in which those of the pro-environmental movements engage in condemning any dissent from their perspective -- in a mode and language almost identical to those they oppose (Brendan O'Neill, *Greens are the enemies of liberty*, *The Guardian*, 15 July 2008).

Academic denial: This phenomenon is evident in debate regarding what disciplines or fields of study are to be considered acceptable and "serious" in contrast to those deemed to be "outside the mainstream" as necessarily dubious "fringe" preoccupations and disciplines. This is evident in debates regarding the potential dangers of alternative and complementary medicines. The process is notably to be seen in relation to creationism and intelligent design.

The phenomenon is fundamental to the challenge of interdisciplinarity -- when many disciplines view other disciplines as "marginal" and problematic in some way. It is as characteristic of the encounters between representatives of different schools of thought as it is between those of different faiths.

Potentially much more directly problematic is the extent to which the existence, severity or implications of problems is repeatedly questioned by academics -- as is evident in the recent debate regarding climate change and the manner in which the scientific objectivity of such questioning and denial is itself questionable.

Especially interesting is the manner in which efforts to analyze the evolution of the world problematique, 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.

Individual denial: This is a phenomenon widely documented by the psychotherapeutic professions whereby an individual systematically avoids consideration or acceptance of realities recognized by others in their community.

Sustaining a consensual reality

Is shunning the challenge of overpopulation essential to sustaining the consensual reality of the current global civilization? The following cases are indicative of ways of considering this possibility.

Faith communities: Despite decades of effort in relation to inter-faith dialogue, it is difficult to detect any alleviation of the attitudes that continue to sustain the many conflicts between religions in support of the integrity and identity of their belief communities. As is evident with respect to the symbolism of the hijab and its use in secular societies, the problematic dimensions of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours are central to modern society (*Politicization of Evidence in the Plastic Turkey Era al-Qaida, Saddam, Assassination and the Hijab*, 2003).

Academic peer review: The process of sustaining an academic consensual reality is highlighted by the gatekeeping function performed by peer review, notably with respect to funding applications and journal publication. In the context of an open world wide web, the significance of the process has notably been challenged by a debate recently instigated by the *Financial Times*:

Clive Cookson and Andrew Jack, <i>Science Stifled?: why peer review is under pressure</i> , <i>Financial Times</i> , 12 June 2008	
Drummond Rennie, <i>Journal of the American Medical Association</i> , 1986, November, 256(27), pp. 2391-92 (cited by Cookson and Jack)	Surendra Kelwala, Peer review is sadism at its best, <i>Financial Times</i> , 17 June 2008 (arguing that Rennie "had it backwards")
There seems to be no study too fragmented, no hypothesis too trivial, no literature too biased or too egotistical, no design too warped, no methodology too bungled, no presentation of results too inaccurate, too obscure, and too contradictory, no analysis too self-serving, no argument too circular, no conclusions too trifling or too unjustified, and no grammar and syntax too offensive for a paper to end up in print.	There is no study too exquisite, no hypothesis too brilliant, no literature citation too exhaustive, no design too elegant, no methodology too pristine, no presentation of results too accurate, no analysis too clear, no discussion too magnificent, no conclusions too straightforward, no language too simple for the peer reviewers to attack it with total savagery if the paper happens to be from a third world writer with limited command of the English language, or if the paper threatens to shift fundamentally the prevailing self-serving approaches in doing science in that particular field

The question this debate raises, after many decades of science, is to what extent emergent themes and insights (potentially vital to any appropriate response to the urgent challenges of the times) are subject to both the problematic processes (highlighted by scientific peer review) and by any subtle analogue -- of which the latter provide such a striking model.

The institutionalized "shunning" of emergent insights, ironically of such concern to the *Financial Times*, is exacerbated by the well documented phenomena of: product-promoting research (characteristic of the medical sciences), politicized research (characteristic of post-9/11 American academia), defence research priorities, and faith-based research (characterized by creationism and intelligent design).

In the USA, the challenge has been highlighted by controversies associated with the [American Council of Trustees and Alumni](#) originally co-founded by [Lynne Cheney](#), wife of the Vice President. This notably undertook an aggressive attack on academic freedom seeking the elimination of ideas and activities that placed 9/11 in a historical context, or critical of the so-called war on terrorism (Roberto J. Gonzalez, *Lynne Cheney-Joe Lieberman Group Puts Out a Blacklist*, *San Jose Mercury News*, 13 December 2001). Many of those blacklisted are top scholars in their fields, and it appears that the report represents a kind of academic terrorism designed to strike fear into other academics by making examples of respected professors. As noted by Gary Younge (*Silence in class*, *The Guardian*, 4 April 4, 2006), university professors are denounced for anti-Americanism; schoolteachers suspended for their politics; and students encouraged to report on their tutors.

To what extent does this contribute directly to shunning of the population issue?

Dynamically-gated communities: As discussed elsewhere (*Dynamically Gated Conceptual Communities: emergent patterns of isolation within knowledge society*, 2004), increasingly social groups, typical of the diversity of civil society, might be usefully understood as forming into psycho-social analogues of the "gated communities" that are now emerging in affluent suburbs. Whilst in the latter case it is for security reasons to sustain a particular lifestyle, in the psycho-social case it would appear to be a question of sustaining a particular belief system or worldview. The process is being reinforced by the rapid commercialization of the web and the creation of exclusion zones -- gated communities in cyberspace -- accessible only to those who can afford access to them and therefore explored as viable business models.

Premature closure and groupthink: The problematic relevance of such gated-communities is well-illustrated by the "groupthink" associated with the intelligence disaster that gave rise to the duplicitous arguments in support of military intervention in Iraq, as argued elsewhere (*Groupthink: the Search for Archaeoraptor as a Metaphoric Tale -- missing the link between "freedom fighters" and "terrorists"*, 2002).

In this exploration there is case for considering a complementary process that might be termed "group nonthink" -- to highlight the extent to which a group invests in non-consideration of an issue or a phenomenon. Of great interest is how group nonthink can be deliberately induced -- possibly by media processes such as "dumbing down".

Illustrative metaphors

As explored below, it is fruitful to assume that there may be issues that are so fundamental that they have been subject to an unsuspected form of shunning and denial. The question is how to begin to think about what cannot -- of necessity -- be adequately described. Of great interest is the reaction of anyone presented with a topic or situation which habitually triggers a "shunning response" of denial. Metaphorically it might be argued that "their eyes glaze over". Conceptually they "slide around" the issue, accompanied by appropriate social behaviours.

Is this how the response to overpopulation should be understood?

The challenge of the above processes is how best to give a sense of them in order to raise the question of what may be subject to institutionalized shunning without any individual capacity to recognize it. The following metaphors may be helpful.

Emperor's new clothes: The much-cited, classic fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen (*The Emperor's New Clothes*, 1837), together with its various adaptations, offers an illustration of the extent to which socio-cultural systems "buy into" a developing consensual reality that is totally disassociated from that which is perceptible to innocent "unbelievers".

Are the various world governance initiatives to be understood as forming the court of the Emperor in the last days of the current human civilization? Are they each to be seen as competing to acclaim the quality of the cloth with which the Emperor is variously clothed at major events in response to the challenges of the times -- courteously offering for consideration other designs and models of even higher quality (and even less substantial)? Clothed in an invisible tissue of half-truths, the Emperor proceeds blithely on with the greatest of dignity and gravitas -- despite the total disconnection with the processes engendering the problematique the court collectively and arrogantly claims as its responsibility.

Stone soup: In contrast to the tale of the Emperor's clothes -- where "something" is revealed to be "nothing" -- the tale of the [Brothers Grimm](#) regarding "stone soup" concerns the process whereby "nothing" is revealed to be "something", after all.

Does this metaphor point to the poverty of insight -- essentially an un nourishing stone carried in an empty vessel -- that is brought to world governance gatherings? The skill of the bearers of such a vessel, as initiators of the gathering, is in being able to induce participants each to contribute a modicum of their own insight to the pot to ensure, through such "cooperation", the nourishment of the bearers. Despite satisfying the immediate needs of the initiators and ensuring a "feel good" factor for the participants, the question raised by this metaphor is whether such nourishment is sustainable and adequate to the longer-term challenge. The answer is indicated by the quality of the vows, pledges, promises and commitments made in such gatherings -- as durable as the solemn marital vows ("until death do us part") promoted as the appropriate framework for engendering children that exacerbate population overshoot.

The implication of both tales may be further explored in the light of the challenge of sustainability understood as an elusive condition where time stops and nothing matters (*Where There is No Time and Nothing Matters: cognitive challenges at the Edge of the World*, 2008).

Carp pond: It has been reported that traditional Chinese farms usually had a small carp pond, often for a single carp. The problem is that a single carp in a small pond positions itself in the middle of the pond and seldom moves. Without any exercise its condition rapidly deteriorates. The simple traditional solution is to place a rock in the middle of the pond. The carp then has the visual illusion that it is in a stream and that by swimming (between the rock "wall" and the other visible "stream bank"), it is continually advancing towards some fruitful goal. This suggests that by identifying a suitable "rock" and positioning it appropriately in an otherwise static environment, an individual can be encouraged to engage in what is perpetual, and therefore sustainable, movement for her/his own health. In so doing the individual (or a group) will be sustained by the illusion that he/she is moving towards some fruitful goal. It is not obvious that this pattern need be consciously used.

As discussed earlier (*Metaphoric Entrapment in Time: avoiding the trap of Project Logic*, 2000), it is consistent with a feeling of frustration experienced by many, without being able to articulate it. There is a sense that the socio-political system has conned them into a pattern of activity that is essentially going nowhere -- although offering insubstantial promises that things will get better. The analysis discussed below offers a systematic understanding of how such a "rock" functions in terms of communication within complex institutions.

Elephant in the living room: Use of the expression an "elephant in the living room" refers to an obvious truth that is being ignored or goes unaddressed by a gathering or community of any kind. The expression helpfully illustrates the possible dimensions of the challenge of overpopulation -- that it is so easy to ignore in common discourse.

The political implications of such a challenge in the USA have been variously explored. As a cognitive scientist, [George Lakoff](#) (*Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate: the essential guide for progressives*, 2004) argues that much of the success of the Republican Party could be attributed to a persistent ability to control the language of key issues and thus position itself in favorable terms to voters. He outlines in detail the traditional American values that progressives hold, but are often unable to articulate. Columnist Ryan Sager (*The Elephant in the Room: Evangelicals, Libertarians and the Battle to Control the Republican Party*, 2006) uses the metaphor to discuss the conflict for control of that party.

The metaphor has been differently used by Paul Bailey (*Think of an Elephant: combining science and spirituality for a better life*, 2007) to show that individual perception has its own potency, namely that individual consciousness has its own charge, and such awareness has its own power of connection. In this sense observation actually does have its own power, its own energetic influence.

Seeking the key: There is a well-known tale regarding the person who searched at night for a lost key -- under a lamp light, because it was convenient to look where they could be seen -- even though the person knew that the key had been lost beyond the lighted area. Technically this approach may be associated with forms of "tunnel vision" and "silo thinking".

As a metaphor this tale illustrates the tendency to focus on seeking solutions to global problems in those areas where a solution may be readily envisaged, even though the key to the solution of the problem is known, unconsciously perhaps, to be found only beyond what may be conventionally envisaged -- in the shadows. The focus on "carbon emissions" as a solution for climate change is of precisely this nature. The challenge of overpopulation, which will continue to aggravate that problem, lies beyond what is conveniently envisaged. Being in the shadow, it cannot be "seen" -- and anyway it is inconvenient to attempt to look there.

The metaphor is especially relevant in the case of climate change, because the convenient focus is on solutions in the short-term (in the "lighted area"), when the implications of the challenge are far greater in the longer-term (the "unlit area"). It is in the "unlit" longer-term -- in which population increases undermine any short-term solutions -- that sustainable solutions need to be sought. This is equally true of

other resource-related problems for which short-term solutions are essentially temporary palliatives.

Prudery: Diplomatic consideration of overpopulation may be seen as governed, to a significant degree by [prudery](#) -- through its overt concern with decorum and propriety and the consequent discomfort with sexuality, nudity, alcohol, drug use and the like. As a result the sexual processes through which the population increases can never be placed meaningfully on the negotiating table -- although most probably a prime focus of recreational activity during the course of conferences on "climate change" and other crises. Such "under the table" processes are assisted by the provision of "adult movies" to conference hotel rooms in addition to various forms of "collective entertainment". The situation is even more curious in that one of the religions primarily responsible for blocking any consideration of overpopulation has been recently devastated by the degree to which sexual abuse over decades by its clergy (as symbols of decorum and propriety) has been systematically denied and covered up.

It is perhaps most tragic to recognize the incapacity of eminent scientists and politicians to address the issue of overpopulation other than through the use of euphemisms such as "demographics" and "demographic change" -- as though the topic was conceptually radioactive.

Metaphorically this highlights the manner in which the underlying process whereby a fundamental problem is "engendered" cannot be considered within conventional processes -- however much it is a prime daily preoccupation by those who collectively avoid its recognition. Ironically, in an era of faith-based governance blithely ignoring the manner in which Freudian metaphors are implicit in its discourse and actions, it is perhaps to be expected that the remedy promoted for population growth is yet more "drilling" and "pumping" -- especially "off-shore". Is it appropriate to compare the shunning of overpopulation with the manner in which authorities have shunned the issue of sexual abuse by clergy, or the extent of covert homosexuality amongst those debating overpopulation? Is there a case for "outing" those who covertly recognize the challenge of overpopulation -- but fail to do so in their official capacities?

Airline weight reduction: As a direct response to rising fuel costs, and partially presented as a means of reducing carbon emissions, airlines over the past year have engaged in radical initiatives to reduce excess weight. These range from reducing, if not eliminating, newspapers and brochures, to replacement of glassware. Aircraft construction is being reviewed to eliminate the smallest dead weight items, including redundant wing lights, as well as using lighter materials in construction and seat design. Some airlines now charge customers for a second bag. "The pressure is immense" to cut weight, said John Heimlich, chief economist for the Air Transport Association of America, an industry trade group. "Every penny more per gallon adds \$195 million to the industry's expenses per year".

This intense effort with regard to minutiae offers a striking insight into shunning. There has never been the slightest suggestion by airlines that passengers themselves should pay by personal weight according to some formula -- even though airlines have for some time required exceedingly large passengers to purchase two seat tickets, against much public outcry. The attitude towards overpopulation can then be seen in terms of refusal to even discuss the cost in non-renewable resources of the "collective obesity" of humanity.

Countermeasures: camouflage and decoys: A more proactive approach to shunning is by camouflaging that which is to be avoided -- or by the use of [decoys](#) or distractants of some kind. In wartime decoys have played a significant role -- whether to mislead enemy observers or the automated guidance system of their missiles -- by simulating some physical properties of a real target. [Chaff](#) has notably been used as a radar countermeasure which either appears as a cluster of secondary targets on radar screens or swamps the screen with multiple returns. Currently use is extensively made of [flare](#) and [infrared](#) countermeasures to mislead missile heat-seeking homing devices. [Electronic countermeasures](#) (ECM) are also used to trick or deceive radar, sonar, or other detection systems.

As a metaphor, such techniques point to the possibility of designing strategic decoys to prevent appropriate detection of information regarding a priority crisis. It might be asked to what extent the priorities accorded to the "global warming crisis", the "food crisis", the "energy crisis" and "terrorism" are designed to function as "flares" or decoys -- with the complicity of those who find them to be technically (and therefore profitably) soluble challenges (*Destructive Weapons of Mass Distraction vs Distractive Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 2003; *Promoting a Singular Global Threat -- Terrorism: strategy of choice for world governance*, 2002). Shinned issues may therefore be imagined as effectively hidden from awareness, whether deliberately or inadvertently, by a constant spray of secondary initiatives that become the intense focus of acclaimed vigorous action -- as is the case with the many worthy responses to carbon emissions.

This metaphor accords with the unchecked explosion in the use of "chaff" (as in e-mail spam) and in the tendency to generate "flares" to disguise investigative efforts in response to the information "heat" of genuine crises. In the specific case of "overpopulation", one approach combining both techniques is to ensure the population of cyberspace with articles on topics such as "overpopulation of pets" so as to ensure that they are highly ranked by search engines.

The more sophisticated development of such technology, and presumably the metaphor, is to be found in so-called [stealth technology](#), whereby aircraft are rendered invisible to electronic detection. Metaphorically such an approach is partially recognized by the phrase "under the radar". The question is however, notably in relation to overpopulation, whether some form of "stealth technology" is used within information systems in order to deflect any efforts to detect or "lock onto" the challenge they represent. In its simplest form this manifests as "classification" of documents as "secret" and "restricted".

Not seeing the forest for the trees: This widely-cited phrase highlights the tendency to focus on detail without according attention to context. This is a fundamentally asystemic perspective. Indeed, in the case of population, the tendency is to focus a totally disproportionate amount of media coverage and public debate on isolated individuals and singular cases (a kidnapped child, a tragic deformity, a dangerous murderer, etc), deliberately avoiding any reference to the larger numbers of individuals in that condition -- especially if they are in distant countries. The argument defending that policy is that people identify with individual human drama and have no way of relating to the generality of similar suffering.

In the case of overpopulation, the drama of individual families, with 5, 10 or 15 children in need of public support, evokes little criticism -- and even less analysis of its wider and longer-term implications. After all the children will grow up to be voters, consumers and

parishioners -- probably with families of similar size.

There is a further irony to the metaphor in relation to climate change in that people tend to become incensed at the prospect of a single tree being cut down in their village, but remain indifferent to the cutting down of whole forests -- as in the Amazon basin.

Taxation on the psyche: With respect to certainty in psycho-social systems, [Benjamin Franklin](#) is frequently cited: "*In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes*". Whilst religion is especially concerned with appropriate responses to the existential fundamentals of death, a widespread preoccupation with the response to taxes offers a valuable metaphor for this exploration.

Whereas taxation is typically the prerogative of institutional government, it is also a feature of other kinds of institution: religious taxes (including [tithing](#)), community dues (membership subscriptions), organized crime ([protection rackets](#)), etc. The question is whether a belief system, religious or otherwise, configures itself in relation to its believers in a manner that might be considered a form of "taxation" on their "psychic income" -- however that might be understood. Would the elusive "taxing" nature of such a relationship evoke responses that might be distinctively described in terms of analogues to:

- **tax avoidance** as the legal utilization of the tax regime to one's own advantage, in order to reduce the amount of tax that is payable by means that are within the law.
- **tax evasion** as the general term for efforts, by illegal means, to not pay taxes

Are the challenges of overpopulation a subtle tax on the psyche -- to be avoided or evaded by means it is wise not to discuss in public?

Non-proliferation treaty: The arguments relating to the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty](#) offer powerful insights in the light of the threats to the world claimed by those of its signatories (already in possession of such weapons) in the event of proliferation of nuclear weapons to other countries. This is evident in the case of major tensions relating to potential acquisition of such weapons by Iran and the concerns about their acquisition by North Korea. Curiously it is those possessing such weapons, permanent members of the UN Security Council, who claim the greatest capacity to act responsibly (in the spirit of the UN Charter) with respect to their use -- especially with regard to any commitment to nuclear disarmament, rather than rearmament. Despite this claim, all have announced they are prepared to use their weapons pre-emptively -- except China, the only one to adopt a non-proliferation [one child policy](#). More curiously, only four recognized sovereign states are not parties to the treaty: India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea. Of these, two have openly tested nuclear bombs. Israel has a [policy of deliberate ambiguity](#) regarding its own nuclear weapons -- estimated to number 60-80 bombs -- to which the UN Security Council assiduously avoids any reference. (see George Monbiot, [We lie and bluster about our nukes -- and then wag our fingers at Iran](#), *The Guardian*, 29 July 2008)

The attitude of the UN Security Council on this matter offers an excellent metaphor of institutionalized shunning of population proliferation. In this case it might be argued that the most influential [religions](#) (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc) effectively constitute the "permanent members" of the global ethical "security council" -- promoting the belief in their inherent capacity to act responsibly -- especially given that this is done with the authority of holy scripture. Curiously however they are totally complicit in shunning any serious discussion of the implications of population proliferation. None of them is of course prepared to consider any form of "disarmament" to reduce the threat of population overshoot. Most are in fact concerned about "rearmament" to maintain their competitive advantage in response to the dire threat of fertility differentials. There is of course no question of a Population Non-proliferation Treaty.

Mortgage financing: A [mortgage](#) is the pledging of a property to a lender as a security for a [mortgage loan](#). As such it is evidence of a debt whereby the interest in real property is transferred from the owner to the mortgage lender, on the condition that this interest will be returned to the owner of the real estate when the terms of the mortgage have been satisfied. The totally unexpected, but financially catastrophic, sub-prime crisis of 2007-8 arose from the complicity between gullible borrowers (eager to acquire housing with inadequate resources), and their encouragement by imprudent financial institutions engaging in [subprime lending](#) (namely lending at a higher rate than the prime rate). Only since the crisis have there been suggestions that the time has come to ensure that the entire financial system, including hedge funds and investment banks, become subject to much stricter regulation (Kenneth Rogoff, [End of Financial Triumphalism?](#) *The Guardian*, 4 August 2008).

This offers the most devastating metaphor of the challenge of overpopulation. Imprudent religions encourage unchecked production of children by gullible parents -- when the possibility of sustaining their ecological footprint is increasingly risky. 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.

Like the financial institutions (prior to the sub-prime crisis), these religions offer ever assurance that all will be well -- and deprecate arguments to the contrary. 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. 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 uncreditworthy. 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, might it be understood as the rate appropriate to healthy system renewal -- to sustainability -- as opposed to the "sub-prime" rates at which populations are encouraged to borrow? When will the era of "population triumphalism" be challenged -- or by what?

<p>Purported cover of 27th September 2008 in response to the scale of the collapse of the global financial system (based on an economic model that <i>The Economist</i> had uncritically supported over many years)</p>	<p>Cover of 31st October 2009 on the basis of an interpretation by <i>The Economist</i> of evidence for a new economic model suggesting that "the population problem is solving itself"</p>
	
<p>Who is kidding whom this time around? A "toxic argument" being sold to the credulous? Or is the latest cover title an implicit appeal to heed the earlier title? A remedial injunction to ensure "business as usual" into the future?</p>	

The "unsayable" and the "unsaid"

Irrespective of censorship in whatever form, it is appropriate to recall the vast quantities of documentation deemed secret and requiring "classification" -- accessible only to those with appropriate clearance. Scot Shane reports that some 15.6 million documents were classified in the USA in 2004 (*Increase in the Number of Documents Classified by the Government*, *New York Times*, 3 July 2005).

The purported danger of such documents to the integrity of psycho-social systems is repeatedly cited -- notably presented as an honorable desire to "protect national security" and to avoid "public panic" or "personal embarrassment". The challenge of such material bears a curious resemblance to that of radioactive waste and its disposal -- being "too hot to handle". As with the latter, such dangerous "psychoactive waste" might be said to have a "half-life" of 60 years or more. Storing poses problems that are systemically analogous to those of radioactive waste -- especially when it may be processed into an "information bomb" as dangerous to society as a nuclear bomb.

More generally, the "unsaid" exists in many domains and sectors of society (*Varieties of the "unsaid" in sustaining psycho-social community*, 2003). It necessarily has unexplored implications (*Global Strategic Implications of the "Unsaid" From myth-making towards a "wisdom society"*, 2003).

Does the challenge of overpopulation form part of the "unsaid" -- as have been the processes through which children are engendered? Is the threat it constitutes -- as a "population bomb" -- to be validly compared with the dangers of a nuclear bomb and its fallout? What then might be the population analogues to the arguments against the threats posed by nuclear proliferation, as in the case of Iran? Are there analogous arguments for sanctions and even military intervention?

The unsaid may perhaps be most fruitfully explored through the well-recognized cultural reluctance of Japanese to say "No" as originally documented by Keiko Ueda (*Sixteen Ways to Avoid Saying 'No' in Japanese*, 1974; Masaaki Imai, *16 Ways to Avoid Saying No: an invitation to experience Japanese management from the inside*, 1982). These may be summarized as:

16 Ways to Avoid Saying "No" ... to Overpopulation?		
Vague 'no'	Lying (equivocation or making an excuse --	Delaying answer (e.g., 'We will write you a
Vague and ambiguous 'yes' or 'no'	sickness, previous obligation, etc.)	letter.)
Silence	Criticizing the question itself	Internally 'yes,' externally 'no'
Counter question	Refusing the question	Internally 'no,' externally 'yes'
Tangential responses	Conditional 'no'	Apology
Exiting (leaving)	'Yes, but . . .'	Equivalent of the English 'no' -- primarily used
		in filling out forms, not in conversation

As in the concern of politicians and religious authorities to maintain good relationships with the population, avoidance of "No" reflects a concern for maintaining good relationships. The more experienced or sophisticated the person, the wider the repertoire of techniques used. Has global policy with respect to overpopulation been imbued with a Japanese culture style -- in order to maintain good relationships?

Question avoidance

The above context cultivates question avoidance to a remarkable degree, as argued elsewhere (*Question Avoidance, Evasion, Aversion and Phobia: why we are unable to escape from traps*, 2006; *Questions to which Many deserve Answers*, 2000; *Questionable answers*, 1995). Presumably the lack of curiosity or concern about overpopulation can be understood from this perspective.

Question avoidance is perhaps most strikingly evident at the time of writing in the response of the European Commission, and the political leadership of its members, to the Irish "No" vote on the referendum regarding the [Lisbon Reform Treaty](#). As with earlier negative votes in other countries, the response has been to avoid understanding the justification of such views and simply to seek ways to oblige the Irish to think again in order not to inhibit the progress of European integration. There is absolutely no question of proactively eliciting questions and insights from any source regarding possibilities that might reframe the challenge of European governance. The widely

exploited "open source" technologies of the emergent knowledge society are held to be irrelevant to the pursuit of such a rigid agenda. Necessarily the political leadership of Europe cannot be wrong, irrespective of the unsolicited views of their electorates.

The irony is that such deliberately blinkered progress is claimed to be in the name of a democracy -- one that has done its best to avoid democratic referenda, even when promised in election manifestos. The consequence might be appropriately described as formally initiating a period of "Bulldozer Democracy" to achieve "Market Development" irrespective of the implications for sustainable "Quality of Life". For the UK, the process has been well described by Jackie Ashley (*It's no longer populist to put jobs ahead of the climate*, *The Guardian*, 23 June 2008):

The government wants to hand over powers to give planning go-ahead on major projects...to an unelected commission.... It wants the new system to speed through projects that have been stuck for years in the slow (but democratic) planning system.... in short, this isn't primarily about climate change at all. It is about business and national growth, and projects that will often run completely counter to environmental needs.

What are the terrifying questions that political leadership is desperate to avoid in seeking a higher degree of undemocratic integration -- purportedly to achieve a more coordinated response to terrorism? Are the consequences of population overshoot to be considered in this light, especially when this may translate into widespread social unrest? Is it absolutely "vital" to conceal the nature and degree of dependency on growth in a society that might otherwise be compared with resource vampirism -- in its dependence on oil for that growth (cf *Global Civilization of Vampires: Governance through Demons and Vampires on Spin*, 2005)?

It is already foreseen that governance of the future may need to be more autocratic in order to respond to such difficulties -- confirming Plato's understanding of the decay of democracy into tyranny (*Plato: The Failure of Democracy; On Plato's Criticism of Democracy*). If such is the case, should the autocracy not focus to some degree on the underlying process exacerbating conditions expected to give rise to social unrest -- and to the oversimplifications from which vital new thinking will be much challenged to emerge?

Curiously many strategies are elaborated to "stop" some process considered inappropriate -- without asking questions as to what is sustaining that process, how that might be addressed, and what might more appropriately substitute for that process were it to be successfully "stopped". Smoking offers the simplest illustration -- with the strategic focus being placed simplistically on "not smoking". Into what was the desire to smoke transmuted?

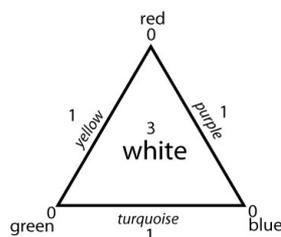
Rather than avoiding questions that challenge the problematic "consensual reality", how would a "poly-sensual reality" enable new strategic options? (cf *Cyclopean Vision vs Poly-sensual Engagement*, 2006; *Using Disagreements for Superordinate Frame Configuration*, 1992).

Systematic analysis of incommunicability

Although not his focus, potentially the most insightful, systematic exploration of the communication issues relating to shunning is that of Ron Atkin (*Mathematical Structure in Human Affairs*, 1974; *Combinatorial Connectivities in Social Systems; an application of simplicial complex structures to the study of large organizations*, 1977). His insights have also been communicated in more accessible form (*Multidimensional Man: can man live in three dimensions?* 1981).

The implications for incommunicability were summarized in an earlier study, *Communicable Insights* (Annex to *Comprehension of Appropriateness*, 1986) which was later presented as *Social organization determined by incommunicability of insights* in the context of the [Global Strategies Project](#). The argument is summarized here to highlight its implications for an understanding of shunning.

Modelling the communication problem: The perceptual significance of Atkin's approach is well-illustrated by visual sensitivity to colours resulting from the three primary hues (red, green and blue). These may be represented on a simple triangle. Here the vertices (0-simplexes) represent the primary hues, the sides are twofold combinations (1-simplexes), and the combination of the three hues makes the central white (2-simplex).



0-dimension vision:

--- Red, Green or Blue

1-dimension vision:

--- Yellow (=Red/Green);

--- Purple (=Red/Blue); or

--- Turquoise (=Blue/Green)

2-dimension vision:

--- White (=Red/Green/Blue)

Now to be able to see all the colours, including white, a person's vision needs to have the ability to function within the triangle as 2-dimensional "traffic" on that geometry, moving from location to location adjusting to the complexity of the geometrical structure which carries the visual traffic. If the person's vision is 1-dimensional, then white could not be perceived because the visual traffic of seeing is restricted to the edges and vertices only.

If the person's colour vision is 0-dimensional, then it is restricted to the vertices. It can only see one vertex colour at a time and never a combination (as represented by an edge). If vision was 3-dimensional, it would allow traffic throughout the geometry, but would perceive other colours as well, calling for a fourth vertex (forming a tetrahedron) in order to contain the full range of combinations.

Dimensions of comprehension: If the geometry represents problems or concepts (or modes of socio-economic organization) instead

of colours, then it would be expected that some people, in relation to that set, would have O-dimensional comprehension (i.e. sensitive to isolated primary problems only). In this sense there is an irony in the way that opposing political factions each tend to identify with a particular primary colour as a symbol. Others may have 1-dimensional comprehension (i.e. only sensitive to binary combinations of primary problems). The latter would be unable to maintain attention to three problems simultaneously in order to perceive the threefold combination (the central, integrated or underlying "white" problem). The threefold problem may then be termed a 2-hole in the pattern of communication connectivity amongst those involved. For 2-dimensional traffic however, the problem complex is coherent, comprehensible and well integrated. For the 1-dimensional traffic, it feels less secure as a whole, since the whole complex may only be experienced sequentially through a succession of experiences ("around the edges"). The shape of the whole may then be deduced but not experienced. For O-dimensional traffic, the underlying problem does not exist, since experience is disconnected.

Social action as traffic in a geometry: Generally speaking it seems that action (of whatever kind) in the community can be seen as traffic in the abstract geometry. This traffic must naturally avoid the holes (because it is impossible for any such action to exist in a hole). The holes therefore appear strangely as objects in the structure, as far as the traffic is concerned. The difference is a logical one in that the word "q-hole" describes a static feature of the geometry, whilst the word "q-object" describes the experience of that hole by traffic which moves in that geometry.

Problems as comprehension inhibitors: This suggests **new ways of comprehending the nature of a problem**. As an "object" this phenomenon is an obstacle to communication and comprehension and obliges those confronted with it to go "around" in order to sense the higher dimensionality by which it is characterized. Communications "bounce off" such objects. As a "hole" this phenomenon engenders, or is engendered by, a pattern of communication. It appears to function both as "source" and "sink". Atkin suggests that, in some way, which is not yet fully understood, object/holes act as sources of energy for the possible traffic around them. From the initial research it would appear that such objects/holes are characteristic of communication patterns in most complex organizational systems. It seems highly probable that they can also be detected in any partially ordered pattern of communication. "Societal problems", "human needs", and "human values" merit examination in this light from the perspective of different languages and modes of socio-economic organization.

Traffic in an organizational geometry: Very concretely, Atkin has investigated situations in which the "vertices" (which could themselves be n-simplexes in a multidimensional geometry) are individuals or offices linked together through various committees. They could also be governments or disciplines. There will then be a lot of O-traffic and 1-traffic within and between offices due to the details of their intra-and inter-office (bilateral) operations.

This traffic will circulate around the holes/objects which they constitute. Any n-level traffic can only be accommodated, or be brought to rest, by an (n+1)-level body (e.g. an executive or a committee). If the latter does not exist, such traffic will continue to circulate around the q-objects in the structure and, according to Atkin, may be defined as noise. An "empire builder" (or any elite), for example, in such an organizational system will carefully create many q-holes underneath him (at the n-level), so that subordinate bodies answerable only to his appointees, are trapped in the flow of noise between them.

Atkin notes that even though the geometry may not have been rendered explicit, such structures generate the feeling throughout a community of some "power behind the scenes" acting to outwit the formal structure. The special value of q-analysis is that it can clarify why action/discussion in connection with (development) problems tends to be "circular" in the long-term, however energetic it may appear in the short-term. As such it shows how **social change is blocked by the way in which conceptual traffic patterns itself around any core problem**, which is never confronted as such because the connectivity pattern is inadequate to the dimensionality of the problem.

This would explain why so many problems go unresolved and why **the process of "solving" problems becomes institutionally of greater importance than the actual "elimination" of the problem**. Atkin analyzes much more complex situations in exploring information flows through the committee structure of a complex organization. He is especially concerned with how **information on substantive issues gets moved around through appropriate committees without it being necessary to confront core issues or bring them into focus**, namely the bureaucratic technique of handling information overload by avoiding use of that information.

Constraints on movement of communicable insights: Q-analysis gives precision to the recognition that traffic of different degrees of content connectivity finds (or creates) its appropriate level in any psycho-social communication complex, presumably including a language. **Communicable insights are level-bound**, especially where they are of high connectivity. In other words, **at the level within which it is possible to communicate, problems cannot necessarily be anchored unambiguously into terms and definitions which "travel well"**. Precision introduces distortion which is only acceptable locally within any communicating society - although "locally" must be interpreted in the non-geographical sense in which all nuclear physicists are near neighbours, for example.

Human impoverishment and reduction of dimensionality: Such considerations suggest the power of q-analysis in clarifying approaches to human and social development in general. **Reducing the dimensionality of the geometry on which a person (or group) is able to live is an impoverishment associated with repressive forces**. Expanding the dimensionality induces positive, attractive forces through which a sense of development and enrichment is experienced. Q-analysis seems to be a valuable new language through which precision can be given to intuitive experiences and their communication, particularly since it provides an explicit measure of obstruction to change.

Disempowerment of response to problems: In the case of social development, it is probable that **most continuing societal problems should be seen as holes/objects**, especially given the well-established record of unfruitful action in response to them - however vigorous and dedicated. Typical examples are: peace/disarmament, development, human rights, environment, etc. Q-analysis could then provide understanding of why any **action tends to be drawn into a vortex of futility**, however much it satisfies short-term political needs for visible "positive" action. The participants in the action find themselves "circulating" around a central concern of which they are unable to obtain an overview due to the geometries of the overlapping conceptual and organizational structures through which they work

(or which they somehow engender).

Provided the dimensionality of discourse can be lowered, such that participants are forced to circulate around a hole -- such as overpopulation -- the analysis makes it clear how avoidance can be designed in. It would seem that this is precisely what has been achieved in the case of overpopulation, namely how the issue is effectively shunned in a complex institutional geometry.

The question might then be fruitfully asked how the dimensionality got diminished in this way and why communication within the institutional geometry find this acceptable over decades.

Intellectual dishonesty

The above-mentioned analysis by Ron Atkin raises fundamental questions as to the degree of intellectual dishonesty that is associated with the emerging knowledge society. Ironically Atkin's basic research was done on the communication processes within and between the academic committees of his own university. It identified the manner in which such communication circulated around core issues without ever addressing them -- or even recognizing them. Communication circulated around the "elephant in the living room" -- perhaps fruitfully recalling the traditional Eastern [tale of the blind men and the elephant](#). He pointed to the possibility of judicious placement of carp-pond-like "stones" in academic communities in order to "manage" them without arousing their objections.

Is overpopulation to be considered such an elephant? Curiously analysis of major crises, reporting of them, and recommendations for their solution, systematically avoid reference to the burgeoning challenge of exploding population. This is despite the attention drawn to such matters in systemic terms by the classic report to the Club of Rome (Donella H. Meadows, et al. [Limits to Growth](#), 1972) and the many subsequent refinements of "global modelling", notably under the auspices of the [International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis \(IIASA\)](#), or from a more topological perspective ([Assessment: Global modelling perspective](#)).

Current analyses, and the proposals based upon them, can therefore only be considered as intellectually dishonest -- reinforcing policies that are consequently profoundly dishonest in failing to respond to the factors engendering the problems to which it is more politically convenient to endeavour to respond. As such they might even be considered by the future, in the light of their consequences, as crimes against humanity.

An interesting and rare exception, indicative of the challenge, is that of a declaration of the Egyptian President ([Egyptian president says unrestricted rise of the population affects the quality of life](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 17 March 2008):

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak warned Monday that **the unchecked rise of the population would wipe away all the returns of the country's economic growth**. Mubarak's remarks came during a Cabinet meeting to address the acute shortages of subsidized bread that have hurt millions of the nation's poor as well as a lack of housing to meet the rising demand. "The unrestricted growth of the population is a national issue that affects the quality of the citizen's life and the nation as well," the president was quoted as saying by his spokesman Suleiman Awwad.

The challenge in Egypt is that birth control for fear of poverty, or to prevent conception permanently is unlawful under Islam, according to a *fatwa* ([Family planning: vasectomy and tubal ligation, Islam Online](#), 2006) -- as discussed by Will Rasmussen ([Preaching family planning to avert a population crisis, Egypt runs into resistance, International Herald Tribune](#), 2 July 2008 -- published online under the amended title [Egypt fights to stem rapid population growth](#)).

Under such circumstances, which other president or world leader would dare to make such an explicit statement? But then who would accord it any attention in practice? Like the incidence of corruption, it was only very late in its own development that the World Bank chose to give official credibility to this challenge and its implications for development programmes -- previously skillfully denied.

Another clarification of the challenge is offered by the analysis of [Thomas Homer-Dixon](#) ([The Upside of Down: catastrophe, creativity, and the renewal of civilization](#), 2006). This is based on very extensive analysis of the burgeoning energy needs of the Roman Empire and the manner in which inability to respond to them was fundamental to its collapse -- at a time when its population was a fraction of what it might now be. His analysis focuses on the central dependency on the energy needs required to sustain the empire -- and especially its highly centralized administration.

That epoch has given rise to the expression "*All roads lead to Rome*". In response to the need for energy transport to the centre at that time, the road system (considered one of the greatest engineering accomplishments) had some 50,000 miles of paved road radiating from the centre of Rome to the limits of the empire. Of course it was primarily designed to facilitate the movement of troops to ensure delivery of energy to the centre, but nevertheless it enabled use for other purposes.

An argument may be made that any systemic analysis of the global system and its problematique would show that it is effectively designed, like the roads of Rome, in terms of flows required to sustain (population) growth as the central ruling activity of human society. "Sustainable development" might even be understood in terms of sustaining the growth of the human population. As with populations beyond the borders of Rome, other flora and fauna of the planet are of value only to the extent that they sustain that process. But, as with the Roman Empire, this view can only be considered implicit in policy options rather than being otherwise rendered explicit.

In commenting on the 2008 annual [Global Attitudes Survey](#) by the Pew Research Center, Philip Stephens ([Saving the planet will be difficult, but do not despair](#), *Financial Times*, 20 June 2008), notes that denial remains a big problem. However:

The good news is that majorities in 14 of the 24 countries covered by this annual poll see global warming as a very serious problem. The bad news is that those countries with the smallest concerned majorities are the ones that are also contributing most to the stock of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Less than half - 42 per cent - of people in the US think the rising temperature

of the planet is a serious problem. In China, the figure is a mere 24 per cent.

Given the lack of effective solutions to the global warming problem as framed, more problematic is the lack of focus of such a "global attitudes survey" on the implications of rising population. Such a survey reinforces the general tendency to avoid recognizing the issue by itself avoiding the introduction of that possibility into the survey.

In a separate survey of attitudes in the USA (*A Deeper Partisan Divide Over Global Warming*, 8 May 2008), the role of population increase might be said to have been euphemistically encompassed by the phrase "human activity" -- but presumably free of all sexual connotation. The lack of conviction there that humans were exacerbating global warming is echoed in the UK (Juliette Jowit, *Poll: most Britons doubt cause of climate change*, *The Observer*, 22 June 2008).

Is there any doubt that the problematic effects of climate change on human society would be dramatically reduced if the world population was 10 per cent of its present size -- as provocatively explored elsewhere (*Challenge of Nonviolent Population Decimation*, 2008)?

<p><i>A G8 removed from the real world</i> Climate, oil and food crisis - it's no longer business as usual for world's leaders Larry Elliott, <i>The Guardian</i>, 7 July 2008 (on the occasion of the G8 Summit in Hokkaido, 2008)</p>
<p>In the build-up to the summit, it has been clear that the individual members of the G8 have been tempted to concentrate solely on the problems facing their own economies and to defer action on the issues that have dominated these events over the past five years...</p> <p>...it would be a profound mistake for the G8 to adopt that approach. For one thing, it is impossible for any country, no matter how big and powerful, to insulate itself from developments in the global economy. And even if they could, it would still be stupid since in the long-term the stability of every country in the world will require energy security, action on climate change and the spread of economic prosperity to the billions living on or below the breadline....</p> <p>...there is no lasting solution to the world's macro economic problems that does not include a solution to where we are going to get our energy from, and how we marry strategies for growth with strategies for environmental sustainability.</p>
<p>But no consideration by the G8 of the process that engenders the inexorable increase in those problems?</p>

Overpopulation

As remarked by the former Permanent Head of the Department of Science of Australia, John L. Farrands (*Don't Panic, Panic: the use and abuse of science to create fear*, 1993):

Population growth is the fundamental problem you should panic about, the problem which will make all our palliatives about resources, peace, the environment, the conservation of cuddly animals come to nought. (p. 151)

Overpopulation is not an insoluble problem, but it is a very difficult problem. It is also a problem that, considering its nature, will take time to solve, and that time is running out. While we are addressing the much less important topics that I have taken as case studies in this book, the nations of the world, singly and separately, are merely nibbling at the edges of this one. They must not be allowed to get away with it. Action requires pressure from a public which understands the scientific, social and economic aspects of the problem. That means you. PANIC! (p. 167).

The combined problems of population growth and economic growth demand that we apply more intelligence to their solution than we have shown to date in our global environmental and economic planning, or we shall just be like the frog in the slowly boiling pan of water who never identifies the point of discomfort level beyond which it is fatal to stay. The frog is boiled alive, every time. (p. 176)

Some responsible analyses of the global problematique already argue that the momentum and acceleration of the processes leading towards some form of collapse are now such as to preclude any effective rational policy solution. This is not to say that "Gaia" will not engage systemic processes to resolve system destabilization -- notably at the painfully violent expense of overpopulation (*Gaia: default global governor of "last resort"?* 2008).

Given the prevalent intellectual dishonesty, and the policies it sustains, it is no longer remedies to the population challenge that are significant and worthy of study or comment. "Population" is such a political "hot potato" and "no go area" that the consequences of its neglect can only develop as it may -- perhaps as the most rapid means of achieving a systemically sustainable balance.

Of greater significance for the future of humanity and the viability of its environment -- and any other extraterrestrial environments that humanity may activate in the future -- is therefore to elicit learnings from the manner in which such a fundamental process is so systematically denied and "shunned". Arguably, as explored by Jared M. Diamond (*Collapse: how societies choose to fail or succeed*, 2005), it is such learnings which humanity needs to render conscious and explicit to navigate the roller coaster of the **adaptive cycle**, notably as promoted by the Resilience Alliance.

The precautionary strategic importance of resilience has recently been stressed in the synthesis by Thomas Homer-Dixon (*The Upside of*

Down: catastrophe, creativity, and the renewal of civilization, 2006). The development of the concept is summarized by Aura Reggiani, Thomas De Graaff and Peter Nijkamp (*Resilience: an evolutionary approach to spatial economic systems, Networks and Spatial Economics*, June 2002). The need for such collective consciousness, in the light of its present inadequacies, has been extensively argued by John Ralston Saul (*The Unconscious Civilization*, 1995).

"Population issues" and "demographics" have been explored in ways that have been proven to be strategically sterile and impotent -- ironically appropriate metaphors (but without any compensating concern for "policy aphrodisiacs"). Whether or not designed to that end, **more fruitful would be the exploration of how these issues are avoided and evaded in the promotion of strategies claimed to be more relevant.** There is considerable scope for:

- tracking development of past issues and exploring the dynamics of how avoidance of population issues was ensured
- engaging in experiments purportedly seeking to address population issues and observing the manner in which such experiments were undermined -- a form of "sting operation" in which the experiment is primarily designed to determine how the significance of the experiment is neutralized

Both approaches are consistent with substantiating, with respect to this central issue, what was defined by management cybernetician [Stafford Beer](#) as an institutional adaptation of *Le Chatelier's Principle*:

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

The central learning is presumably to be found in discovering by what humanity's sustaining cultural myth is so fundamentally terrified -- beyond the judicious oversimplifications of "terrorism" (*Promoting a Singular Global Threat -- Terrorism: strategy of choice for world governance*, 2002).

Ending the "Stultifying Silence" in a "Broken Society"? (Allegra Stratton, <i>Don't be afraid to say what's right and wrong -- Cameron</i> , <i>The Guardian</i> , 8 July 2008)
David Cameron, leader of the UK Conservative Party, called for an end to the failure to distinguish between good and bad behaviour -- and "a mandate to call time on the twisted values that have eaten away at our social fabric":
"I have not found the words to say it sensitively. Then I realised, that is the whole point: we, as a society, have been far too sensitive. In order to avoid injury to people's feelings, to avoid appearing judgmental, we have failed to say what needs to be said. We have seen a decades-long erosion of responsibility, of social virtue, of self-discipline, respect for others, of deferring gratification instead of instant gratification."
"We talk about people being at risk of poverty, or social exclusion: it's as if these things - obesity, alcohol abuse, drug addiction - are purely external events like a plague or bad weather. Of course, circumstances... have a huge impact. But social problems are often the consequence of the choices that people make."
... but what of the behaviour engendering those problems and of those who reinforce it -- at any cost?

Strategic "cloaking" by surrogate problems: weapons of mass distraction

How then is the systemic causative process of exploding population so effectively "shunned"? How is the process strategically "cloaked" -- to employ a term familiar to science fiction enthusiasts and their military emulators? Indeed, from a military perspective, the issue is how to camouflage issues such as to render them effectively invisible? What indeed are the analogues to [stealth technology](#) in a socio-political context? How do these relate to "image management" and to [subliminal communication](#) -- as employed in "public relations" and propaganda?

The approach taken in the Roman Empire was then summarized as "*panem et circenses*" -- subsequently widely cited as "*bread and circuses*". Then as now, "bread" is increasingly a challenge -- and appeals to Marie Antoinette's "*let them eat cake*" are as politically naive now as then. On the other hand, as then, huge resources are now devoted to "circuses" in the form of media facilities, notably gory virtually gaming beyond any horrors practiced in Roman stadia.

Whereas these practices are considered appropriate to many, strategically greater sophistication is required in cloaking the challenge of population increase in which the population is naturally enthusiastically engaged.

The question is how preferred strategic options -- surrogate problems -- are used as "weapons of mass distraction", as vast exercises in cognitive displacement (*Destructive Weapons of Mass Distraction vs Distractive Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 2003). Examples include:

- "war on terror": the manner in which terrorism is promoted as a prime distractive strategic focus is discussed elsewhere (*Promoting a Singular Global Threat -- Terrorism: strategy of choice for world governance*, 2002)

- **climate change crisis:** this is now presented as the fundamental challenge for humanity's immediate future (Al Gore, *An Inconvenient Truth*, 2006), assiduously avoiding any reference to the manner in which population increase will rapidly undermine any remedial action (as recognized, above, by the Egyptian President)
- **food crisis:** now recognized as tragically dramatic for many in developing countries, again assiduously avoiding the question of how population increase would rapidly undermine any remedial measures
- **energy crisis:** already giving rise to social unrest in industrialized countries, again without any reference to the future impact on energy demand of population increase and rising expectations for products requiring energy. Intellectually dishonest responses to the energy crisis through promotion of biofuels are only recently recognized as impacting dramatically on the food crisis.

Curiously the extensive resources allocated to these "crises" -- and others being promoted, such as the threat of asteroid collision with Earth -- all focus narrowly on technical research and solutions consistent with existing corporate business models -- effectively on "silver bullets". Seemingly there is little relevant expertise, or resources, for complex social challenges such as the regression of city environments to the conditions prior to industrialization. Huge efforts are deployed to disarm those in Afghanistan and Iraq, with questionable success -- but without any significant capacity to disarm those in city centres, such as London or Washington.

Avoiding any reference to population as a causative factor, a front page headline of the *Financial Times* (Carola Hoyos and Javier Blas, *Security fears over food and fuel crisis*, 21 June 2008) argues:

Western countries have upgraded the food and fuel crisis into a national security concern as they fear record high energy and agriculture commodity costs are destabilising key developing regions of the world.

What is curious is the variety of "virtual wars" now recognized as strategic fronts calling for the allocation of resources (*Review of the Range of Virtual Wars: a strategic comparison with the global war against terrorism*, 2005). Almost no effort is devoted to determining the consequences of "winning" any such war and "stopping" the phenomenon considered undesirable -- or of the manner in which these processes impact on each other. The use of the military metaphor strangely echoes the battles staged in Roman stadia -- by sponsors seeking popular political approval. More curious is that strategic options are typically articulated using "bullet points" without any sense of how the "targets" for such bullets will respond to receiving the bullet intended for them (*Enhancing Sustainable Development Strategies through Avoidance of Military Metaphors*, 1998).

What calls for exploration is how these seemingly eminently respectable strategies "cloak" psycho-active realities that are cognitively and politically "too hot to handle". Echoing the tale of the Emperor's wardrobe, these cloaks are now the focus of awards and the highest honours, as with according the Nobel Peace Prize to Al Gore -- an appropriately worthy award within its own context. Indeed the award for enabling widespread recognition of climate change might be seen as an award for a degree of collective "unclinking" of the systemic issues -- a process of **conscientization**. Recognition of that "under-cloak" might more fruitfully be seen as merely a step towards removing further layers in order to expose the naked reality of the underlying issues and processes that the cloaks are designed so effectively and elegantly to conceal.

Nakedness is both problematic to faith-based ethics and a prime focus of individual preoccupation (intimately related to both consumer marketing and population increase). In such a society, perhaps this process of unclinking might be fruitfully understood as a political "dance of the seven veils" -- with all the attractions and perversions with which it is conventionally associated in human civilization -- the truth being variously and seductively visible beneath and between the veils.

Part of the challenge lies in correcting the methodology of any such exploration of population increase for the kinds of perverted curiosity with which the various "revolutionary" reports on human sexual activity were associated and for which they were criticized (Alfred Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, 1948/1998; Shere Hite, *The Hite Report on Female Sexuality*, 1976/2004). Beyond Gore's use of the term, there are other challenges to any exploration of "an inconvenient truth", as argued elsewhere (*An Inconvenient Truth about any inconvenient truth*, 2008).

Insurance coverage for aphrodisiacs but not for birth control ?

Women are challenging health benefit plans that fail to cover birth control as unlawfully discriminating on the basis of sex. Their challenge has been finding the appropriate analogy to women's birth control in men's repertoire of medical needs. Attention has been drawn to payment of health coverage for Viagra when none is available for birth control. (Sherry F. Colb, *Denial of Birth Control Insurance as a Form of Sex Discrimination: What "Male" Drug Is Most Similar To Birth Control Pills? Female Birth Control? FindLaw*, 3 January 2001).

Presidential candidate John McCain, known to be a straight talker, declined to discuss the fact that insurance companies cover Viagra but not birth control products -- on *Straight Talk Express* (9 July 2008) (*McCain dodges question on Viagra, contraceptives*)

Religious terror

The Abrahamic religions have been central both to efforts to avoid the population issue as well as to sustaining continuing cycles of interreligious violence (*Root Irresponsibility for Major World Problems: the unexamined role of Abrahamic faiths in sustaining unrestrained population growth*, 2007). There is therefore a need for careful exploration of the manner in which religion, population and terror are intertwined.

Richard Kearney (*Thinking after Terror: an interreligious challenge*, *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Crossroads*, 2, 1, April 2005) goes some way towards exploring the relationship between religion and terror. In a commentary on his argument (*Thinking in Terror:*

refocusing the interreligious challenge from "Thinking after Terror", 2005 in the same issue), the following point was made:

Kearney positions his reflection in time as "thinking **after** terror". This temporal displacement has unfortunate cognitive consequences, effectively favouring a preoccupation with a terror-focused variant of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome -- focusing on the terror as trauma **after** the event. There is nevertheless a strong case for "thinking in terror" -- **within** the actuality of the moment when terror is experienced. This may be the continuing lived reality for many. Religions may even be said to emerge as a response to terror of the unknown and inexplicable -- to be nourished by it, especially in nourishing terror of the afterlife...

Religion and terror have always been intimately associated and it is not surprising that it is faith-based regimes that have been the primary promoters of the various facets of terrorism and the war on terror. As further argued:

There is a challenge offered by terrorism from a spiritual perspective -- and by the scientific innovations offering ever more horrific means of causing terror. The challenge lies in whether the theoretical advances in the fundamental sciences regarding the nature of reality offer cognitive guidelines and templates through which dialogue can transcend the dualism separating religions. Pointers are, for example, offered by physicist David Bohm (*Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 1980) and his subsequent deep involvement in dialogue processes [more], or by mathematician Ron Atkin (*Multidimensional Man; can man live in 3-dimensional space?*, 1981) [more]. People might thereby be carried into the "fabric of reality" -- into "the stones" -- through a process that may hold a key to the "invisible" character of the ubiquitous "unspeakable, inexplicable, unlocateable terror" to which Kearney refers.

Is there a sense in which **religions have served as vehicles through which to mediate collective exposure to the terrifying nature of the underlying reality to which desperate reproduction is a comprehensible, instinctive response?**

But has this role now been assimilated into the political processes of world governance and into the academic processes that sustain them? Is this the role and nature of secular "orthodoxy" as a cultural analogue to religious belief?

Given the ill-considered, asystemic nature of the responses to this undefinable terror, is it appropriate to ask:

- are global strategies currently designed, unconsciously if not deliberately, to herd populations into "plague mode" through overshoot?
- are future scenarios articulated such as to "groom" people for disaster? ("rapture", [technological singularity](#), "2012")
- given these seeming probabilities, what of the traditional Roman question *cui bono* -- who benefits (*Cui Bono: Groupthink vs Thinking the Unthinkable?* 2005)
- who indeed might rejoice in such processes through a form of *schadenfreude* -- and why?

Shunning Truth? "False understanding" of "Go forth and multiply"? (<i>Genesis</i> , 24:2)
In <i>The Gospel According to Mark</i> (2002), James R. Edwards (discussing <i>Mark</i> , 7: 17-19) notes the imperviousness of the disciples to the truth. He argues: Their failure to understand is not the fault of stupidity, nor are they in need of enlightenment by means of esoteric instruction, as in Gnosticism. Their lack of perception is related to a false understanding of "this parable"... A parable cannot be understood from the outside but only by entering into it and seeing the reality it depicts from within. The disciples are like a dog looking at the pointed finger of its master rather than the object to which the finger points.

Transformative pressures: emergence of "new thinking"?

It might be hypothesized that the accelerating processes and increasing pressures described above, and the questioning that they evoke in individuals -- if not at the policy level -- are a characteristic of collective cultural development.

Is there a sense in which these processes are bringing people to an awareness of the nature of the psycho-active terror from which religion overtly seeks to protect them (as an "opium") but with which covertly it seeks some form of transformative existential engagement? This could of course be framed as a fundamental betrayal and perversion -- potentially of a scale far greater than that recently uncovered in relation to systematic denial and cover-up of sexual abuse by priesthoods.

It would be logical for this transformative focus to be linked with instinctual reproductive pressures and their association with individual and collective identity. But the essence of the transformational possibility might be hypothesized to emerge into conscious awareness -- whether individually or collectively -- only with the kinds of pressures and conditions noted by Jared Diamond. For others it is framed as a singularity -- associated by some religions with collective rapture.

Will such pressures lead to recognition that the instinctual pressure to "reproduce" genetically is to be understood as a case of mistaken concreteness -- perhaps even a deliberate misrepresentation? In an emerging knowledge society great emphasis is placed on creativity, dematerialization and virtualization. Does mistaken concreteness "cloak" the sense in which it is "memetic reproduction" that is a more realistic key to carrying identity through the death for which religions strive to act as gatekeepers? Is it this that is intuitively understood by those concerned with their "legacy"? Is this a way of reframing and refocusing reproductive pressures -- especially appropriate to a knowledge society? The French reflexive verb "*se reproduire*", although used pejoratively, is an indication of this understanding. Do other

languages offer valuable clues?

The millennial challenge of religions is typically articulated through the dualism of "good" vs "evil" -- with which the terror in question is so closely associated. This duality is reflected in the processes of reproduction -- defined as a God-given "good", if not an obligation. Any problematic consequences of overpopulation -- evoking the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* in some form -- are to be associated with "evil". From this the individuals concerned are necessarily dissociated, as seemingly having no systemic responsibility. Any responsibility has been collectively framed as deniable -- a perspective questioned elsewhere (*Universal Declaration of Responsibilities of Human Intercourse: a draft proposal*, 2007).

Population bomb 'ticks louder than climate'

(Rosslyn Beeby, *The Canberra Times*, 22 July 2008)

"Climate change is one of a number of stresses we're facing, but it's overshadowed by global population growth and the amount of water, land and energy needed to grow food to meet the projected increase in population. We are facing a world population crisis." (Professor Shahbaz Khan, UNESCO chief of sustainable water resources development,)

"Sustaining growth" as a Ponzi scheme?

It is most curious that the fundamental model for the economic sustainability of human civilization is entirely dependent on growth -- despite its challenges (Fred C. Ikle, *Growth without end, amen? -- conservative policies and the need to assess economic growth for the sake of growth*, *National Review*, 7 March 1994). According to conventional thinking, if the economy does not continue to grow there is no way that the viability of society can be ensured. The point is made with regard to the analysis by one of the world's most influential economists Jeffrey D. Sachs (*Common Wealth: economics for a crowded planet*, 2008) by Martin Wolf (*Sustaining growth is the 21st century's big challenge*, *Financial Times*, 11 June 2008):

If economic growth halted, conflict among the world's people would risk becoming unmanageable. If the environmental consequences proved overwhelming, the costs of growth would become unbearable. We are the masters of our planet now. The great question for the 21st century is whether we can also become masters of ourselves.

The seemingly naive "fix-it" optimism of analyses such as those of Sachs -- as for climate change -- completely fail to take into account the track record of failures with regard to fix-it strategies of past UN "development decades" and development goals ("health for all", "food for all", etc). Such optimism is only justified by success in narrowly defined, **closed system**, technical initiatives -- as in aerospace or military intervention (*In Quest of Optimism Beyond the Edge -- through avoidance of the answering process*, 2008).

In the case of **open system** challenges, and humanitarian (peace-building) initiatives, the failure of this mindset is being currently exemplified by what history will no doubt define as humanity's most ill-conceived, disastrous and costly initiative. As argued by a London East Ender, how is it that unprecedented resources are so enthusiastically and unsuccessfully deployed in Afghanistan to neutralize the Taliban, whereas it has proven impossible to disarm the teenagers in London schools?

The optimism has been justified in the USA by reducing the complexity of social systems -- resulting in the incarceration in penal institutions of the anti-social (a greater percentage than in any other country) and of their potential victims in gated communities (also a greater percentage than in any other country). Presumably emerging patterns of autocratic governance will seek a similar degree of oversimplification (*Emergence of a Global Misleadership Council: misleading as vital to governance of the future?*, 2007).

How is it expected that the necessary "new thinking" relevant to such challenges will emerge from the groupthink by which such psycho-social systems are currently sustained? (cf *Irresponsible Dependence on a Flat Earth Mentality -- in response to global governance challenges*, 2008).

More curious, in the "marketing" of such proposals, are the parallels with **Ponzi schemes** ("pyramid selling schemes") that are so entirely dependent on growth and productivity for their viability and in order to avoid collapse. A growth-based civilization is only sustainable to the extent that the possibility can be "sold" to a gullible, ever burgeoning market. Belief in the possibility might be compared to promotion of **perpetual motion machines** or **squaring the circle** -- denying proofs to the contrary. One might ask whether the kinds of collapse studied by Jared M. Diamond (*Collapse: how societies choose to fail or succeed*, 2005) are due to the failure of various kinds of "selling schemes" intrinsic to different belief systems.

For the individual, the fundamental significance of growth to personal identity and self-esteem is intimately related to sexual activity and reproduction. This is not only evident in the social esteem with which capacity to produce large families is held. It is also evident in the existential angst associated with capacity and endurance in sexual intercourse -- made only too evident by the proportion of e-mail spam concerned with such matters. The economic preoccupation with size is curiously echoed in that domain -- seemingly "size does matter".

Emergent psycho-cultural mirroring?

It might however be hypothesized, following from arguments by various authors (Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: a necessary unity*, 1979; Henryk Skolimowski, *The Participatory Mind: a new theory of knowledge and of the universe*, 1994; Werner J. Sattmann-Frese and Stuart B. Hill, *Learning for Sustainable Living: psychology of ecological transformation*, 2007) that there is a degree of implicit mirroring to be collectively discovered as the key to genuine sustainability. It is possibly through such mirroring, however it becomes conscious, that appropriate global remedial strategies might emerge, as argued elsewhere (*My Reflecting Mirror World: making my World Summit on Sustainable Development worthwhile*, 2002).

That commentary pointed to an elusive sense in which the major governance challenges most discussed offer metaphors of powerful learnings it may be fruitful, if not essential, to explore. In that sense those challenges may indeed be "surrogates" -- mnemonic catalysts - for the learnings vital to authentic sustainability:

- **food and malnutrition:** by what does the population of a knowledge society need to be nourished? How is the conventional framing of the challenge undermined by the huge preoccupation with "substance abuse" and the considerable value associated with other forms of psycho-active nourishment (ironically invisible and meaningless to science)?
- **unemployment:** what is to be understood by meaningful employment? Why has identity-enhancing employment been commodified, commercialized and denatured?
- **energy:** what is the energy required to "oil" the processes of society? Why the dilemma between "natural" and "nuclear" options, both pointing to unconventional ways of engaging with reality (cf *Enactivating a Cognitive Fusion Reactor Imaginal Transformation of Energy Resourcing (ITER-8)* 2006)?
- **economic growth:** what psycho-social processes underlie conventional understanding and dependence on economic growth? What is it that needs to "grow" in a knowledge society and how is that to be understood?
- **global warming:** to what extent does this point to a degree of isomorphism between economic overheating (inflation), overheating of debates between different belief systems, and the generation of "hot air" and more noxious "emissions" in contexts where dramatic challenges are discussed? Is this indicative of a fundamental need for a change of climate? (cf *Playfully Changing the Prevailing Climate of Opinion: climate change as focal metaphor of effective global governance*, 2005).

The dangerous indecisiveness of current global governance, especially given the degree of denial, suggests the advantage of considering the pattern of debate on such issues in the light of meteorological models -- as "whether" patterns rather than "weather patterns" -- with denial and "fix-it" optimism as complementary "cyclones" and "anti-cyclones". The current parallels between the patterns of denial regarding collective crises of learning -- whether the role of women, global warming or those regarding overpopulation -- are indeed striking (cf Jeff Jacoby, *The coming population bust*, *The Boston Globe*, 18 June 2008).

There is a peculiar irony to the population challenge in that it is engendered through a process termed "intercourse", also used metaphorically in reference to dialogue with any "other", notably the environment that is exploited and stressed by increasing human numbers ("*Human Intercourse*": "*Intercourse with Nature*" and "*Intercourse with the Other*", 2007).

The distinctiveness of the human species, justifying its exploitation of other species to its own ends, has been notably defined in terms of a mirror test (or a mark test). Also termed "**mirror self-recognition**" (cf J B Asendorpf, 1993; M W De Veer, 1999; Julian Keenan, 2003; Sue Taylor Parker, 2006; Theresa Schilhab, 2004), such recognition in an ordinary reflecting mirror is a common psychological test of both intelligence and of maturity. Particular importance is attached to observer self-recognition capacity -- exemplified by the capacity to act on that recognition by noting the presence of a mark (hence "mark test") placed where it can only be perceived in the mirror image. From an Abrahamic religious perspective, it is tempting to consider that any such "mark" test is in some curious way related to the "**Mark of Cain**" and the associated curse.

As discussed elsewhere (*Self-reflective Embodiment of Transdisciplinary Integration (SETI): the universal criterion of species maturity?* 2008), the challenge of extra-terrestrial "intelligence" and the seeming failure of such civilizations to enter into communication with a species as intelligent and mature as humanity, might be explored in the light of an analogue to the human mirror test of intelligence and maturity:

- rather than self-recognition in a conventional mirror, the standard of maturity may be the capacity of a species to recognize its reflection in its environment as a whole.
- rather than "intelligence", maturity may be framed as the capacity to integrate such reflection meaningfully and to engage with others in the light of the recognition of how they mirror oneself.
- rather than the capacity to recognize the existence of a mark on one's face in a mirror, it may be more a capacity to recognize how a problem in the environment is a reflection of one within one's own awareness -- from which the problem emerged and by which it is sustained.

Is imminent population overshoot then to be understood as a significant mark on the collective face of humanity -- which it is as challenged to recognize as it would be for some immature species?

Is such unconscious recognition the reason for institutionalized shunning of the challenge of overpopulation -- in anticipation of the painfully transformative consequences of systemic negligence? *Cui bono?* Gaia?

***If we cannot understand how we are part of the problem,
we cannot understand the nature of the solution required***

References

J. B. Asendorpf and P. M. Baudonniere. Self-awareness and other-awareness: mirror self-recognition and synchronic imitation among unfamiliar peers. *Developmental Psychology*, 29, 1993, pp. 88-95.

Ron Atkin:

- Mathematical Structure in Human Affairs. Crane, Russak, 1974
- Combinatorial Connectivities in Social Systems; an application of simplicial complex structures to the study of large organizations. Basel, Birkhauser, 1977

- Multidimensional Man: can man live in three dimensions? Penguin, 1981

Gregory Bateson. *Mind and Nature: a necessary unity*. Dutton, 1979

Stafford Beer. *The Cybernetic Cytoblast:- management itself*. Chairman's Address to the International Cybernetics Congress, September 1969

Elise Boulding. *The Underside of History: a view of women through time*. New York, Halsted, 1976

Stanley Cohen. *States of Denial: knowing about atrocities and suffering*. Polity Press, 2001 [[review](#)]

M. W. De Veer and R. van den Bos. A critical review of methodology and interpretation of mirror self-recognition research in nonhuman primates. *Animal Behavior*, 1999, Sep, 58(3), pp. 459-468. [[abstract](#)]

Jared M. Diamond. *Collapse: how societies choose to fail or succeed*. New York, Viking Books, 2005

John L. Farrands. *Don't Panic, Panic: the use and abuse of science to create fear*. Melbourne, Text Publishing Company, 1993 [[excerpts](#)]

Thomas Homer-Dixon. *The Upside of Down: catastrophe, creativity, and the renewal of civilization*. Knopf, 2006

Anthony Judge:

- Challenge of Nonviolent Population Decimation: reducing effects of overpopulation on resources and climate change by major reduction in the height of people. 2008 [[text](#)]
- Universal Declaration of Responsibilities of Human Intercourse: a draft proposal, 2007 [[text](#)]
- Begetting: challenges and responsibilities of overpopulation, 2007. [[text](#)]
- Root Irresponsibility for Major World Problems the unexamined role of Abrahamic faiths in sustaining unrestrained population growth, 2007 [[text](#)]
- Dynamically Gated Conceptual Communities. 2004 [[text](#)]
- Spontaneous Initiation of Armageddon: a heartfelt response to systemic negligence, 2004 [[text](#)]
- Reframing the problem of "overpopulation", 1995 [[text](#)]
- Checklist of Nasty Methodological Questions -- regarding development analyses and initiatives. 1981 [[text](#)]

Julian Keenan with Gordon G. Gallup, Jr., and Dean Falk. *The Face in the Mirror: the search for the origins of consciousness*. Ecco/Harper Collins, 2003 [[review](#)] [[review](#)]

M. Lafrance. Postural mirroring and intergroup relations. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 11, 1985, (2), pp. 207-217.

John Fizer. The Problem of the Unconscious in the Creative Process as Treated by Soviet Aesthetics, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 21, 4, Summer 1963, pp. 399-406 [[abstract](#)]

Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III. *The Limits to Growth*. New York, Universe Books, 1972

R. R. Meeks. The Mind in the Mirror: Self-Awareness, Self-Recognition, and the Mark Test. Paper presented at the Association for the Scientific Study of Consciousness, Memphis, Tennessee, 2003

Mark Nielsen, Thomas Suddendorf, and Virginia Slaughter. Mirror Self-Recognition Beyond the Face. *Child Development*, January/February 2006, 77, 1, pp 176 - 185 [[text](#)]

Sue Taylor Parker, Robert W. Mitchell and Maria L. Boccia (Eds). *Self-Awareness in Animals and Humans Developmental Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press, 2006 [[summary](#)]

Jeffrey D. Sachs. *Common Wealth: economics for a crowded planet*. Allen Lane, 2008

Werner J. Sattmann-Frese and Stuart B. Hill. *Learning for Sustainable Living: psychology of ecological transformation*. Morrisville, Lulu, 2007

John Ralston Saul. *The Unconscious Civilization*. House of Anansi, 1995

Roy Sorensen. The Aesthetics of Mirror Reversal. *Philosophical Studies*, 100/2, (2000), pp. 175-191

Theresa Schilhab. What mirror self-recognition can tell us about aspects of self. *Biology and Philosophy*, 19 (no.1), 2004, pp. 111-126 [[text](#)]

Henryk Skolimowski. *The Participatory Mind: a new theory of knowledge and of the universe*. Arkana, 1994

K. B. Swartz. What is mirror self-recognition in nonhuman primates, and what is it not? In J.G. Snodgrass and R.L Thompson (Eds.), *The self across psychology: Self-recognition, self-awareness, and the self-concept*. New York Academy of Sciences, 1997, pp. 65-71.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

For further updates on this site, [subscribe here](#)