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Seven Deadly Sins of Fundamentalism

assessing memetic weapons capability of neoconservatism

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Introduction

The focus here is on the distortion of information and insight that characterizes the neoconservatism that now has as its agenda the hegemonic domination of the world [[more](#) | [more](#) | [more](#)]. Such distortion is however consonant with other forms of fundamentalism and single-factor thinking, even those associated with some narrow forms of technocracy.

The arguments follow from earlier explorations into groupthink (*Groupthink: the Search for Archaeoraptor as a Metaphoric Tale*, 2002) and psycho-social twistedness (*Twistedness in Psycho-social Systems: challenge to logic, morality, leadership and personal development*, 2004), especially that arising from those who perceive themselves uniquely privileged by having been "chosen" or "born again" (*Strategic Opportunities of the Twice Born: reflections on systemic camouflage of mass deception*, 2004). Of particular interest is the link between the narrow and exclusive quality of the thinking of neoconservatism with the religious mandate it derives from fundamentalist supporters -- or opponents that can be appropriately demonised to reinforce the divine mandate on which that religious support is believed to be grounded.

In religious discourse -- fundamental to the faith-based governance now explicitly preferred by the American people -- the distortion can then be most usefully highlighted in terms of "sin" or "vice", and notably the classic "seven deadly sins" or the corresponding "seven vices". The argument here is that the evident phenomena associated with sin derive from a distortion of attitude on which it is much more important to focus -- as the prime hindrance to any appropriate form of individual or collective development. In the latter case this relates to hindering the emergence of appropriate forms of governance and response to threat (*Transforming the Encounter with Terrorism*, 2002)

It is ironic, and characteristic of neoconservatism, that such underlying "sinful" distortions of attitude are poorly acknowledged in preference to the more evident manifestations of their consequences in morality or ethical behaviour. This displacement, notably when deliberate, might be cited as an example of a cardinal sin as explored here. By the same token, extolling the matching redemptive "virtues" can be deliberately undertaken such as to reinforce the sin they are believed to alleviate. This distorted appeal to virtue, so demeaning of its essential attitudinal value, might also be cited as a cardinal sin.

The following arguments are articulated in response to Christian fundamentalism, notably as it affects faith-based governance. Analogous

arguments could of course be developed in relation to Islamic and other forms of fundamentalism -- favouring their respective forms of faith-based governance -- at the origin of so many conflicts around the world inspired by religion. Ironically however, despite their foreseen "clash", they are each driven by an honourable preoccupation with rejection of "sin" as a hindrance to relation to the divine -- as each understands this. But it is to be expected that their understandings will be used in the development and deployment of memetic weapons in the 21st century. These need to be better understood to forestall a memetic arms race and its consequences.

Sin as deliberate distortion of insight

The concern here is to track back from classic expositions of the more evident forms of "deadly", "mortal" or "capital" sin to their underlying attitudinal distortions. It is important to note that the various religious and other bodies that have elaborated sets of sins / vices have not reached unanimity on the items to be included -- commonly assumed to number seven [sins] -- or their precise correspondence to appropriate salvatory virtues [vice | sin | virtue]. It has been argued that one way of organizing the vices is as the corruption of the virtues. A virtue could therefore be corrupted by nonuse, misuse, or overuse [more].

The classic understanding that the essence of sin is the selfish placement of one's own perspective before that of the more universal perspective of God may be seen as the articulation in religious terms of a misplaced focus on the individual at the expense of the community, of humanity, or of the planet. *Hamartia*, the Greek word translated as "sin," is commonly understood to mean "missing the mark". But when used in Aristotle's *Poetics*, it is translated as error, frailty, or tragic flaw. Seen this way, sin, or hamartia, is an essential part of our humanness (cf Philip Simmons. *The Usefulness of Sin*, 1999). Scott Peck (*People of the Lie: the hope for healing human evil*, 1983) argues that sin is mental illness characterized by: denial of personal responsibility, destructive scapegoating, intolerance to criticism, over concern for public image, denial of hateful or vengeful feelings, and intellectual deviousness (see also Katherine Yurica. *How to Detect Evil*, 2003).

One formal definition of "sin" would be: "Disobedience to the Will of God." -- the deliberate, intentional act of disobeying the Will of God. Paul Tillich, for example, associates "sin" with "humanity's estrangement from the ultimate Ground of Being which is God." -- such an estrangement being the existential condition of humankind. Each sin is an attenuation of the central Christian sin of failing to love God with all resources and to love fellows as much as self. Such "sinfulness" is the "real" state of being of all human beings until they have been "saved." For Josef Pieper (*The Concept of Sin*, 2001) it is the willful denial of one's own life-ground, a denial that alone rightly bears the name of "sin." He argues that paradoxically, this reality is both willed and yet also pre-given, that is, both adventitious and yet somehow innate to our existence - a paradox which, next to the mystery of existence itself, is the most impenetrable mystery of all. **Each "sin" might therefore be understood as a form of highly dangerous failure of understanding in relation to a larger scheme in which the individual or group is embedded.** [more]

The initial focus here is on "sins" in relation to the handling and presentation of information and concepts. Some "sins" lend themselves more readily to this exploration, notably the first:

1. **Pride** (*superbia*) or vanity. As excessive self-love (holding self out of proper position toward God or fellows), this has been recognized as the root of all of the vices. It includes a desire to be important or attractive to others. In religious terms it is placing oneself above the divine as the origin of all things -- interfering with recognition of the "grace of God".

Conceptually, and in cognitive terms, this might be described as placing oneself above the most general framework by which others are subsumed, defined and constrained -- an excessive belief in one's own abilities (to "go it alone" without need of allies). In this sense it is a form of exclusivism through which one defines oneself at the origin of (or above, or prior to) the conceptual framework through which others are necessarily ordered. In legal terms this would be understood through the expression "placing oneself above the law", exemplified by the phrase typical of those with dictatorial tendencies: "I am the law". The extensive disruption of international law through neoconservative policies is an illustration of this process.

Such an attitude necessarily precludes, and may deliberately and actively oppose, the emergence of new insight vital to the survival of a group, or of humanity as a whole. It reinforces the premature conceptual closure that directly prevents any form of innovation or creativity -- otherwise to be defined as potentially threatening dissidence. Present-day governments and their intergovernmental organizations, invest heavily in public information programmes to promote their false pride in purportedly delivering the best administration and social security to their citizens for which they consider the respect of their citizenry their due.

As with any dictator, the great challenge for a superpower is to assume that the powers to which it attaches value (such as military or economic power) are directly correlated with its insight and thus inherently superior to those of others of lesser power measured on the same scale. In seeking to sustain such pride, there is a marked tendency to associate with, and be surrounded by, those who reinforce such erroneous perceptions. These may be defined as sycophants or "yes-men" (cf Maureen Dowd. *A Plague of Toadies*. *New York Times*, 18 November 2004). Typically they reinforce any tendency to groupthink -- a phenomenon explicitly acknowledged in relation to intelligence reporting on weapons of mass destruction in the response to Iraq.

Subcategories of pride might include:

- **disobedience** of those with complementary or potentially greater insight (as has been evident in the pattern of asymmetrical relationships cultivated amongst members in the Coalition of the Willing);
- **boasting or ostentation**, indulging in vanity, ignoring the role of complementary or potentially more valuable achievements of others (as is typically evident in triumphalism over short-term achievements);
- **hypocrisy**, in sustaining a pattern of double standards, whether openly or covertly (as has been evident in claims to be

- acting in defence of the highest values of civilization whilst simultaneously undermining and demeaning those values through the restriction of civil rights and the use of the most reprehensible forms of treatment of those in its power);
- **contempt**, for others sincerely promoting alternative perspectives (possibly despite their significant historical insight);
- **arrogance**, to the point of blindly dismissing the relevance of the insights and experience of others (as has been evident in response to the cautionary warnings of those concerned with the strategies currently deployed in the Middle East);
- **impudence**, to the point of disrespect for those, acknowledged by their constituencies as having other forms of insight and experience
- **celebrating one's own bad deeds**, notably the capacity to manipulate the system to personal advantage or to the advantage of a privileged group (as has been evident in relation to the commercial groups that have so strikingly benefited financially from military intervention in Iraq);
- **exclusiveness**, to the point of reinforcing righteous belief in "manifest destiny", specially blessed and "chosen" by God, thereby implicitly relegating others to a less "blessed" category excluded from the "chosen" (as has been evident in the stance of religious fundamentalists in their special association to God, whether in justification of a "crusade" or opposing it with a "jihad").

The corresponding **salvatory or redemptive virtue** is traditionally defined as "faith" (*fides*), with which the virtue wisdom, and the "contrary virtue" humility, may also be associated. The challenge of faith lies however in the quality of the experience of that in which faith is held. Constrained insight, whether of the "head", the "heart", or the "gut" instinct (as preferred by the current American president), may severely restrict understanding of the larger framework with which the faith is claimed to associated. Pride may simply limit that understanding to reinforcement of individual prejudice. Calls for the blessing of God, now a requirement for American politicians (as much as it is for those of Muslim belief), beg the question as to whether the blessing is for the exclusively chosen, or extends to those excluded by such a pattern of belief. The possibility that salvatory faith in a larger dynamic pattern of connectedness may in some as yet unrecognized, "mysterious", way include those who are excluded from a narrow perspective is then readily denied. A narrowly defined "faith" necessarily lacks the "humility" to respond to patterns beyond its immediate understanding. And yet it may be the dynamics of that pattern -- and recognition of one's place in it -- that are fundamental to any sustainable future for humanity.

2. **Avarice** (*avaritia*), covetousness or reprehensible acquisitiveness: This attitude manifests most tangibly in efforts to acquire material wealth or gain, notably the physical or intellectual resources of others, so depriving them of the benefits they might otherwise expect from them. Typically it includes theft, and the means by which it is fraudulently disguised. More subtly it includes "greed", namely the coveting of the property of others -- which may sustain the ambition that leads to fraudulent initiatives through which they are obtained. In the current international crisis, the American ambition to acquire and control the oil reserves of the Middle East has been most frequently cited in this respect. This is recognized as following a pattern of initiatives to control intellectual and cultural property (patents, etc). With respect to Iraq, and the deliberate misrepresentation of information regarding weapons of mass destruction (and the involvement of Saddam Hussein with al-Qaida), these might be understood as a deliberate form of fraud to disguise the envisaged theft. The role of officials of the United Nations, and others, in the preceding oil-for-food scandal might also be seen in this light. The levels of corporate kleptocracy associated with military procurement and reconstruction contracts have also been noted in the case of Iraq -- with, or without, the complicity of government officials.

Avarice may also be associated with the desire to acquire and control information through every means, including continuous electronic monitoring of communications. This form of avarice is exemplified by the Bush Administration's [Total Information Awareness](#) program run through the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency by Admiral John Poindexter, and designed to gather every available scrap of information about Americans' private activities into a single, gigantic database [\[more\]](#). Its name was subsequently changed to [Terrorist Information Awareness](#).

The avarice in the case of governments, and any superpower, may relate to power itself -- wanting the power to force someone to act according to their agenda with the aspiration of living and prospering at the expense of others as is evident to many in relation to the "hogging" of natural resources by the current superpower. It is however typical of many government initiatives that enrich themselves with taxation to the benefit of the privileged and the disadvantage of the poorer.

In a religious framework, avarice was understood to include simony (the sale of clerical offices), and sacrilege (or usurping the place of God). Both Christianity and Islam have associated it with usury. More generally in such a framework it might be understood as the fraudulent acquisition of "merit" (with which some Eastern religions are more explicitly concerned) in order to ensure a better afterlife. Ironically, in a context of faith-based governance, the sin of simony might be said to reemerge with the awarding of public offices (ambassadorships, etc) to those who have significantly demonstrated their financial support during the election process [\[more\]](#).

Conceptually avarice is most evident in the distortions to which the competitive pursuit of knowledge leads, most notably the dynamics associated with prior publication of results, and the pursuit of scientific recognition and career advancement -- even through the falsification of results. This points to ways in which such ambition may in fact obscure genuine breakthroughs: suppression of patents significant for humanity, suppression of emergence of new insights articulated by outsiders perceived as constituting a competitive threat, etc. In the competitive dynamics amongst agencies with intelligence responsibilities, this may lead to suppression of vital leads in favour of increased institutional budgets. This sin directly opposes the honest pursuit of knowledge "for its own sake", or any honest assessments of the justifications for various forms of research or "intelligence".

The corresponding **salvatory virtue** is traditionally named as "justice" (*justitia*) or liberality (the "contary virtue"), through which each is given their due, rather than stealing and retaining the things of another. As such it may be understood as generosity -- giving without having expectations of the other person. This in turn may include allowing others to get the credit or praise which is their due. Beyond the tangibles, however, "justice" may be understood as being central to the appropriate balance of complementary conceptual or explanatory elements in a complex system vital to individual and collective survival. Efforts to position particular theories as unduly central to any complex pattern of understanding are then characteristic of the sin, in contrast with the necessary determination of the role that any particular insight may be called upon to play in the larger scheme of things. The tragedy of any "clash of civilizations", or of the violent confrontations between adherents of different belief systems, is that so little effort is invested in determining how each may indeed be more appropriate under certain conditions (as some have ventured to explore ***Lorimer). In this sense particular belief systems, and notably the most fundamentalist, might be better understood at this time as inherently avaricious and lacking in the generosity of spirit essential to deeper understanding.

3. **Gluttony** (*gula*) traditionally includes drunkenness, gluttonous eating, and soft living, namely the consumption in excess of that which is required -- a misplaced desire for food for its sensuality, or withholding food from the needy. This may extend to forms of food, clothing, shelter, and transportation far in excess of real needs. Numerous assessments identify the disproportionate use of global resources required to sustain the western lifestyle -- defined especially defensively in the case of Americans as a "way of life" that is not subject to any negotiation in the light of the diminished quality of life experienced by others. The examples most frequently cited are those of energy resources, notably oil -- and the challenges of substance abuse in the form of alcoholism, eating disorders (and the associated obesity), and drugs. In economic terms, this sin may perhaps best be examined in relation to the controversy regarding "glut" and scarcity. In the case of the hegemonic agenda of neoconservatives, gluttony precludes any appreciation of the cultures whose insights are looted in the pursuit of the tangibles which happen to be associated with them.

More interesting in this context are the less tangible forms of gluttony. **Conceptually** these may be seen in the excessive consumption of information, the constant search for media experiences, and the ever greater dependence on "action" and "happenings". These may be framed positively in terms of natural human curiosity or the "thirst for knowledge" -- "going boldly where none have gone before". Such pursuits are commonly subject to the criticism that they are dangerous distractions from the discovery, experience and cultivation of less superficial and more fundamental insights and experiences. It is such subtlety that may be vital to sustainable lifestyles in circumstances of reduced tangible resources.

The corresponding **salvatory virtue** is "temperance" (*temperantia*) or possibly hope. This suppresses extremes of excess, and includes abstinence (the "contrary virtue"), continence, and modesty -- typified by the Quaker use of "plain", notably with respect to "plain speaking" and "plain living" (cf Catherine Whitmire. *Plain Living: A Quaker Path to Simplicity*, 2001). It accepts the natural limits of pleasures and preserves this natural balance. The challenge is of course the contrast between the "drab" and the "innovative" and how innovation for its own sake may be used to obscure and demean the merits of the plain -- or how emphasis on the "plain" may be used to suppress the emergence of the innovative and various forms of expression of the joy of living, or resonance with the infinite.

4. **Lust** (*luxuria*) as a sin traditionally includes any form of sexual relationship understood to be abusive attachment to carnal pleasure (fornication, adultery, incest, sodomy, masturbation) -- the drive for pleasure out of proportion to its worth and self-destructive potential. However it also includes love of other forms of carnal or worldly luxury. Political parties, and in the case neoconservatives, are recognized as having a "lust for power" and what it brings. To that end every effort may be used to manipulate democratic systems and the media to guarantee the satiation of that lust -- which may be extended to a "lust for war", or the uncritical use of unproven technology by technocrats. Once in power these same systems may be used to manipulate key macro-economic variables to create an illusion of high sustainable growth. Such lust for power is itself recognized as inherently corrupting. In a religious context it is recognized as the suffocation of the spirit's pursuit of higher insight. Its ubiquity in the West is condemned as hedonism by Islam.

Conceptually, and more interesting than the lust for carnal knowledge and pleasures of the body, is the "lust" for explanatory knowledge and insight. This is exemplified by the "need to know" associated with ever higher levels of secrecy and security classification -- associated in turn with both government intelligence services and with secret societies. It is caricatured in portrayals of Hitler's occult agendas, notably his coveted possession of the Spear of Destiny [[more](#) | [more](#)]. By association, this caricature has been extended to the invasion of Iraq by the Coalition of the Willing (Meghan O'Rourke. *Raiders of the Lost Art: Why didn't we protect the National Museum and Library in Baghdad?* 2003). But perhaps even more interesting is the scientific "lust" for a Theory of Everything through which the mundane can be totally explained and controlled.

In contrast to lust, the **salvatory virtue** is "prudence" (*prudentia*) or chastity (the "contrary virtue") or even charity, which keeps the incorrupt from corruption and includes providence, circumspection, caution, and docility. Of potentially greater interest is its articulation for governance in terms of the "Precautionary Principle". This is the ethical principle prescribing that if the consequences of an action, especially the use of technology, are unknown but are judged by some scientists to have a high risk of being negative from an ethical point of view, then it is better not to carry out the action rather than risk the uncertain, but possibly very negative, consequences.

Through a new principle of "preemptive justice", neoconservatives in the USA have distorted this virtue of prudence to subvert long-held American principles of justice, notably the presumption of innocence [[more](#)]. Through the "presumption of guilt", some

200 years of American jurisprudence have been overturned -- of which the only possible outcome is injustice; a result that has already been institutionalized by the Bush Administration's flagrant disregard for the rule of law. For government, the justification for such "precautionary justice" is of course the threat of terrorism (cf *Promoting a Singular Global Threat -- Terrorism: Strategy of choice for world governance*, 2002). The trend toward "preemptive justice" complements the loss of rights by criminals, spreading coercion into all spheres of life. Such "anticipatory self-defense," including preemptive war, is increasingly framed as vital in the neoconservative approach to battling international terrorism.

5. **Sloth** (*accidia*), or laziness, as a sin includes pettiness, cowardice, negligence, being remiss in one's duties, mistrustfulness, indolence, and sluggishness. It may be interpreted as sadness or listlessness (and in earlier times as "wanhope" or paralysis of despair), although "apathy" is proposed as a modern term. In individual physical terms the associated laziness may be most evident in increasing obesity and reliance on transportation and "energy-saving" devices. Those in industrialized economies readily accuse those in subsistence economies of some form of sloth in failing to rise to the level of productive efficiency perceived to be necessary to any improvement in their quality of life.

From a religious perspective, the other sins work together to deaden the spiritual senses, leading to apathy and inactivity in the practice of virtue. People are held to first become slow to respond to God and then to drift completely into the sleep of complacency.

In an institutional context, this sin is most obvious in the failure to explore lines of evidence with sufficient diligence. Ready explanations are accepted without further question -- as with the phenomenon of groupthink. Convenient assumptions tend to be neither examined nor even recognized. There is a lack of vigilance under potentially vulnerable circumstances.

This phenomenon is widely recognized as characterizing government regulatory bodies called upon to verify respect of parameters and threshold previously agreed to be important to the well-being of society. It is a characteristic of "self-regulatory" initiative of corporations -- agreed in response to public criticism. Failures in this respect, whether deliberate or inadvertent, have notably resulted in the scandals of overbilling detected in relation to contracts for reconstruction in Iraq. The accusations concerning handling of information by the intelligence agencies regarding the terrorist threat in the USA may be seen in the light of this sin.

Conceptually, with respect to handling of information and the pursuit of insight, this sin takes the form of lack of assiduity. This is most evident in criticism of the response of students to educational opportunity. A particular logical fallacy is recognized as slothful induction in which the proper conclusion of an inductive argument is denied despite the evidence to the contrary.

More interesting however is the manner in which relevant disciplines and intelligence agencies procrastinate in examining (and even denying) evidence regarding possible new threats to society and the planet -- such as global warming, for example. Terrorism itself may be understood as a consequence of failure to treat seriously evidence regarding the level of discontent associated with underprivileged populations around the world who had reason to believe (whether correctly or incorrectly) that they were being exploited. Neoconservatives persist in this view in dealing with the "threat of terrorism", possibly because of the ease of appropriating resources to deal with tangible immediate threats that can be readily reinforced.

In a similar manner relevant disciplines and agencies, in furtherance of policy priorities, may be less than diligent in applying their skills to detect and address the challenges of society. Such negligence is also characteristic of the sin of sloth. Can it be said that the range of intellectual disciplines have been diligent -- rather than slothful -- in their approach to alleviating, rather than exacerbating, the Middle East and other territorial conflicts (cf *And When the Bombing Stops? Territorial conflict as a challenge to mathematicians*, 2000).

The corresponding **redemptive virtue** is fortitude (*fortitudo*), zeal or diligence (the "contrary virtue"), whose active forms include magnanimity and constancy -- extended by some to charity. The passive forms include security and good faith. In a religious context this is the energetic response of the heart to God's commands. This may however be exaggerated and result in the insensitivity of zealotry. It might be asked to what extent neoconservative promotion of democracy should be understood as a form of zealotry obscuring, possibly deliberately, unrecognized forms of neglect and lack of diligence.

6. **Wrath** (*ira*), anger or hate as a sin is usually associated with the desire to do harm to someone or to some group. This sin can be described to include abuse, violence, racial hatred, etc. In a religious context it may be understood as inappropriate (unrighteous) feelings of hatred, revenge or even denial. These may be extended to include punitive desires outside of justice -- a love of justice perverted to revenge and spite. Anger is often the first reaction to the problems of others. Impatience with the faults of others is related to this.

The most obvious contemporary example is in the cycle of violence associated with terrorism and the vengeful response to it -- justified as righteous. The associated hatred on both sides is less readily justified as virtuous. For the neoconservatives this hatred is not only fruitfully focused on foreigners but is also extended internally to liberal factions in America, notably those favouring homosexual marriage and abortion (but seemingly not extended to divorce, which has attracted so much concern by religious groups in earlier periods).

Conceptually, more interesting in this context are the underlying attitudinal sins associated with conceptual violence -- possibly embodied in structural violence. As argued elsewhere (*Being Other Wise: Clues to the dynamics of a meaningfully sustainable*

[lifestyle](#), 1998):

Much physical violence in society is about the interpretation or domination of fixed categories -- starting with peace. Religion has been at the origin of many such conflicts. Johan Galtung makes a vital distinction between physical violence and structural violence. Physical violence is for the amateur, using weapons in order to dominate. For Galtung, structural violence is the tool of the professional employing exploitation and social injustice to achieve domination. But beyond the latter, acting behind the scenes (and adjusting the scenery) is surely the conceptual violence of the super-professional, using disinformation and psychological operations (military psy-ops) -- and the associated processes of brainwashing. It is in this light that the entrapment of people in networks of fixed categories could be usefully explored, as undertaken by Noam Chomsky (1992, 1994). Examples of conceptual violence include use of category euphemism to inhibit or numb recognition of other dimensions of an experience. This is typical of business and military jargon (bodycount, collateral damage, etc.) but even of reference to body processes (washroom, etc.) -- reinforcing an insidious form of experiential denial.

A form of conceptual violence may be associated with conceptual gerrymandering, definitional game-playing, and category manipulation as discussed elsewhere ([Category Manipulation in Global Dialogue](#), 2000; [Spin and Counter-spin: Governance through Terrorism](#), 2002):

Such "manipulation", whatever it may be taken to mean, may be conscious and deliberate, casual or unintentional, or completely unconscious. It may also be difficult to detect and a challenge to comprehend, since obviously we think and communicate through categories that may well be subject to such manipulation.

The corresponding **redemptive virtue** is variously understood as meekness, kindness -- and even fortitude. This is understood as involving an attitude of patience (the "contrary virtue") and compassion. This approach is reflected in the many initiatives towards conflict resolution, and the extensive research on which it has been based (notably including that currently promoted by Johan Galtung through [Transcend](#)).

7. **Envy** (*invidia*) or jealousy. This sin involves the resentful or painful desire for another's advantages or possessions, traits, status, abilities, or situation. It resents the good others receive or even might receive. What makes it different from avarice (covetousness) is the desire to deny the other person the object of envy. Vandalism is one expression of envy -- notably to be seen in the destruction of the cultural heritage of other civilizations (under the heading collateral damage).

Envy (or resentment) is the sin most characteristic of "bureaucratic warfare" between government agencies. In the case of the USA and its response to terrorism, this has been most clearly seen in the problematic relationship between the Department of Defense (Donald Rumsfeld) and the Department of State (Colin Powell), between the CIA and the FBI, as well as amongst various intelligence agencies.

Much of the "clash of civilizations", foreseen by neoconservatives in relation to Islam, might be explored in terms of the role of envy and resentment. It is readily argued by neoconservatives that those who resent their neo-imperial ambitions, notably in Arab countries, are simply envious of the American way of life. More interesting however would be the nature and consequences of resentment by neoconservatives regarding the oil resources controlled by Arab countries. And potentially even more interesting would be any hidden resentment amongst their Christian fundamentalist supporters regarding the quality of faith exhibited by Muslims in being prepared to die for their faith -- a quality of belief that is increasingly uncommon in Christian societies.

Conceptually it is to be seen in the resentment amongst scholars regarding the levels of insight they achieve and for which they are appreciated. In a political context this takes the form of resentment at the successful initiation of alternative socio-political models by others. Julius Nyerere was articulate on this subject with respect to international sabotage of his Tanzanian experiment and the subsequent disaster [\[more\]](#). Fidel Castro has invoked this theme with respect to the deliberate efforts by the USA over decades to ensure the failure of the experiment in Cuba. In the case of Allende's experiment in Chile, and prior to its overthrow with US support, Henry Kissinger was explicit regarding US intolerance of potentially successful alternative socio-economic models in the Western hemisphere.

The **redemptive virtue** is variously presented as brotherly love, hope or courage (*fortitudo*) -- actively seeking the good of others for their sake. This may also be manipulated through offering hope that is only later discovered to have been based on false promises. The "contrary virtue" is kindness.

Conceptual sins as logical fallacies

The conceptual sins explored above might be more precisely articulated with the set of "logical fallacies" as presented with exceptional clarity by Stephen Downes ([Stephen's Guide to the Logical Fallacies](#), 1995-2001). He distinguishes:

Sins as Fallacies	
Fallacy Group	Specific Fallacy
Fallacies of Distraction	False Dilemma , From Ignorance , Slippery Slope , Complex Question

Appeals to Motives in Place of Support	Appeal to Force, Appeal to Pity, Consequences, Prejudicial Language, Popularity
Changing the Subject	Attacking the Person: Appeal to Authority: Anonymous Authority, Style Over Substance
Inductive Fallacies	Hasty Generalization, Unrepresentative Sample, False Analogy, Slothful Induction, Fallacy of Exclusion
Fallacies Involving Statistical Syllogisms	Accident, Converse Accident
Causal Fallacies	Post Hoc, Joint effect, Insignificant, Wrong Direction, Complex Cause
Missing the Point	Begging the Question, Irrelevant Conclusion, Straw Man
Fallacies of Ambiguity	Equivocation: Amphiboly: Accent
Category Errors	Composition, Division
Non Sequitur	Affirming the Consequent, Denying the Antecedent, Inconsistency
Syllogistic Errors	Fallacy of Four Terms, Undistributed Middle, Illicit Major, Illicit Minor, Fallacy of Exclusive Premises, Fallacy of Drawing an Affirmative Conclusion From a Negative Premise, Existential Fallacy
Fallacies of Explanation	Subverted Support, Non-support, Untestability, Limited Scope, Limited Depth
Fallacies of Definition	Too Broad, Too Narrow, Failure to Elucidate, Circular Definition, Conflicting Conditions
<i>Stephen Downes Guide to the Logical Fallacies</i> Copyright © Stephen Downes, 1995-2003	

At first sight, it is not apparent how these logical fallacies map onto the cognitive sins discussed earlier. Any such mapping also needs to take account of the preoccupation with the need for "critical thinking" as documented by Tim van Gelder (*Critical Thinking on the Web*).

Cognitive distortions as "sins"

Cognitive distortion, as a concept, highlights the importance of perceptions, assumptions and judgments in coping with the world. Cognitive distortions are logical, but they are not rational. They have been identified as another way of describing the origin of irrational ideas, overgeneralization of simple mistakes, or development of false assumptions about expectations of experience. The phenomenon may be associated with a fact or set of facts that seem true to a person with [borderline personality disorders](#), for example, but not to others familiar with the situation. They reflect the distortion of reality through the manner of evaluating a situation. They are closely related to [cognitive biases](#).

Of particular interest is recognition of their role in academic environments when students inadvertently acquire thinking patterns that limit college success, promote low self-esteem, poor self-confidence, loss of direction, and low academic performance (cf Dennis H. Congos, *12 Thinking Patterns that Limit College Success*, 2002)

Cognitive therapy is directed at a set of 10 widely-cited common cognitive distortions, or faulty thought patterns identified by Albert Ellis (*Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*, 1962), Aaron Beck and D Stein (*The Self Concept in Depression*, 1960) and David D Burns' *Ten Forms of Twisted Thinking* (in *The Feeling Good Handbook*, 1989):

- **All-or-Nothing thinking:** Assessing experience in absolute, black-or-white, binary terms (framed as "always", "every" or "never"), without any intermediary category..
- **Overgeneralization or catastrophizing:** Using isolated negative events as a basis for predicting a future pattern, namely hasty generalization or induction (otherwise recognized as the "fallacy of insufficient statistics" or the "fallacy of insufficient sample") based on too little evidence.
- **Mental filtering:** Focusing exclusively on certain, usually negative or upsetting, aspects of experience while ignoring the rest, otherwise known as the logical fallacy of misleading vividness -- through which some occurrence (however exceptional) is made the focus of attention.
- **Disqualifying the positive:** Rejection or discounting of positive experiences as irrelevant in order to maintain a negative belief. As special pleading, this is a form of spurious argumentation that avoids details unfavorable to a point of view, notably by applying circumstances or considerations that are relatively immune to investigation without unavailable expertise. Dependence on unexplained claims of exemption from principles commonly thought relevant to the subject matter.
- **Jumping to conclusions:** Negative interpretation in the absence of definite facts that convincingly support the conclusion. Subtypes recognized are:
 - 1. Mind reading: Assuming the intentions of others, usually as being negative.
 - 2. Anticipating, forecasting or "fortune telling": Conviction that predictions are an already-established, usually negative, fact
- **Magnification and minimization:** Exaggeration of the importance of experiences, or minimizing them to an inappropriate degree -- exaggerating negatives and understating positives.
- **Emotional reasoning, treating feelings as facts:** Assumption that any negative emotions experienced necessarily reflect reality.

Making decisions and arguments based on feelings rather than objective reality. Deducing the falsity of a conclusion (specifically a belief) from the negative or positive consequences that would follow belief.

- **Making judgemental "should" statements:** Focusing on what is believed "should" or ought to be rather than the actual situation experienced, usually associated with an emotional consequence of ineffectiveness and guilt. As wishful thinking, it is the formation of beliefs (and making decisions) according to what might be pleasing to imagine instead of by appealing to evidence or rationality.
- **Labeling and mislabeling:** An extreme form of overgeneralization using emotionally loaded language -- explaining by naming. Mislabeling involves describing an event with language that is highly colored and emotionally loaded. Rather than describing a behavior so that it may be remedied, a label is assigned to frame it in absolute and unalterable terms.
- **Personalization, blame or attribution:** Placing the blame or the praise for a given result, in the absence of better explanations, on a person or group only partly involved, or not involved at all -- possibly to the point of deification or scapegoating (including demonisation). Tendency for people to believe they can control or at least influence outcomes when they clearly cannot.

Of particular interest in assessing the cognitive sins associated with the ineffective response to the social problems that are the preoccupation of governance, is that of academic procrastination -- a form of the sin of sloth. Procrastination has been researched from a wide variety of perspectives [more]. Economics studies it as a form of temporal discounting, examining its effects on behaviors such as retirement savings. Decision theorists have investigated its effects, trying to determine why some decisions are put off and not others. For example, J R Ferrari (1995) has distinguished the following forms of academic procrastination:

- overestimation of time left to perform tasks,
- underestimation of time required to complete tasks,
- overestimation of future motivational states,
- misreliance on the necessity of emotional congruence to succeed at task, and
- belief that working when not in the mood to work is suboptimal.

Strategic "sins"

It could be said that "sin" was recognized early in determining the emergence and evolution of the USA -- as in the writings of James Madison (*Vices of the Political System of the United States. Federalist Papers, 1787*).

Curiously it would appear that it is the US military that has most explicitly associated "sin" with forms of warfare, as in the study of Thomas P.M. Barnett (*The Seven Deadly Sins of Network-Centric Warfare. Proceedings, U.S. Naval Institute, 1999*). He identified the following relationships:

1. Lust: NCW Longs for an enemy worthy of its technological prowess
2. Sloth: NCW slows the U.S. military's adaptation to a MOOTW world
3. Avarice: NCW Favors the many and cheap; the U.S. military prefers the few and costly
4. Pride: NCW's Lock-out strategies resurrect old myths about strategic bombing
5. Anger: NCW's Speed-of-command philosophy can push us into shooting first and asking questions later
6. Envy: NCW Covets the business world's self-synchronization
7. Gluttony: NCW's Common operating picture could lead to information overload

With respect to strategy itself, Ron Robinson (*Seven Sins of Strategic Planning. CharityVillage.com 4 March 2002*) offers the following set of "sins":

- Believing the strategic plan is a panacea
- Viewing the plan as the end product
- Developing the plan in isolation
- Failing to gather the necessary information
- Developing paralysis by analysis
- Failing to communicate
- Failing to implement

With respect to the strategy of contingency planning Bob Post (*Seven Deadly Sins of Seven Deadly Sins of Contingency Planning. Booz Allen Hamilton, 2002*) identifies the following "sins":

- Not having a plan(s)
- Not maintaining plans
- Not exercising or testing plans
- Not raising awareness of plans
- Not identifying essential functions
- Not identifying key roles and responsibilities
- Not coordinating plans with partners

However it is Ian Demack (*The Modern Machiavelli: the seven principles of power in business. Allen and Unwin, 2004*) who might be said to provide the link to the strategic advice of Machiavelli which has so inspired neoconservatives:

- Trust people to serve their own interests
- Everyone is delusional
- Power must be contested
- Your allies are not your friends
- Congruence is power
- Fortune favours the wise
- Power demands submission

The strategic approach to "sin" is also reflected in organizational management, as noted by Jean Bannon (*The Seven Deadly Sins Managers Commit*. *New Mexico Labor Letter*, Fall 1999) who identifies the following:

- Failing to address problems
- Promoting employees without management training
- Assigning new management to "clean house"
- Improper documentation
- Ignoring informal complaints
- Mishandling medical information
- Retaliation

Mohandas Gandhi, as one of the most influential figures in modern social and political activism, identified in 1947 the following "seven blunders" or "sins", stemming from passive violence that people commit against each other, as the most spiritually perilous to humanity.:

- Wealth without work
- Pleasure without conscience
- Knowledge without character
- Commerce (business) without morality (ethics)
- Science without humanity
- Religion without sacrifice
- Politics without principle

Knowledge-handling "sins"

Corresponding to the strategic "sins" are what might be termed the knowledge-handling "sins" associated with the cognitive distortion discussed earlier.

Walter Lippman (*Public Opinion*. Free Press, 1997) identified seven deadly sins against public opinion as follows:

The Appeal To Reason: There is, however, a noble counterfeit in that charity which comes from self-knowledge and an unarguable belief that no one of our gregarious species is alone in his longing for a friendlier world. So many of the grimaces men make at each other go with a flutter of their pulse, that they are not all of them important. And where so much is uncertain, where so many actions have to be carried out on guesses, the demand upon the reserves of mere decency is enormous, and it is necessary to live as if good will would work. We cannot prove in every instance that it will, nor why **hatred, intolerance, suspicion, bigotry, secrecy, fear, and lying are the seven deadly sins against public opinion**. We can only insist that they have no place in the appeal to reason, that in the longer run they are a poison; and taking our stand upon a view of the world which outlasts our own predicaments, and our own lives, we can cherish a hearty prejudice against them.

With respect to information systems in general, Bob Lewis (*The seven deadly sins of information systems*. *InfoWorld*, 1998) identifies the following:

- Arrogance
- Grandiosity
- Project-itis
- Jargon
- Methodologism
- Control
- Supplier mentality

The "sins" associated with the discipline of economics, that is so fundamental to governance, are explored by Deirdre McCloskey (*The Secret Sins of Economics*. Prickly Paradigm Press, 2002). With respect to the statistics on which so much economics is based, Steven S. Ross ("*Lies, damned lies, and statistics*": *the seven deadly sins*. *21stC*, Fall 1998) identifies the following "sins":

- Non-response bias, or the non-representative sample.
- Mistaking statistical association for causality
- Poisoned control
- Data enhancement.
- Absoluteness.
- Partiality
- A bad measuring stick

More fundamental to the challenge of knowledge-handling is the manner in which the human memory may fail -- as explored by Daniel L. Schacter (*The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001):

- Transience affects weakening memory over time
- Absent-mindedness, when failures of attention sabotage memory
- Blocking, when a well-known name cannot be retrieved
- Misattribution: assigning a memory to the wrong source
- Suggestibility: implanting false memories
- Bias: rewriting the past based on present beliefs
- Persistence: intrusive recollections that cannot be forgotten

The challenge of the erosion of collective memory, so vital to the coherence of cultures and civilizations, is explored elsewhere (*Societal Learning and the Erosion of Collective Memory: a critique of the Club of Rome Report*, 1980)

Towards a logico-mathematical formalization of "sin"

In a separate paper (*Towards a logico-mathematical formalization of "sin"*, 2004), it is argued that faith-based governance in a multi-faith society may call for a much higher order of mathematics to enable and sustain meaningful communication, dialogue and organization -- whether in support of memetic warfare against any opposition or in the design of the most elegant "bridges" across the most challenging abyss -- separating two psycho-social territories hitherto unjoined.

Deployment of memetic weapons

Fundamentalists, notably those supporting the neoconservative agenda, place considerable emphasis on the challenge of sin -- in justifying their support for faith-based governance. Their focus is on very tangible manifestations of sin as understood in religious terms. In fact there is very little discussion of the deeper significance of such sin -- as distortions of the plenum -- especially in the restricted cognitive sense explored above.

But, as explored elsewhere (*Twistedness in Psycho-social Systems: challenge to logic, morality, leadership and personal development*, 2004), the widely documented manipulative use of information by neoconservatives -- labelled "twisted" by critics -- can be understood as conceptually sinful, in the sense explored above. Specifically it may be understood to impede insight into questions of higher order, as discussed elsewhere (*Engaging with Questions of Higher Order: cognitive vigilance required for higher degrees of twistedness*, 2004).

The intellectual influences on neoconservative thinking from Niccolo Machiavelli (*The Seven Books on the Art of War*, 1520 [review]), notably via philosopher Leo Strauss, have been well-documented, particularly with respect to [Republican Dominionism](#). Shadia Drury (*Leo Strauss and the American Right*, 1999) and others indicate, for example, that:

- Strauss believed that a leader had to perpetually deceive the citizens he ruled.
- Those who lead must understand there is no morality, there is only the right of the superior to rule the inferior.
- According to Drury, Religion "is the glue that holds society together." It is a handle by which the ruler can manipulate the masses. Any religion will do. Strauss is indifferent to them all.
- "Secular society ...is the worst possible thing," because it leads to individualism, liberalism, and relativism, all of which encourage dissent and rebellion. As Drury sums it up: "You want a crowd that you can manipulate like putty."
- "Strauss thinks that a political order can be stable only if it is united by an external threat; and following Machiavelli, he maintains that if no external threat exists, then one has to be manufactured."
- "In Strauss's view, the trouble with liberal society is that it dispenses with noble lies and pious frauds. It tries to found society on secular rational foundations." [[more](#) | [more](#)]

From such a strategic perspective, it becomes clear that "sins", understood cognitively, are effectively key disruptive weapons of memetic warfare (cf *Missiles, Missives, Missions and Memetic Warfare: Navigation of strategic interfaces in multidimensional knowledge space*, 2001). The checklist of logical fallacies, as articulated by Downes, may then be more clearly understood as an armoury of memetic weapons. It is then to be expected that any of those weapons would be deployed to advance the neoconservative agenda. The various forms of "misrepresentation", now well-documented in relation to the "war on terrorism", are to be understood as "military" devices that have been known since Sun Tzu's 2400-year old classic *The Art of War* (cf "All warfare is based on deception", Ch 1, para 18). Many commentators have expressed concern at the emerging culture of lies (Charles Utwater II. *The Culture of Lies in America: Race Lies, Enron, the Crooked Media and the Collapse of Integrity in 21st Century America*. *American Politics Journal*, 2002). For the Christian fundamentalists of America, this is what they have voted for in reaffirming the mandate of the neoconservatives..

Use of radio as a form of memetic warfare has long been known and exploited (Voice of America, Radio Free Europe). The early innovations of memetic warfare are evident in spam, now reaching 80% of internet traffic -- possible to justify future implementation of severely restrictive counter-measures. In contrast to the threat of viruses, spam has a cognitive component. The focus on sexually explicit imagery, together with performance improving drugs and devices, is clearly associated with evocation of lust as a memetic weapon. It is no coincidence that a high percentage of such spam originates in the USA -- where even the highest ranked hotels offer "adult movies". Only the naive would fail to recognize the offensive function of such memetic weapons against other cultures, such as Islam.

Whilst such spam may be understood as a memetic analogue to biological warfare, there is a case for anticipating the development and deployment of memetic analogues to tactical and strategic nuclear weapons. There is also a case for recognizing the probable nature and targets of such weaponry and the appropriate modes of defence.

Nuclear weapons -- with their emphasis on mass destruction -- have proven to be a fundamental revolution in warfare. They are destructive not only of mass in the physical sense but also of masses in the demographic sense -- as well as of ecosystems on which life depends. It is therefore useful to question whether any memetic analogue would be equally fundamental in its effect on the:

- "nuclear family", as it has come to be understood in its more restrictive sense
- "nuclear community", as it is understood in the neighbourhood or *quartier* sense
- "nuclear culture", as it is increasingly understood, especially by threatened minorities and ethnic groups, and it is becoming framed in the case of "Christian civilization" or the "Muslim Umah"

What are the consequences on these "nuclear" bonds of the emergent possibilities of memetic nuclear warfare? Already the effects of "information warfare" are apparent and a feature of Psy-Ops. Censorship and the control of information on problematic issues can already be understood as "nuclear shields" (cf *Missiles, Missives, Missions and Memetic Warfare: Navigation of strategic interfaces in multidimensional knowledge space*, 2001). Intriguingly the manipulation of statements regarding "sins" and "virtues" seem to be used in such warfare rather like "binary weapons" -- composed of two ingredients that become lethal only when combined at the last minute before detonation. The art would appear to be ensure the implosive deployment of memetic components based on "sin" (its recognition, evocation of guilt, etc) in conjunction with deployment of "virtue" (occupying the vacuum created). This might be seen as analogous to the deployment of [thermobaric weapons](#).

The challenge for fundamentalists in engaging in such memetic warfare is that even after such deployment, as is evident in Iraq, the population remains highly resistant to replacing Islamic virtues, framed as sinful by the crusading occupation forces, by Christian virtues. In memetic terms, destruction of nuclear bonds in order to reform a culture through "nation-building" processes (conceived as analogous to interrogation, brain-washing, indoctrination and re-education techniques) has proven to be far from successful -- despite the arrogance with which it was envisaged sending an army of missionaries into Iraq to follow the invasion by the Coalition of the Willing [[more](#)].

What would seem to be required in relation to community building, nation building, and building a viable planetary culture, is a memetic analogue to nuclear "fusion technology" -- rather than the "fission technology" through which the bonds of the "pattern that connects" are broken. This would call for investment in a degree of imaginative "memetic innovation" analogous to that currently deployed internationally in relation to nuclear fusion [[more](#)]. In this light the "clash of civilizations" would be designed into a framework capable of holding their interaction so as to reinvigorate humanity through the rich pattern of energetic relationships the "clash" engendered. Can humanity control its own functions as a memetic nuclear fusion reactor? Is the design challenge analogous to that of avoiding plasma "quenching" in order to ensure sustained fusion? Perhaps "sin" is best to be understood in terms of "quenching" the spirit?

This approach is to be contrasted with fundamentalist efforts to eliminate the difference which enables that memetic energy release in order to create a homogeneous hegemony in which everyone sings from the same hymn sheet -- composed in Washington. Is it possible that models deriving from fusion technology would point to radically new approaches to fusion at a far more fundamental level between contrasting faith perspectives -- a level respectful of both the differences (that are otherwise expressed so violently) and the inspiration that sustains them?

It is the memetic technology required to work with requisite difference that would enable civilization to engage more effectively with questions of a higher order (*Engaging with Questions of Higher Order: cognitive vigilance required for higher degrees of twistedness*, 2004).

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