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The Consensus Delusion

Mysterious attractor undermining global civilization as currently imagined

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Produced on the occasion of the [G8 Summit](#) (Deauville, May 2011)
and the much-acclaimed historic declaration of Barack Obama to the UK Houses of Parliament:
There are few nations that stand firmer, speak louder and fight harder to defend democratic values
Our action, our leadership, is essential to the cause of human dignity.
And so we must act, and lead, with confidence in our ideals.

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Introduction

The vital importance of consensus is acclaimed everywhere. Any challenge to it is deprecated, considered a regrettable misunderstanding by the misguided, or even demonised. The absence of consensus is however evident in every domain, whether religious, scientific, political, or otherwise. The so-called global civilization is a quarrelsome environment. Appeals for consensus are typically pathetic exercises in tokenism in their effective influence on the reality of psychosocial dynamics. Vast resources are nevertheless allocated on the assumption that consensus will be achieved.

Is it possible that the quest for consensus, as currently imagined, will be considered pathological by the future?

An approach to the challenge has been helpfully made in the highly controversial study by [Richard Dawkins](#) (*The God Delusion*, 2006), from which the above title is adapted as a "methodological device". His argument is directed against the core belief of religion. However that core belief constitutes an understanding of ultimate "consensus" around which worldwide communities have formed. As he demonstrates, that understanding has proven to be divisive throughout history -- with each religion deploring the untruth which others cultivate. A merit of his study is that it treats the focus of such discord as a singular delusion transcending the particularities of any one religion. Perversely it offers an integrative perspective to which religions themselves have proven completely incapable of giving form. Dawkins treats it as a formless delusion with numerous unfortunate consequences.

Dawkins' critics have noted that he and his cohorts are simply promoting the "religion" of atheism using the scientific rationale (Greg Taylor, *The Atheist Delusion: Answering Richard Dawkins*, *New Dawn*, 1 May 2007). The following argument endeavours to integrate this latter view with his own perspective by recognizing that **both religious believers and critics desperately endeavour to promote a form of consensus which may itself be essentially a delusion**. The suggestion is that **implicit in Dawkins' argument is an excellent criticism of the delusion of consensus for which he has chosen "God" as a convenient symbol -- effectively a surrogate for "consensus"**.

The question raised in what follows is therefore: **Has Dawkins' approach been taken far enough?** Can it be fruitfully extended to other domains where there are vain attempts to promote consensus -- on the assumption that every reasonable person should agree, once they are aware of the facts? These notably include political beliefs and the strategies they engender -- as is most evident in the tragedies of never-ending territorial disputes, as in the Middle East.

The desperate quest for consensus is also evident within particular scientific disciplines, and across the broader spectrum of disciplines - - on the assumption of the possible future emergence of some form of unity of knowledge, even implied by the concept of a "university". The questionable nature of any "consensus" within the scientific community has recently emerged with respect to the purportedly vital challenge of climate change, for example.

The argument here is not a plea for a simplistic form of relativism, nor a case for nihilism. Rather it is an argument for exploring the nature of the consensus delusion in order to arrive at a more fruitful understanding of what "consensus" might otherwise imply. However, in following the conventional pattern of calling for consensus on the merits of this initiative, it also fruitfully brings into play the paradoxical challenges of self-reflexivity. **What is the nature of any consensus on the delusional nature of consensus?**

The consensus delusion exemplified

On the occasion of the G8 Summit (Deauville, May 2011) it was noted that the group had failed in its solemn pledges of aid to developing countries made in 2005 (*G8 has 'cooked books' over Gleneagles aid pledges*, *The Guardian*, 18 May 2011). Of relevance to the unique defence of "democratic values", acclaimed by Barack Obama in his historic address to the joint UK Houses of Parliament (25 May 2011), is the cost of the effort to impose those values on other cultures. This is now measured in trillions of dollars -- and hundreds of thousands of dead in Iraq and Afghanistan, with uncounted millions otherwise affected -- a financial cost borne by countries faced with insurmountable deficits impacting severely on the well-being of their own populations. The "democratic values" have been further marked by the hundreds who remain incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay, uncharged, and complicity in the pattern of extrajudicial interrogation, renditions and executions, all purportedly in the name of democratic justice.

Untried, [Bradley Manning](#) has been forced to stand naked outside his cell for months, with full presidential approval [[more](#)].
An appropriate complement to the cloaked [Statue of Liberty](#)?

"Global civilization" as a metaphorical context for delusion

Much is made of globalization, global civilization, and the variety of implications of living on a "globe". These insights have emerged in very recent centuries as a development beyond the previous [flat earth](#) understanding. Most curiously, appeals continue to be made for a form of consensus on the "flattening" of the Earth by the process of globalization itself, as argued in the widely acclaimed study by [Thomas Friedman](#) (*The World Is Flat: a brief history of the Twenty-First Century*, 2005) -- a view criticized elsewhere (*Irresponsible Dependence on a Flat Earth Mentality -- in response to global governance challenges*, 2008).

Most intriguing, however, is the question of how any globality is to be inferred and imputed to the globe on which humanity lives, and how this globality is to be understood. The challenge is evident for those who necessarily dwell on some particular part of it at a given moment in time. This of course means everyone. How is "globality" to be comprehended from the perspective of standing upright on the Earth's surface? This is the familiar experience of daily life. Indications regarding other understandings of the world depend on a variety of means for juxtaposing items of information -- partial perspectives -- and achieving consensus on the coherence of the emergent perspective regarding "globality". This can also be held to be the case with the many views provided from satellites orbiting the Earth -- since these views can only indicate curvature, with roundness left as an inference from an ordered succession of such views, integrating those from different orbits.

Globality can then only be inferred and is necessarily only partially understood to different degrees by some. It is physically impossible for anyone to see the world "in the round". Arguments to the effect that "of course it is round", and "everyone knows it is round", then become reminiscent of the arguments made by those with respect to the special coherence of their own preferred belief system whose consensus is cherished -- whilst deploring the consensus of others regarding alternative worldviews. Whilst it is claimed that there are valid explanations for the spherical nature of the Earth (despite experiential evidence to the contrary), with respect to the following argument **there are no coherent explanations for the diversity of worldviews each attracting a degree of consensus**. This lack of consensus has severe consequences -- often bloody and tragic.

In this sense the nature of any consensus on the globality of the Earth offers a splendid metaphor for the delusion implied by the conventional quest for consensus in any domain.

The question of why globality is so variously understood, and why many consider they are variously "right" from their own perspective, is usefully explored as a question of geometry, as discussed separately (*Geometry of Thinking for Sustainable Global Governance*, 2009). The coherence of the identity sustained by such perspectives can also be fruitfully explored in terms of geometry (*Geometry, Topology and Dynamics of Identity*, 2009).

Varieties of delusional consensus regarding "globality"

In the schema which follows, the nature of "globality" is used as a simple metaphor for the consensus so variously, desperately and vainly sought in different domains.

Engagement with consensus
in the light of engagement with "globality"

<i>Modality</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>
Some simply believe in it	They have faith in the unseen, without fully understanding its nature, in the manner of religion and deep ecology
Some deduce it in the light of complex measurement procedures	They have the quantitative skills of science, and confidence in complex chains of logical inference, but are challenged to "ex-plain" their understanding
Some declaim it as a reality	As with imperialists, they are preoccupied with the global extension of their domain of influence, without recognizing the challenge implied by curvature
Some simply experience it	They take risks in exploring unknown elsewhere with whatever navigational skills they assume they can rely on
Some depict it as an attractive symbol and dramatize it	They use imaginative aesthetic skills, and any available technology, without necessarily being concerned with their cognitive implication
Some fear it as a challenge to their competence	As with the military, they see it as giving strategic advantage to their enemies over conventional dependence on linear framings of reality
Some endeavour to inculcate it as necessary dogma	Possibly using censorship, they seek to ensure that no misguided alternative view emerges as in any way preferable or relevant

As with the traditional tale of the [seven blind men and the elephant](#), these particular understandings of globality are essentially delusional - sustained by the preferred modality in each case. Any sense of the globality of Earth is clumsily and partially inferred in such a way as to invite alternative perspectives as to its implication -- the reality of today.

The same is more profoundly the case with regard to consensus. Just as the men in the tale are unable to achieve meaningful consensus with regard to the nature of the elephant, global civilization is much challenged to achieve any meaningful operational consensus on the nature of integrative understanding -- on consensus itself. This does not of course prevent each from vigorously asserting a particular understanding and deploring the inadequacies of the other -- seemingly quite incapable of "getting it". The polarized discourse between religions, between science and religion, between political factions, between development and environment, etc, is all of this nature.

There is no understanding of what consensus might mean within such a context -- other than as an obligation on others to "agree with us, and rightly so", possibly seen as fundamental to foreign policy (*Us and Them: relating to challenging others*, 2009). It is in this sense that what is understood in aspirations to consensus is delusional, including that sought by Richard Dawkins regarding the delusional nature of belief in God.

The situation for those living on various areas of the globe offers a striking metaphor for the challenge. Whilst one group may claim it is midday, another is forced simultaneously to note that it is midnight. The shape of the surface which reconciles these two perspectives is completely unknown in the case of the quest for any mutually meaningful consensus. Furthermore it is a matter of no interest or relevance, since the experience of each is upheld as uniquely right. Whilst the metaphor may appear trivial, the consequence of the lack of any richer understanding of the topology on which consensus could be built is simply tragic.

Curiously, as with the flat Earth worldview of centuries long past, there is no understanding of the meaning of "round" which could be of relevance to an understanding of consensus.

Explorations beyond the delusion?

What emerges from the application of Dawkins' "methodological device" to the spectrum of initiatives acclaimed as offering a degree of consensus -- the surrogate "gods" of global civilization? Does the process suggest other possibilities?

In considering the nature of exploration, with the potential of moving "beyond the delusional barrier", at this stage it must be recognized that these all tend to be handicapped in various ways characteristic of their preferred cognitive modality. Despite enthusiasm, as might be expected, any quest for "consensus" is successful in inverse proportion to the number and variety of perspectives involved. Examples include:

1. **Interfaith discourse:** At best this can be most usefully characterized briefly as the faith of some in that context that there is a fruitful form of interfaith consensus to be found. But the appalling strategic consequences emerging from religions unable to address the challenge effectively are immediately indicative of the inadequacy of those efforts (*Root Irresponsibility for Major World Problems: the unexamined role of Abrahamic faiths in sustaining unrestrained population growth*, 2007).

As argued by John Cornwell (*A Question of Respect*, *Times Online*, 30 September 2006), Dawkins' criticism could have been better focused on fundamentalism, although this highlights the inability of religion to handle the problematic variety it engenders within any much-sought consensus:

If there is a dangerous delusion in the world, it is not so much moderate religion, as Dawkins would have it, but fundamentalism in all its forms - ideological, scientific and religious - as the imposition of dogma that brooks neither doubt nor respect for disagreement.

2. With respect to the interfaith enterprise, it might be provocatively asked whether the method of Richard Dawkins, preoccupied with "God" (*The God Delusion*, 2006), could not have been more appropriately focused on the delusional form of the integrative "consensus" variously framed through an image of God. In that sense, God, however understood, is an idealisation of an

underlying "consensus". Are problematic assumptions evoked by consensus effectively hidden by the focus on a more immediately comprehensible "God"? Could Dawkins be accused of avoiding the more general and fundamental issue of "consensus" in focusing on the superficiality of "God" as effectively a "surrogate" for that underlying consensus delusion?

Similar points could be usefully made with respect to the study by [Christopher Hitchens](#) (*God is Not Great: how religion poisons everything*, 2009), the book most compared with that of Dawkins. Reinterpreting Hitchens' title in the same way, the "consensus" to which he effectively alludes is indeed "not great" -- in fact it is not the consensus which "passeth all understanding" which might be expected from interfaith discourse. It is fruitful to consider other [criticism of religion](#) in this light. The method might also be adapted to key works of [Karen Armstrong](#) (*A History of God*, 1993; *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, 2000). The distinction made in the latter between logos and mythos offers valuable clues to the nature of the consensus delusion.

- 3. Interdisciplinarity and integrative methodologies:** Those proposing integrative perspectives are as quarrelsome as are the individual disciplines (*Self-reflexive Challenges of Integrative Futures*, 2008; *Integrative Knowledge Project*, 1995). The classic dynamics of interactions between faculties in a "university", exemplify the challenge -- with no emergent sense of the nature of a more fruitful form of consensus.

The early approaches to "unified science" have now lost favour, although suggestive traces still exist as noted below. Especially problematic with respect to the basis hypothesized for such unification are the implications of the [incompleteness theorems](#) of [Kurt Gödel](#). The deprecation is consistent with a degree of recognition of the consensus delusion. The remarkable synthesis of [Jennifer Gidley](#) (*The Evolution of Consciousness as a Planetary Imperative: an integration of integral views*. *Integral Review*, 2007) might be seen as a careful documentation of the failure of of integrative perspectives to respond fruitfully to each other.

With respect to science itself, reference is made to the assertion of [Michael Crichton](#) about scientific consensus: *Historically, the claim of consensus has been the first refuge of scoundrels. It is a way to avoid debate by claiming that the matter is already settled. The great scientists in history are great precisely because they broke with consensus.* Others also comment on the illusory nature of such consensus (*The Illusion of Consensus, The Spirit Level Delusion*, 24 January 2011).

- 4. Consensus within philosophical systems:** Potentially to be understood as the generic challenge underlying the previous two points, this has been articulated in a conclusion by [Nicholas Rescher](#) (*The Strife of Systems: an essay on the grounds and implications of philosophical diversity*, 1985):

For centuries, most philosophers who have reflected on the matter have been intimidated by the strife of systems. But the time has come to put this behind us -- not the strife, that is, which is ineliminable, but the felt need to somehow end it rather than simply accept it and take it in stride. To reemphasize the salient point: it would be bizarre to think that philosophy is not of value because philosophical positions are bound to reflect the particular values we hold.

It might be added that there is no consensus on the nature of the challenge -- each framing it as a question of the need for the other to subscribe to the consensual perspective it so uniquely and valuably holds.

- 5. Theories of Everything:** A range of approaches to model building could be understood as "theories of everything" with respect to narrowly defined domains. They typically exemplify -- possibly only for a time -- the integrative worldview of their constructors. Potentially of greater significance is "the" [Theory of Everything](#) (TOE) to which fundamental physics has long aspired and on which considerable effort is expended -- and with a degree of success.

Progress towards the ultimate TOE helpfully reframes the nature of the consensus delusion. The level of mathematical sophistication required to comprehend the integration achieved, requires years of training -- necessarily only available to the few with the appropriate aptitudes. Those then able to comprehend their insights represent a larger set, but the possibility of communicating the TOE to the world at large diminishes rapidly with the numbers who would need to be "brought up to speed" within a system already much challenged in that respect. The TOE then acquires the status of something attracting consensus amongst the few -- effectively excluding the many.

The resulting situation may then be upheld as a form of mystification quite difficult to distinguish from that acclaimed within the world of religion -- where years of training may also be seen as necessary, if not sufficient. Both domains suggest a kind of delusion in which the participants indulge to their own considerable satisfaction. Every effort may be made to persuade others of the reality of that insight in which they are enjoined to have faith-- even if it is essentially meaningless within their more limited mode of thinking.

Suspicion may also be aroused by the fact that proponents of any TOE flavour keep adding "dimensions" to the theory to imbue it with the coherence held to be necessary to encompass "everything". This process is difficult to distinguish from some of the arguments of religion regarding the extreme subtlety in terms of which "God" and the "heavenly hosts" need to be understood. The considerable mathematical elegance associated with some of the integrative insights is highlighted by symmetry group theory and the visual renderings of fundamental "objects" characterized by 196,884 "dimensions" (*Potential Psychosocial Significance of Monstrous Moonshine: an exceptional form of symmetry as a Rosetta stone for cognitive frameworks*, 2007).

Also worthy of suspicion is that the "everything" which is embodied in such a theory excludes, in a peculiar way, any consideration of its wider psychosocial implications -- typically held to be "too complex" to be appropriate for consideration (*Dynamics of Symmetry Group Theorizing: comprehension of psycho-social implication*, 2008).

At a much lower level of sophistication, the dangerous reliance placed on particular models, assumed to be encompassing "everything" to a satisfactory degree, has proven to be astounding (*Uncritical Strategic Dependence on Little-known Metrics: the Gaussian Copula, the Kaya Identity, and what else?* 2009)

6. **Logical omniscience:** One valuable approach to the nature of intelligent consensus is through the logical preoccupations of **artificial intelligence**. The concern is the vulnerability of assumptions made with regard to "knowing everything" -- even in a more restricted situation. The matter has been reviewed by Roderic A. Girle (*Delusions of Omniscience*. Proceedings of the Eleventh International FLAIRS Conference, 1998). He introduces his paper as follows:

We begin by defining three kinds of omniscience - logical, deductive, and factual. We will then discuss some of the strategies which have been used to dispose of or deflate omniscience. Our main concern will be for the no worries strategies, and the other logics strategy. We then comment on the prospects for omniscience free logics'.

Subsequently Girle focused on the challenges implied by **Gödel's Incompleteness Theorems** (Melvin Fitting, Types Tableaus and Gödel's God, *Studia Logica*, 2005).

7. **Political consensus:** It could be appropriately asserted that individual political parties are sustained by consensus delusion.

A broader consensus is often sought and acclaimed through "**bipartisan**" initiatives in national parliaments. However the term is indicative of the exclusion of any more than two. Such agreements are typically of the shortest duration in the continuing struggle for power between factions. In the international arena, much has been made of **consensual voting procedures**. Typically this is most successful on minor issues -- if not the most trivial. Consequently progress is effectively blocked on any more fundamental issues.

Especially interesting at this time is the extent to which "democracy" is promoted -- and effectively imposed as a condition of aid - - as a somewhat mysterious process through which access is ensured to a form of collective consensus. The illusory nature of consensus is however well indicated by the challenges to that process in countries which claim to have adopted it. Aside from widespread issues of **electoral fraud**, democracy is far from ensuring that the collective will of the people is expressed as a meaningful consensus -- as recent debate on an **alternative voting system** has argued in the UK, for example. It is appropriate to recall the percentage of any population whose rights, as a minority, are under-represented in a democracy -- effectively the "**left-behind**". This should be contrasted with the much-acclaimed **statement of Barack Obama to the UK Houses of Parliament** to the effect that: *We do these things because we believe not simply in the rights of nations; we believe in the rights of citizens.*

As indicated by declarations at the G8 Summit (May 2011), politicians vigorously declare the unacceptability of the solemn pledges broken by their predecessors (Patrick Wintour, *David Cameron defends aid spending at G8 summit in Deauville*, *The Guardian*, 27 May 2011). To elicit consensus, they then promise solemnly to fulfil new pledges -- which can be readily broken in due time at the price of only mild political embarrassment. Such is the delusion providing a semblance of coherence to political discourse.

Democracy itself may be described as an illusion which obscures recognition of the consensus delusion (Tim Stanley, *The Contrarian: The Democratic Delusion*, *History Today*, 61, 2011, 4; Kishore Mahbubani, *The Dangers of Democratic Delusions*, *Ethics and International Affairs*, 23, 1, Spring 2009; Justin Raimondo, *The Democratic Delusion*, *AntiWar.com*, 11 June 2005). Democracy may even engender delusion, as argued by Joel S. Hirschhorn (*Delusional Democracy: fixing the Republic without overthrowing the Government*, 2006). There are even suggestions for "post-consensus" politics (Micah White, *Post-Consensus Politics: moving beyond the elusive 51%*, *Adbusters*, 7 December 2010)

Efforts may of course be made to "manufacture" consensus, as highlighted in the much-cited study of **Noam Chomsky** and **Edward S. Herman** (*Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, 1988). A contemporary variant is noted by Aaron Maté (*Censoring the Dead*, 15 June 2005) with regard to the suppression of photographs from texts as being "too sympathetic" to the Palestinian cause. As Maté notes: *And rarely in the media do we hear the many anti-occupation voices that challenge the delusional consensus that Palestinians are to blame for their own misery.*

Issues for governance

- **Critical issues for governance:** Specific examples of domains in which consensus is improbable include:
 - **Intervention:** The delusion of the so-called **Washington Consensus: *The Washington Consensus of Iraq Reality is Delusion***, *Out of Iraq Bloggers Caucus*, 24 August 2007; Gideon Rose, *The Exit Strategy Delusion*, *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1998
 - **Internationalism:** Roger Scruton, *Delusions of internationalism: David Held's flawed perspective*, *OpenDemocracy*, 7 July 2004; Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, *Hegemonic Delusions Power, Liberal Imperialism, and the Bush Doctrine*, *The Fletcher*

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- **Multiculturalism:** In various countries political parties are now asserting that efforts to achieve coherence through [multiculturalism](#) have proven to be a failure, leading to the unproven assumption that it is now possible to elicit or impose coherence in terms of the original national cultural identity (*After Merkel, Cameron too says multiculturalism has failed*, *EurActiv*, 7 February 2011; Greg Sheridan, *How I lost faith in multiculturalism*, *The Australian*, 2 April 2011).
- **Development:** Toby Carroll: *Delusions of Development: The World Bank and the Post-Washington Consensus in Southeast Asia*, 2010
- **Peace:** Richard Falk: *The delusions of the peace process*, *Al Jazeera*, 18 Dec 2010; Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present*, Cornell University Press, 2006
- **Poverty:** Donovan Storey, et al.: *The Poverty Consensus: some limitations of the 'popular agenda'*, *Progress in Development Studies*, January 2005, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 30-44
- **Pensions:** Martin Wolf, *Britain's great pensions delusion*, *Financial Times*, 29 October 2004; John Lounsbury, *Illustrating the Bond Return Problem: public pension funds' delusion*, *Seeking Alpha*, 1 October 2010; *A Survey of Pensions: snares and delusions -- the trouble with pyramid schemes*, *The Economist*, 14 February 2002
- **Employment:** Mark Thoma, *The Job Delusion: growth is just around the corner*, *The Fiscal Times*, 11 May 2011; Ronald Bailey, *The Green Jobs Delusion: dispatch from the Copenhagen climate conference*. *Reason.com*, 17 December 2009
- **Debt:** Peter Warburton, *Debt and Delusion: central bank follies that threaten economic disaster*, Penguin, 2000; Robert Blumen, *Debt and Delusion*, *Gold Digest*, 8 December 2004; Will Slatyer, *The Debt Delusion: evolution and management of financial risk*, 2008; Mehdi Hasan, *The Debt Delusion*, *New Statesman*, 19 August 2009; Paul Krugman, *The Austerity Delusion*, *The New York Times*, 24 March 2011
- **Growth:** Bob Lloyd (*The Growth Delusion*, *Sustainability*, 2009, notably indicating, of relevance to the "method" of this argument, *The irrationality of religion has recently been examined by Richard Dawkins in The God Delusion. Dawkins' book is used as a starting point to investigate similarities between a belief in God and a belief in continuous growth*); Paul Craig Roberts, *A Stimulus to What? Delusions Prevail in Washington: Farewell to Supply-Side Economics*, *Information Clearing House*, 21 January 2008); C. Hamilton, *Growth Fetish*, Pluto Press, 2004; Dennis Meadows, *Limits to Growth: the 30 year update*, 2004.
- **Climate change:** *The Climate Change Consensus and the Delusion of Denial*, *New Wood*, 10 May 2011; Vincent Gray, *The Greenhouse Delusion: a critique of "Climate Change 2001"*, August 2002; Joe Bast, *You Call This 'Consensus' on Climate Change?* *The Heartland Institute*, 2 May 2011; Robert Carter, *Climate: The Counter-consensus - a Scientist Speaks*, Stacey International, 2010; Ernest Partridge, *A Convenient Delusion*, *The Crisis Papers*, 28 December 2009; *Are Global Warming Proponents Suffering From Mass Delusion?* *IronShrink*, 6 April 2009
- **Overpopulation:** Paul and Anne Ehrlich, *The Population Explosion*, *Our Planet*, 1994; Alison George, *The Population Delusion*, *New Scientist*, 25 September 2009; Steven Mosher, *The Malthusian Delusion and the Origins of Population*, 2008; Amy Julia Becker, *A Christian Response to Overpopulation*, *Christianity Today*, 25 May 2011

Whilst these issues may be variously recognized or denied, any global consensus on effective action is highly improbable. Such issues continue, however to be the subject of heated debate -- reminiscent of the challenge of global warming itself (*Sins of Hot Air Emission, Omission, Commission and Promission: the political challenge of responding to global crises*, 2009).

- **Sustainable governance:** Much is made of the quest for sustainable governance and the regrettable behaviour of those who impede its emergence. In practice it is in opposition to the latter that the most consensus is achieved -- however limited the insight into what might be proposed, as argued by [George Monbiot](#) (*We know what to march against on 26 March; here's what to protest for*, *The Guardian*, 6 March 2011). Little is asked about the potentially delusional nature of the assumptions by which that quest is currently framed by the international community.

Is the psychosocial system inherently ungovernable -- as every trend would imply (*Ungovernability of Sustainable Global Democracy?* 2010)? What might be the characteristics of emergent forms of governance bypassing the conventional assumptions of governance, as separately explored (*Consciously Self-reflexive Global Initiatives: Renaissance zones, complex adaptive systems, and third order organizations*, 2007)?

As with the Pax Romana and Pax Britannica, the success of the [Pax Americana](#) can simply be proclaimed through skillful use of public relations. Consensus on that achievement with respect to sustainable governance can simply be declared -- and woe to those who deny it. The classic tale of the *Emperor's New Clothes* offers insights into the nature of such consensus and the dilemmas it poses (*Entangled Tales of Memetic Disaster: mutual implication of the Emperor and the Little Boy*, 2009).

- **Alternative strategies:** The movements promoting such strategies are explicit in cultivating a consensus regarding future possibilities as a remedy for current planetary and social ills. Whilst often visibly effective in demonstrating their opposition to the conventional consensus, they have proven to be much challenged in reframing their own dysfunctional dynamics. To that degree they have proven unsuccessful in embodying the consensus to which they variously aspire -- thereby allowing their opponents to argue successfully that it is a delusion.

The potential of the various calls for "new thinking" to address this failure also merits consideration (*From Changing the Strategic Game to Changing the Strategic Frame: missing cognitive possibility in changing the system not the planet*, 2010). This is also evident in the *Urgent Appeal to Change the Mindset* (March 2011) launched by the [Civil Society Reflection Group on Global Development Perspectives](#).

Curiously the argument for "new thinking" has now been reinforced -- from a different perspective -- by a leader editorial in *The Economist* (*Welcome to the Anthropocene: Humans have changed the way the world works. Now they have to change the way they think about it, too*, 26 May 2011).

- **Rule of law:** It is appropriate to ask whether the plethora of international conventions is as much a symptom of the consensus delusion as a manifestation of effective global consensus building. There is an increasing body of evidence that respect for the rule of law, even at the highest level, is ever more tokenistic and more a feature of public relations. The point continues to be made in periodic reports on the abuse of human rights. Examples include the level of [extraordinary rendition](#) through which people are abducted and transferred extrajudicially from one nation to another for the purpose of "interrogation" -- with the official complicity of both. The widespread breach of international treaties, whether alleged or confirmed, offers another example (*Alleged Breach of UN Treaty Obligations by US*, 2010) -- as does the pattern of [extrajudicial execution](#), acclaimed as "justice".

The pattern of extrajudicial initiatives is increasingly seen as a "normal" strategic option -- most notably by the US and its allies, who see themselves as free to operate "above the law" when convenient to do so. This reinforces the more general point that the widespread incidence of crime, tax evasion and illegal bribery, all demonstrate the improbability of the global rule of law. Again it is remarkable with respect to the [International Criminal Court](#) that it is the US and Israel who have "unsigned" their original signatures of the Rome Statute, indicating that they no longer have legal obligations arising from their former representatives' signature of the statute. With respect to the distinct [International Court of Justice](#), the US withdrew from its compulsory jurisdiction in 1986, and only accepts that jurisdiction when convenient to its interests. Within the framework of any purported global consensus, it then becomes difficult to distinguish between "outlaw", "terrorist", "criminal", "covert extrajudicial operations" and "freedom fighter".

The point is remarkably well made by the "justice" with which Osama bin Laden was executed and the pre-judgment and "show trial" of Dominique Strauss-Kahn (*Iconic Extrajudicial Execution of Jesus through Osama by US? 2011; Pre-Judging an Institution's Implicit Strategy by the Director's Private Behaviour*, 2011). These contrast with the inability to bring [Henry Kissinger](#) and [Warren Anderson](#) to international justice for crimes against humanity ([Christopher Hitchens](#), *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, 2001).

The emergence of an increasingly delusional nature of any international legal consensus has been succinctly expressed with respect to the neocon strategy of governance, as presented by Ron Suskind (*Without a Doubt*, *The New York Times*, In The Magazine, 17 October 2004) following an exchange he had with an aide in the decision-making circle of President Bush:

The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality -- judiciously, as you will -- we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."

Most striking is the extent to which declarations and resolutions of collective intent have very short "half-lives" -- if they in fact "live" at all.

- **Global ethics and universal values:** The variety of understandings and appreciations of human "values" notably effects any possibility of viable consensus as discussed in relation to the [Human Values Project](#) (1995). Building on the initiative of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), of special interest is the effort by religions to elaborate a [global ethic](#) and seek adherence to it.

The very limited uptake in practice highlights the essentially delusional nature of the consensus sought with respect to "values" -- whose importance is so frequently cited as fundamental to global civilization.

- **Internet:** The increasing role of the internet has been widely remarked. Euphoric enthusiasts have seen it as indicative of the emergence of "planetary consciousness" and a "global brain". The conventional view recently articulated has been that the internet and related technologies bring about social or political change, as claimed in relation to the [Arab uprising of 2010-2011](#).

The "device" of borrowing the approach to "delusion" from Dawkins has however been used to focus the counterargument of [Evgeny Morozov](#) (*The Net Delusion: the dark side of internet freedom*, 2011). Contrary to the "cyberutopians," as he calls them, Morozov convincingly argues that, in freedom's name, the internet more often than not constricts or even abolishes freedom -- notably through its use for purposes of surveillance (cf *From ECHELON to NOLEHCE: enabling a strategic conversion to a faith-based global brain*, 2007).

Concerns are now widely raised regarding the surreptitious use to which mega-corporations have been discovered to be putting the personal data they collect online or failing to protect it (*Apple is Tracking iPhone, iPad Users' Location*, *Daily Tech*, 20 April 2011; Seth Finkelstein, *Google's surveillance is taking us further down the road to hell*, *The Guardian*, 26 March 2009; Peter Walker, *Facebook loses friends as privacy campaign grows*, *The Guardian*, 14 May 2010; en Quinn and Charles Arthur,

PlayStation Network hackers access data of 77 million users, *The Guardian*, 26 April 2011). Other questionable practices are appropriately suspected -- despite increasingly predictable denials.

Whilst the technology clearly enables higher degrees of interrelationship, it has yet to demonstrate any capacity to reframe the delusional nature of the disparate forms of "consensus" which multiple (and mutually antagonistic) groups construct within that context (*Simulating a Global Brain: using networks of international organizations, world problems, strategies, and values*, 2001; *Dynamically Gated Conceptual Communities*, 2004). What is the "global" nature of the conversations which the internet could potentially engender (*Future Generation through Global Conversation*, 1997)?

Any "consensus" is however most powerfully undermined by the volume of accessible information, experienced as overload even within the more specialized domains -- especially given constraints on attention span and comprehension capacity.

- **Community life:** Local communities, whether intentional or otherwise, have been upheld as offering the essence of consensual living. The approach has long been explored by intentional communities sharing a spiritual commitment (monasteries, ashrams, and the like). It has been followed by the [commune movement](#) in all its flavours, as identified by the [Fellowship for Intentional Community](#).

Their disparate nature, and their reactions to "outsiders", may be understood as making the point that consensus of a kind may be achieved locally but that the quest for any more global forms is a delusion. Reports of the dynamics within individual communities of this kind are also indicative of the extent to which consensus of a certain kind is imposed (if not "manufactured") and is effectively, if not necessarily, an obligation of membership.

- **Relationships:** The delusional nature of consensus is perhaps most usefully highlighted in interpersonal relationships -- through the consensual union between two individuals -- even "until death do us part". The delusional nature of that "consensus", into which many enter so enthusiastically, is indicated by the statistical trend towards ever shorter periods of commitment -- and the pattern of infidelity, marriage breakdown, and domestic violence.

It remains questionable whether a succession of relationships is indicative of a learning process leading to consensual relationships of greater maturity -- or whether aspirations to maturity of consensus are abandoned through compromises recognizing their delusional nature. Possibly a form of relationship RealPolitik.

It is perhaps ironic that the literature on "consensual" relationships is increasingly focused on consensual sexual relationship -- in contrast to nonconsensual forms now increasingly associated with rape. Of particular relevance is the association of consensual sexual relationships with the experience of their [consummation](#) -- upheld as the epitome of consensus in one of its most fundamental experiential senses. Here too, however, concerns are widely raised regarding the suboptimum degree to which that experience fails to meet the promoted expectations of "consensual union".

- **Psychedelic enhancement and trance dancing:** Jason Keehn (*Trance Dancing - The Rave*) raises the question whether trance-dancing can "save the planet":

Thousands of bored youth pumping themselves up with drugs, going out to huge underground parties and dancing maniacally to electronic rhythms and psychedelic light-shows till dawn.... Why is it that at the peak moments (admittedly rare) of the very best underground house/techno/rave parties, we get this miraculous sense of hope, of possibility, of transformation . . . a feeling that we're actually heading somewhere. . . together. . . towards a brighter future, one worth living in, one where we've returned to some kind of harmony with ourselves, with each other and with our planet as a whole? Is it "just the drugs," a kind of *consensus delusion*, or might there be some basis in reality for these feelings, hard to justify as they may seem once we're back out in the normal world?

Keehn cites Gurdjieff to the effect that:

... our ideas of free-will and individuality are a delusion, an image of our potential mistaken for a general fact of our existence. Bluntly put, we are blind products of genetics, conditioning and external influence; on an energetic level, we are next to nothing. We are less, in that sense, than most mammals even.

- **Crowd consensus:** A sense of consensus is variously implicit in the above points. Of particular interest are cases where "consensus delusion" is named in response to acclaimed consensus. One study, described by Tom Jacobs (*Racists Believe They Are Well Within the Norm*, 28 April 2010) shows that new research finds racists mistakenly tend to believe they're less prejudiced than their neighbours. This was named as *Racism - The Consensus Delusion* (*Global Sociology Blog*, 28 April 2010).

As a variant of the previous point, a striking process offering a high degree of collective consensus is increasingly enabled by the amplification of the coherence facilitated by [scapegoating](#) -- namely the capacity of the media to amplify and focus antipathy on a single individual as a form of "feeding frenzy". As "manufactured consent" by the media, the individual then constitutes a powerful "vehicle" for "consensus" -- on what the collective is not.

Examples have been provided in the current period by Osama bin Laden and Dominique Strauss-Kahn, as discussed separately

(*Iconic Extrajudicial Execution of Jesus through Osama by US?* 2011; *Pre-Judging an Institution's Implicit Strategy by the Director's Private Behaviour*, 2011). Both provide a form of social consensus, but unfortunately of limited duration -- requiring that further scapegoats be identified for "sacrifice" according to the traditional, primitive pattern. Is a form of consensus engendered by "feeding" on enemies brought to "justice"? Is it increasingly the case that reason is irrelevant to consensus? Is it emotional catharsis that is more vital?

- **Psychosocial construction of "reality"**: Consensual reality can be claimed to be a [psychosocial construction](#). Various schools of thought articulate the claim that the only reality we can know is that which is represented by human thought, namely that meaning or knowledge is always a human construction. The issue highlighted above remains in that any consensus on that construction is variously partial -- with the paradoxical possibility of having been constructed to be so.

The potentially pathological considerations -- the delusional nature of a constructed consensus -- are variously noted in writings on schizophrenia, as by Rollie Bollocks (*Schizophrenics, Base Nothing*, 17 December 2010).

... the *consensus delusion* of what constitutes reality is forged in a scientific looking glass of psychiatric reductionism. More often than not, the theoretical underpinnings of psychiatry are based on studies of the brain, and this too is a reductive dismissal that the entire body is responsible for the internal states of the individual, and while inquiries into the brain may often lead to useful discoveries, patients are not walking brains, anymore than they are chemical imbalances.

In a study by Al Sieber (*A Schizophrenia Breakthrough: progressing toward freeing our minds from our minds*, 2007), the understanding of "mental illness" as "*A Delusional Consensus Reality*" is challenged (in an appendix).

Within this context it might be provocatively asked whether the [individuation process](#), upheld as the royal road to emergent maturity, involves navigating degrees of delusion -- possibly to be understood as a "dance" with delusion.

In each case there is little sense of how to progress beyond naive and simplistic understandings of consensus. Each case exemplifies entrapment in delusional approaches to consensus -- which the future may have every right to label pathological.

Meta-dialogue and meta-discourse?

The question is then: **through what mode of discourse can the nature of the delusion be appropriately acknowledged in order to address the challenge of moving beyond it?** Does the exploration of "meta-discourse" and "[meta-dialogue](#)" offer any possibilities?

- Eric Heinze: *Principles for a Meta-Discourse of Liberal Rights: the example of the European Convention on Human Rights*, *Indiana International and Comparative Law Review* 1999, 319
- Simone Teufel: *Meta-Discourse Markers and Problem-Structuring in Scientific Articles*
- Lisa Wade: *The Contemporary Meta-Discourse of Politics: Stewart's Rally for Sanity*, *Sociological Images*, 31 October 2010
- Brian Donovan: *Advice to College Writers: On Meta-Discourse*
- Jaworski, A., Coupland, N., and Galasinski, D. (Eds.): *Metalanguage: Social and ideological perspectives*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004
- J. A. Lucy (Ed.): *Reflexive language: Reported speech and metapragmatics*. Cambridge and Cambridge University Press, 1993
- J. Verschueren: *Language on language: Toward metapragmatic universals*. IPrA Papers in Pragmatics, 3, 1989, 5-144.
- Jürgen Hargens and Uwe Grau: *Meta-dialogue*, *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 16, 6, December, 1994, pp. 451-462
- Maurice A. Finocchiaro: *Arguments, Meta-arguments, and Metadialogues: A Reconstruction of Krabbe, Govier, and Woods*. *Argumentation*, 21, 3, September 2007, pp. 253-268
- Peter Houtlosser¹ and Jan Albert van Laar¹: *Metadialogues: Krabbe's Immanent Dialectic*, *Argumentation*, 21, 3, September, 2007, pp. 205-208

What role can "[critical thinking](#)" play? Or the initiatives of the [International Society for the Study of Argumentation](#) ?

Ironically the specialists in delusion whose views might be valued -- namely the various disciplines and practices of the psychological sciences and therapies -- are as mired in problematic dynamics between each other as any other discipline. They are quite incapable of doing more than recognizing the limitations of the other, and celebrating their own particular insight. Worse still, they are not capable of addressing their own condition -- anymore than are their typical clients. (cf. James Hillman and Michael Ventura, *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy -- And the World's Getting Worse*, 1993)

Possible ways of framing a more fruitful exploration have been explored through metaphor (*Metaphorical Geometry in Quest of Globality in response to global governance challenges*, 2009). These may be variously understood as a challenge to the imagination (*Imagining the Real Challenge and Realizing the Imaginal Pathway of Sustainable Transformation*, 2007; *Living as an Imaginal Bridge between Worlds: Global implications of "betwixt and between" and liminality*, 2011; *Imaginal education: Game playing, science fiction, language, art and world-making*, 2003).

Understandably, the young will have every right to reject integrative strategies which have a long record of demonstrating incapacity to reframe strategic challenges such as to enable higher orders of meaningful consensus (*Sustaining Higher Orders of Policy Consensus through Metaphor: towards a new language of governance*, 1992).

Paradoxical quest for consensus regarding consensus

What is the consensus to which so many initiatives aspire? It has been extensively researched by the social and political sciences. There

are at least three general definitions: group solidarity in sentiment and belief; general agreement or concord, unanimity; and majority opinion.

Is it more than the warm and fuzzy feeling of togetherness evoked so eloquently by Barack Obama? What is suggested by insights into "team spirit" (Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams: creating the high-performance organization*, 1994)? And how is that to be related to the [bribery scandals](#) at the very core of world football at this time of writing (*FIFA in crisis after claims against Jack Warner and Mohamed bin Hammam*, *The Guardian*, 25 May 2011)?

Efforts to define "aggression", "terrorism" and "rape" continue to arouse challenging controversy, and remain essentially unresolved. So too, however, are efforts to clarify the nature of their opposites, such as "agreement", and "consensus". Disagreement as to the nature of agreement is necessarily problematic at the highest levels of governance, especially in arenas like the European Community with its commitment to "harmonisation" between nations.

What does "agreement" mean in practice? Can there be "agreement to disagree"? Alf Temme (*Agreeing to Disagree*) argues that: *Disagreement is a very useful tool in life to drive improvement and progress*. Can one agree with that? Is there general agreement, namely consensus, as with that described by Roger Fisher and William L. Ury (*Getting to YES: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, 1981)? But what of cultures where "yes" is readily said to avoid the embarrassment of saying "no" (Masaaki Imai, *16 Ways To Avoid Saying No: an invitation to experience Japanese management*, 1981)? What of the nature of consensus in repressive societies where saying "no" is fatal to career, livelihood and even life -- or where is extorted under duress? The Japanese case is especially interesting because of the reliance in management on a culturally unique process of consensual decision-making (*ringisei*).

A group process of [consensus decision-making](#) is indeed recognized as seeking not only the agreement of most participants but also the resolution or mitigation of minority objections. This involves both general agreement and group solidarity of belief or sentiment. It is a question of both "hearts and minds". As might be expected, in addition to the restricted areas in which any such process is used, distinct variants are recognized. These include the [Quaker model](#), the [Consensus-Oriented Decision-Making](#), the [ringisei Japanese model](#), [Internet Engineering Task Force rough consensus model](#), as well as others merging into voting procedures. The inability to apply these approaches more widely, or their wider unacceptability, suggests that there is indeed a degree of delusion in assuming the possibility of broader consensus. Belief in the possibility of "scaling up" any one of these models to a global level, would then exemplify the consensus delusion.

Of relevance to pressures for increased public involvement in the formulation of science and technology policy, efforts have been made in various countries to organize "consensus conferences". These involve lay people in the assessment of socially sensitive topics, as summarized by Simon Joss and John Durant (*Public participation in science: the role of consensus conferences in Europe*, 1995). This study raises the issue of the "epistemology of consensus" -- also explored by the [RealTruth Project](#).

Wikipedia, which uses its [own process of consensus decision-making](#) (as is necessary for any [open source](#) project), offers a section on [the idea of consensus in the abstract](#). This is related to two processes:

- **Collaboration:** Again it is necessary to note that "collaboration" or "cooperation" does indeed occur in specific domains or locally, but its failure is best remarked in the dynamics of dysfunctional political decision-making at a global level. As the number of parties (or countries) increases, the capacity to "collaborate" decreases -- unless the topic becomes ever more specific, or ever more superficial. Assumptions of potential global collaboration (on more than an ad hoc narrow technical basis) are then necessarily delusional, even if "consensus" emerges as to its desirability. (*Cooperation and its Failures (From the 1960s through the 1980s): 12 Metaphors towards understanding the dilemma for the 1990s*. 1988)
- **Collective intelligence:** Few could adequately defend the quality of intelligence brought to bear on the challenges of the times, most notably in response to emergencies (*Enabling Collective Intelligence in Response to Emergencies*, 2010). Many remark on collective stupidity of one form or another. In the light of the challenges of *Wikipedia*, a useful summary is offered by Krissada Maleewong, et al. *Analyzing Community Deliberation and Achieving Consensual Knowledge in SAM*. *International Journal of Organizational and Journal of Organizational and Collective Intelligence*, 2010).

An online initiative dating from the 1970s has endeavoured to combine these functions by clustering the insights of thousands of international constituencies in an *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential* (*Encyclopedia Illusions*, 1991). **This specifically sought to hold opposing evaluations of both problems and remedial strategies -- effectively a detailed indication of the delusions held and attributed, together inhibiting the emergence of consensus.** Of interest are learnings from a systemic approach to what inhibits consensus (*Recognizing the Psychosocial Boundaries of Remedial Action: constraints on ensuring a safe operating space for humanity*, 2009).

Coexistence of variety: an implicate order?

As a contribution to the problematic debate on the co-existence of a variety of savagely competing religions, one study articulates the value of that variety (Stephen Prothero, *God Is Not One: the eight rival religions that run the world and why their differences matter*, 2011). This appreciation of "non-consensus" is to a degree consistent with the recognition in cybernetics of the [Law of Requisite Variety](#) necessary to control of a complex system -- of which Prothero makes no mention. There is of course the issue of the many other religions not encompassed by his argument and most unlikely -- as upholders of other unique truths -- to subscribe to his thesis.

If one simple metaphor of consensus is ensuring that everyone "sings from the same hymn sheet", provocatively it might be asked (in the light of his argument) what might be the musical organization of the "hymn" which would allow for (and honour) the necessary differences between the religions. For example, in musical terms, it might be argued that each religion could be responsible for a different part. The metaphor has implications for other potential forms of consensus (*A Singable Earth Charter, EU Constitution or Global*

Ethic? 2006; *All Blacks of Davos vs All Greens of Porto Alegre: reframing global strategic discord through polyphony?* 2007).

Despite the title of Prothero's valuable presentation, he makes no reference to the discipline which has best demonstrated its competence in handling every aspect of numbers and their relationships. [Number theory](#) is of fundamental importance within the named religions, at least with respect to symbolism. There is indeed a certain literature on "[mathematical theology](#)" ([Philip J. Davis, *A Brief Look at Mathematics and Theology*, 1999](#); Sarah Voss, *What Number is God? Metaphors, Metaphysics, Metamathematics, and the Nature of Things*, 1995). Beyond the mysticism typically associated with such concerns, of potential relevance are the recent advances in maths which suggest new ways of thinking about "one" and the relationships between whatever is symbolically associated with other numbers.

Mathematical theology has been described as an approach to assigning numeric value to possible theological beliefs. What calls for investigation is how the (vital) differences noted by Prothero might be interpreted mathematically -- potentially leading to a form of reconciliation of a higher order, but mathematically articulated. The approach has been extensively developed, with insights from music, by [Ernest McClain](#) (*Myth of Invariance: the origins of the gods, mathematics and music from the Rg Veda to Plato*, 1976; *Meditations Through the Quran: tonal images in an oral culture*, 1981).

Other than nature itself, what metaphors facilitate thinking about the coexistence of variety that is so challenging in its psychosocial forms? Of particular interest is the classical Chinese [Ba Gua](#) pattern of eightfold interactions. Whilst inspired by nature, this is understood metaphorically in terms of its cognitive and psychosocial implications. This raises the question of the nature of any cognitively [implicate order](#) -- potentially mirroring the order of nature -- as suggested by the work of [David Bohm](#) (*Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 1980; *Changing Consciousness: exploring the hidden source of the social, political and environmental crises facing our world*, 1991), notably with respect to the dialogue fundamental to consensus (*Limits of Thought: Discussions with Jiddu Krishnamurti*, 1999).

Periodic organization

Curiously the key to comprehending "globality" in daily life is the periodicity associated with diurnal cycles. Somehow this recognition is lacking in relation to the consensus delusion. This focuses on the myth of the eternal sunshine of a "positive" worldview -- and the efforts to deny the fruitfulness of periodic "endarkenment" are rejected as "negativity"

The set of religions distinguished by Prothero, arguably an eightfold consensus delusion, raises the question of how they might be ordered more systematically -- as implied by mathematical theology and/or music, or even the dynamics of the Ba Gua pattern. It is curious that no consideration is accorded to geometric possibilities, especially given the importance attached to [sacred geometry](#) by many of the religions, and notably with the technical enhancement offered by a web-based global knowledge society ([Sacralization of Hyperlink Geometry](#), 1997; *Sustaining the Coherence of Dialogue through Apartness Patterns of systematic configuration of entities through hypertext*, 1997).

Especially intriguing is how "one" might be understood as emerging from such patterns -- echoing the "oneness" associated with "global" and the "interactions" within it (*Spherical Configuration of Categories to Reflect Systemic Patterns of Environmental Checks and Balances*, 1994; *Spherical configuration of interlocking roundtables: Internet enhancement of global self-organization through patterns of dialogue*, 1998).

Implicit in such geometry is the periodicity associated with symmetry. To that extent the [periodic table of chemical elements](#) offers possible clues to another mode of representation, as separately discussed:

- [Tuning a Periodic Table of Religions, Epistemologies and Spirituality: including the sciences and other belief systems](#) (2007)
- [Periodic Pattern of Human Knowing: implication of the Periodic Table as metaphor of elementary order](#) (2009)
- [Towards a Periodic Table of Ways of Knowing -- in the light of metaphors of mathematics](#) (2009)
- [Towards a Periodic Table of Questions: strategic opportunities from ordering WH-questions](#) (2007)
- [Functional Classification in an Integrative Matrix of Human Preoccupations](#) (1982)

Most curiously, mathematics as the study of relationships and sets has been unable to provide more than a simplistic classification for its own discipline which fails to benefit from insights of the discipline itself -- and its possibilities, to elicit insight into consensus ([Dave Rusin, *A Gentle Introduction to the Mathematics Subject Classification Scheme*, 2000](#)).

Such periodic organization, potentially honouring and elaborating Prothero's eightfold pattern, also suggest the exploration of a weaving metaphor, as separately discussed (*Interweaving Thematic Threads and Learning Pathways*, 2010). Especially interesting is the traditional use of the weave as a means of embodying some form of enthralling "magic", as with the legendary magic carpets (*Magic Carpets as Psychoactive Systems Diagrams*, 2010). Carpet patterning is consistent with recent work of [Christopher Alexander](#) (*The Nature of Order*, as separately discussed (*Harmony-Comprehension and Wholeness-Extending*, 2010).

As mentioned above, the remarkable elegance of symmetry group theory suggests the possibility of meaningful consensus of a very high order. However its challenging relation to delusion is well-illustrated within mathematics itself in the literature on "[moonshine theory](#)" associated with the improbable nature of the correspondences through which some of the most fundamentally integrative forms of symmetry have been discovered. Might non-delusional forms of consensus come to be understood in such terms (*Potential Psychosocial Significance of Monstrous Moonshine: an exceptional form of symmetry as a Rosetta stone for cognitive frameworks*, 2007)? What is the nature of the "correspondences" between the disparate religions (*Theories of Correspondences -- and potential equivalences between them in correlative thinking*, 2007)?

Sustaining consensus delusion -- as a Ponzi scheme

With respect to simplicity in engendering consensus, in addition to the [KISS principle](#), the adage of General Montgomery during World War II is relevant: *Make no more than three points, for otherwise you will only confuse people -- and you will certainly confuse yourself.*

The iconic Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the US, is famously alleged to have declared:

You can fool some of the people all of the time,
and all of the people some of the time,
but you can not fool all of the people all of the time.

This goes a long way towards clarifying the process of sustaining a consensus delusion. The statement might be refined in practice by the qualification: *Success is ensured to the extent that the matter can be simply stated and is apparently of little consequence.* **Rather than religion, as criticized by Dawkins, it is that consensus which might then be appropriately understood as "the opium of the people".**

Stated otherwise, success in sustaining the consensus delusion is directly proportional to its simplicity and superficiality, and is inversely proportional to the number of people involved. Combining "simplicity and superficiality" in this way hinders recognition of the scope or range of issues potentially associated with successful consensus. Paradoxically the degree of personal existential implication, experienced as profundity, may simplify what might otherwise be held to be complex.

In his remarkable analysis of the crisis faced by global civilization, [Thomas Homer-Dixon](#) (*The Upside of Down: catastrophe, creativity, and the renewal of civilization*, 2006) derives learnings from a careful study of the diminishing energy resources on which the historical Pax Romana was dependent. The methodology might be fruitfully adapted to the "energy" required to sustain the consensus delusion of global civilization -- understood more generically in terms of "information"..

Energy is then **not** to be understood in terms of the current preoccupation with its renewable and non-renewable material forms. Rather it is to be understood in terms of the cost of news management, public relations and spin -- to ensure the "psychosocial energy" on which that consensus delusion is dependent. This preoccupation was implicit in the "circus" component of the Roman *"panem et circenses"*. This form of energy is much neglected, despite its recognized importance for recovery from crisis -- as in Japan (*Massive Elicitation of Psychosocial Energy: Requisite technology for collective enlightenment*, 2011; *Reframing Sustainable Sources of Energy for the Future: the vital role of psychosocial variants*, 2006).

With respect to sustaining a consensus delusion, as so clearly demonstrated in the case of [Ponzi schemes](#), the challenge is to ensure appropriate psychological engagement in its dynamics. Ironically, whereas "recycling" is currently a challenge to global society, a form of recycling is fundamental to the operation of a Ponzi scheme based on psychosocial energy. This may explain the widespread popularity of media presentations of vampires, which might otherwise have been considered a completely irrelevant myth in a global civilization (*Global Civilization of Vampires: governance through demons and vampires on spin*, 2005).

Current global strategic initiatives can then be fruitfully reviewed from the perspective of "inflating" consensual initiatives (*Globallooming -- Strategic Inflation of Expectations and Inconsequential Drift*, 2009; *Credibility Crunch engendered by Hope-mongering: "Credit crunch" focus as symptom of a dangerous mindset*, 2008).

Delusion as an attractive illusion

A [delusion](#) is held to be a belief that, though false, has been surrendered to and accepted by the whole mind as a truth -- typically held with vehemence. An [illusion](#), is however an impression that, though false, is entertained provisionally on the recommendation of the senses or the imagination, but awaits full acceptance and may not influence action. The two may, however, be readily confused in practice, especially when held to have pathological implications. The question is then with respect to what framework the belief is judged to be pathological.

Delusions are conventionally distinguished in terms of four types:

- Bizarre delusion: one that is very strange and completely implausible; an example of a bizarre delusion would be that aliens have removed the affected person's brain.
- Non-bizarre delusion: one that, though false, is at least possible, e.g., the affected person mistakenly believes that he is under constant police surveillance.
- Mood-congruent delusion: one having content consistent with either a depressive or manic state, e.g., a depressed person believes that news anchors on television highly disapprove of him, or a person in a manic state might believe he is a powerful deity.
- Mood-neutral delusion: one that does not relate to the sufferer's emotional state; for example, a belief that an extra limb is growing out of the back of one's head is neutral to either depression or mania.

These may variously manifest according to consistent themes, including: delusion of control, nihilistic delusion, delusional jealousy, delusion of guilt or sin, delusion of mind being read, delusion of reference, erotomania, religious delusion, somatic delusion, delusion of grandeur, and persecutory delusion. Experientially a delusion may then be understood as a powerful attractor -- even a [strange attractor](#), as with the experience of other values (*Human Values as Strange Attractors*, 1993).

Illusion is more conventionally associated with misperception by the senses, most notably that of vision. Thus *Scientific American* offered a set of *169 Best Illusions--A Sampling* (10 May 2010). There is a natural fascination with illusion -- traditionally cultivated by magicians.

Illusion and delusion tend to be confused when the senses are used metaphorically, as with the widespread use of the vision metaphor in "envisaging" the future -- the need for politicians to be "in touch", or to "hear" the voice of the people (*Metaphor and the Language of Futures*, 1992). It is the strategies elaborated on the basis of an attractive "vision" -- even utopian -- by which people may be effectively seduced.

Curiously it is the technical innovation of multi-media which has made evident the heightened attraction of "poly-sensual" information --

now increasingly valued in the marketing of strategic proposals. Multi-media in fact enhances the attraction of "delusional immersion" as the ultimate distractor. Less evident is any recognition of the cognitive implication of mixing the metaphoric languages of the senses -- a polysensorial extension of the argument of [Magoroh Maruyama](#) (2004) regarding the necessity of "poly-ocular" thinking as a means of transcending "subunderstanding", as separately discussed (*Strategic Challenge of Polysensorial Knowledge: bringing the "elephant" into "focus"*, 2008). How might "enlightenment" be imagined without the bias in favour of the vision metaphor -- or of the alternative offered by other senses? Sound? Smell? Touch?

The cognitive and metaphorical potentials of [synaesthesia](#), as a means of transcending such delusion, have yet to be articulated. Is it in such terms that "consensual" will acquire new significance as a basis for new forms of "consensus"? What might then be the future significance of "[grokking](#)", as speculatively explored (*Authentic Grokking: Emergence of Homo conjugens*, 2003)?

Illusion of delusion

A delightful paradox in any appreciation of Dawkins' *The God Delusion* derives from those religions which explicitly emphasize the essentially illusory nature of reality as conventionally conceived -- and consequently of any conceptual formulation of "God". In this sense the title of his book is more than appropriate. "God", as so inadequately conceived, is indeed a delusion and the book could be classified as a theologically valuable critique of that inadequacy -- as some religious writers have acknowledged. This is in accordance with the *via negativa* of "unsaying" of apophatic discourse (*Being What You Want: problematic kataphatic identity vs. potential of apophatic identity?* 2008).

The irony goes further in that Hinduism in particular has a major deity, [Maya](#), intimately associated with "illusion". Maya is the deity that manifests, perpetuates and governs the illusion and dream of duality in the phenomenal universe -- a duality so intrinsic to Dawkins' preferred methodology. A commentary on this illusion in relation to Dawkins' argument is provided by M. D. Kini (*The God Delusion or The World is an Illusion ? : a common Hindu's perspective*, 19 May 2009). Curiously the illusion is in accordance with the arguments of fundamental physics to the effect that objects (as conventionally perceived and defined by humans) are particular, and temporary, manifestations of waveforms in a spacetime within which no viewpoint is privileged.

In terms of understanding the fundamental illusion to which Maya alludes, this does not mean the world is not real, rather it is only real as a form of reflection -- as with the image of a person in a mirror. The world is not real/true when compared to the reality. But the world is also not false. This understanding is consistent with participatory cognition ([Gregory Bateson](#), *Mind and Nature: a necessary unity*, 1979; [Henryk Skolimowski](#), *The Participatory Mind: a new theory of knowledge and of the universe*, 1994; [Stephanie Sorrell](#), *Nature as Mirror: an ecology of body, mind and soul*, 2011).

As with both the goal of enlightenment and an appropriately enlightened understanding of physics, the challenge is to experience and transcend this false dichotomy -- between the perceiving self and the "external" universe. The difficulty, even for physicists of high degree, is achieving this understanding, whether or not it can be communicated. Potentially even more challenging, therefore, is the delusion associated with the nature and propagation of any "consensus" with "others" on this understanding, as with any scientific consensus. The image of a dog chasing its tail comes to mind.

Other Eastern religions, notably Zen, play with the sense in which the illusion is itself a delusion (*Removing the delusion of non-enlightenment*, *The Zennist*, 4 March 2010). In this sense, both consensus and non-consensus are delusions inappropriate to action in response to the challenges of humanity. Curiously the sense of "play" features in the etymology of both "illusion" and "delusion" -- deriving as they do from the Latin *ludere* -- but implying also a degree of deceptive, jesting mockery. The "humour of the gods"?

Topology of consensus -- and bonding

Geometry and topology offer tools for exploring the illusions which sustain consensus delusion. As argued above, this is most evident with respect to people variously positioned on a sphere and the conflicting claims they would then variously make -- if unaware of the geometry. The question is **what surface facilitates consensus -- or rather to what degree any "habitable" surface facilitates consensus of a particular degree.**

Flat: Whilst a flat surface would seem to do so, as seemingly advocated by [Friedman](#) (2005), it does **not** however honour those "on the other side". In practice they may well be demonised -- "there be monsters" -- as with the interaction between adherents of the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum. The perspective of the other is then held to be irrelevant and even a fantasy, or both.

Sphere: It would seem that "global" civilization has as yet to catch up cognitively with the sense in which people live on a sphere -- and with the cyclic dynamic which ensures the coherence of that understanding (or sustains the respective delusions, failing awareness of its global implications). Ironically the dynamic is associated with "spin" -- and metaphorically with reinforcement of the delusion. A number of mathematicians have offered fictionalised accounts of the cognitive challenges encountered by dwellers on "flatland" in comprehending a third dimension (***)

Spherical polyhedra: However the very fact that mathematics has explored more complex forms suggests that these may be vital to civilization for the heightened levels of consensus required by the emerging challenges of psychosocial organization and governance. The question may be addressed in terms of the kinds of cognitive and social bond implied by "consensus". On a flat surface the dwellers will tend to form "two-dimensional" relationships, possibly mapped as flat networks, as is now so often done. In three dimensions, networks become more complex and can notably be mapped as polyhedra, where the robustness of consensus can usefully be related to spherical symmetry (*Polyhedral Empowerment of Networks through Symmetry: psycho-social implications for organization and global governance*, 2008).

Torus: It would seem however that even such potential robustness of bonding does not respond to the more complex challenges of

consensus characterized by more radical disagreement. This could be understood as being sustained by lack of awareness of the more complex forms of "globality" -- the sphere being the simplest variant. In terms of topology, the sphere is in fact a "degenerate" form of **torus** -- which can itself have many higher dimensional forms. A torus allows for more complex forms of bonding and therefore for consensus of greater coherence, as separately discussed (*Comprehension of Requisite Variety for Sustainable Psychosocial Dynamics: Transforming a matrix classification onto intertwined tori*, 2006). As noted in that argument, the torus has particular implications for more coherent argument, transcending the (typically unexamined) constraining assumptions associated with description on a flat surface.

Paradoxical forms: Comprehending the consensus potentially associated with the patterns of bonding of a torus is necessarily more challenging than that on a simple sphere. Hence the value of exploring simple forms which hold the level of paradoxical complexity undermining consensus and effectively honour and "legitimate" the associated delusions.

The simplest form of this kind is the **Möbius strip** -- a band so connected that it has only a single side. For a dweller at any point on such a band there is indeed another "side" -- but traveling along the band, the distinction between the "sides" is recognized as an illusion. A more complex variant is the **Klein bottle**, which appears to have an "inside" and "outside", but again these are not distinct -- in four dimensions however. Both the Möbius strip and the Klein bottle offer surfaces which respond to the divisive nature of the delusion that consensus can be effectively associated with a single side. Such possibilities are discussed separately (*Metaphorical Geometry in Quest of Globality*, 2009).

Mandelbrot set: Mathematics has explored numerous forms of greater complexity with potential psychosocial implications -- although these are of no interest whatsoever to the mindset of that discipline. Many may be understood as offering insights into forms which could sustain higher orders of consensus and bonding -- whether cognitive or relational. Striking examples are offered by symmetry groups as mentioned above, and by the **Mandelbrot set** (*Psycho-social Significance of the Mandelbrot Set: a sustainable boundary between chaos and order*, 2005). The latter is especially significant in terms of the elegance of its visual rendering and the variety that may be explored within it.

"Rosetta Stone"? Speculatively it is appropriate to ask, from the design perspective explored by Christopher Alexander, what might be the topological "design" of a "Rosetta Stone" or a "Philosopher's Stone" of requisite complexity -- as metaphors of relevance to the level of "non-delusional" consensus required by the future (*Systemic Crises as Keys to Systemic Remedies a metaphorical Rosetta Stone for future strategy?* 2008; *Potential Psychosocial Significance of Monstrous Moonshine: an exceptional form of symmetry as a Rosetta stone for cognitive frameworks*, 2007).

As implied with respect to spherically symmetrical polyhedra, the development to higher and more sustainable degrees of "consensus" would seem to be associated with a process of cognitive embodiment involving higher degrees of bonding. A useful comparison could be made with the various forms and bonding possibilities of carbon -- including diamond and **fullerenes**. Diamond, in contrast to other crystals, is especially useful because of the value attributed to it due to its optical properties (*Patterning Archetypal Templates of Emergent Order: implications of diamond faceting for enlightening dialogue*, 2002).

"Strange loops": The inadequacy of crystal forms in holding the "essential" qualities of consensus is that it readily reinforces the objectification associated with more constrained forms of consensus -- consensus of low degree. It is in this sense that the self-reflexive explorations of **Douglas Hofstadter** are so helpful (*Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid*, Basic Books, 1979; *I Am a Strange Loop*, Basic Books, 2007). Appropriate to this argument is his further work with Emmanuel Sander (*Surfaces and Essences* or the *The Essence of Thought*, 2011).

Exploiting the Möbius strip and the Klein bottle, their "strangeness" with respect to consensus lies in how they imply self-reflexivity to a degree which challenges conventional approaches and allows for the mirroring to which reference was made above in connection with Maya. Consensus may then be explored in terms of an unconventional approach to community (*Sustaining a Community of Strange Loops: comprehension and engagement through aesthetic ring transformation*, 2010).

Use of the Möbius strip may be taken further to hold more explicitly the paradoxical relationship between subjectivity/objectivity and static/dynamic in any consensual relationship (*¿ Defining the objective ∞ Refining the subjective ?! Explaining reality ∞ Embodying realization*, 2011). Related use may be made of the Klein bottle (*Intercourse with Globality through Enacting a Klein bottle: cognitive implication in a polysensorial "lens"*, 2009).

Potential for "consensus" on climate change and financial reform?
<i>Worst ever carbon emissions leave climate on the brink</i> (<i>The Guardian</i> , 29 May 2011): <i>These figures indicate that [emissions] are now close to being back on a 'business as usual' path. According to the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's] projections, such a path ... would mean around a 50% chance of a rise in global average temperature of more than 4C by 2100. Such warming would disrupt the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people across the planet, leading to widespread mass migration and conflict. That is a risk any sane person would seek to drastically reduce</i> (Lord Stern)

<i>If we have bold, decisive and urgent action, very soon, we still have a chance of succeeding</i> (Fatih Birol, IEA)

<i>Ailing UN climate talks jolted by record surge in greenhouse gases</i> (<i>The Guardian</i> , 29 May 2011): <i>Next week, governments will convene in Bonn, Germany, for the latest round of more than 20 years of tortuous talks, aimed at forging a binding international agreement on climate change which so far has eluded them. Little is expected of the meeting... But the data from the International Energy Agency (IEA) should shock even the most jaded of negotiators.... The contrast between the snail's pace of negotiations and the rapid rise in emissions catalogued by the International Energy Agency could scarcely be more marked.... While warnings grow louder, analysts say politicians are turning off.</i>
<i>Outrage at the banks is everywhere, so why aren't there riots on the streets?</i> (<i>The Guardian</i> , 30 May 2011): <i>As the</i>

film [[Inside Job](#)] points out, each banking crisis in the last 25 years of deregulation has been progressively bigger and costlier, culminating in the massive bailout of 2008. Yet effective reform has stalled, all the key players and institutions are still in place: business as usual. This is the most disturbing aspect of the film - a political system in paralysis. Not one financial institution or individual has been prosecuted for the biggest bank theft ever; the executives who resigned from their collapsing banks in 2008 walked away with their vast fortunes intact. There has been no effective calling to account on either side of the Atlantic; both the UK and the US have repeatedly brought in bankers to run inquiries or act as advisers to sort out the bankers' mess, with predictable results - caution and status quo...

Anger with the banks is widespread but diffuse, confused as to what to ask for. It doesn't have the political vehicle to get traction with the public. Yet evidence emerges on a weekly basis of the banks' outrageous behaviour.... The scale of the injustice is so blatant, the risks ahead of failing to reform now clearly defined by so many, that it beggars belief that our political system cannot generate the pressure to defy the banks and their implausible threats to relocate.

[The strategy of stagnation](#) (*The Guardian*, 30 May 2011): The counter-revolution in economics is almost complete. A flirtation with alternative thinking lasted for the six months between the near collapse of the banking system in late 2008 and the London G20 summit in April 2009. Since then, the forces of economic orthodoxy have regrouped and fought back.... the world has returned to the pre-crisis mindset with remarkable speed.... The blueprint for reform of the financial sector is to do as little as possible lest it deter the money-changers from returning to the temple.

Conclusion

Immense resources are devoted to achieving "superficial" consensus and none to the manner of building on more fruitful disagreement and bonding -- as suggested by the explorations of mathematics ([Using Disagreements for Superordinate Frame Configuration](#), 1992). **The consequence is premature closure on superficial forms of consensus inadequate to the challenges of the times.** Whilst offering a degree of immediate satisfaction, these both preclude unsuspected options and constitute a defensive protection from them.

Such premature closure assumes a form of consensus based on constrictive notions of agreement. A healthy civilization would offer scope for a wide variety of perspectives -- beyond what is currently understood as freedom of opinion and mutual tolerance. The everybody-must-agree approach, either by dictatorial imposition or by majority vote, is not the basis for social coherence. Missing, as yet, is any understanding of how to embody the complex dynamics of diversity -- best exemplified by the widespread breakdown of families and communities, and ironically including those promoting consensual worldviews.

The delusional nature of formulated consensus is most tragically evident in the case of so-called "global" initiatives, most notably by the United Nations -- with its marked inability to deliver on earlier promises of "health for all", "jobs for all", "education for all", "justice for all", "housing for all", "food for all", etc, and most currently challenged to fulfil commitments of its [Millennium Development Goals](#). The failure to understand the track record of past inability strongly suggests that optimistic initiatives for the future are effectively "built on sand" with a dangerous "lottery-ticket" mentality ([Credibility Crunch engendered by Hope-mongering](#), 2008). It is of a kind with global dependence on the \$600 trillion [financial derivatives](#) market with its associated [toxic assets](#). Satisfaction with the "feel-good" consensus characteristic of such strategies is difficult to dissociate from Abraham Lincoln's above-cited remark, perhaps to be appropriately adapted as:

- You can **feed** some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can not feed all of the people all of the time.
- You can **employ** some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can not employ all of the people all of the time.
- You can **protect** some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can not protect all of the people all of the time.
- You can **educate** some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can not educate all of the people all of the time.
- You can **house** some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can not house all of the people all of the time.
- You can ensure **justice** for some of the people all of the time, and for all of the people some of the time, but you can not provide it for all of the people all of the time.
- You can provide **heal care** to some of the people all of the time, and to all of the people some of the time, but you can not provide it to all of the people all of the time.

The above argument suggests the possible future emergence of much richer forms and dynamics of relevance to "global consensus". The need for such has been made evident through the financial crisis of 2008-2009, widely cited as a crisis of confidence. Consensus and confidence may then be understood as intimately related, with "confidence" understood -- like "consensus" -- in a very fuzzy and simplistic manner, inadequate to the dependence on it. Of particular interest, as suggested by the dynamics potentially associated with the Möbius strip, is the requisite dynamic of confidence in a global context. This may be variously explored ([Varieties of Confidence Essential to Sustainability](#), 2009; [Primary Global Reserve Currency: the Con? Cognitive implications of a prefix for sustainable confidelity](#), 2011).

Whilst "consensus", as conventionally promoted, may indeed be the ultimate delusion, it is clear that through variously cultivating that delusion people can be motivated to ends of which they are unlikely to be aware. An example is provided by the danger of terrorism, that is repeatedly presented as the ultimate threat to global civilization ([Promoting a Singular Global Threat -- Terrorism: strategy of choice](#)

for world governance, 2002). As such it engenders a significant level of consensus -- a threat to a degree deliberately manifested. [Gideon Rachman](#) argues that the numbers make it clear that the threat of terrorism has been seriously hyped (*Declare victory and end the 'global war on terror'*, *Financial Times*, 3 May 2011):

In a book published a couple of years ago [John Mueller](#), a US academic, pointed out that the number of Americans killed by terrorists since 1960 is "about the same as the number killed over the same period by accident-causing deer" [*Overblown: how politicians and the terrorism industry inflate national security threats, and why we believe them*, 2006]. In a report for the Rand Corporation, [Brian Jenkins](#) made a similar point: "The average American has about a one in 9,000 chance of dying in an automobile accident and about a one in 18,000 chance of being murdered." However, in the five years after 9/11, and including the people killed there, "an average American had only a one in 500,000 chance of being killed in a terrorist attack".

Whereas, "God" may indeed be a delusion (as conventionally understood), the "extrajudicial regulatory actions" of [Gaia](#) in the domain of the world's superpower, merit reflection in a context of [faith-based governance](#) (*Acts of God vs Acts of al-Qaida: Hurricane Katrina as a message to Bible Belt America?* 2005). It might be asked whether there is a correlation to be found between US fatalities from "Acts of God" (tornadoes, floods, etc) and from its extrajudicial and "illegal" operations -- with deaths from both being of the same order over the recent period. With respect to any implicit global consensus, Gaia is increasingly emerging as the global "governor of last resort" (*Spontaneous Initiation of Armageddon: a heartfelt response to systemic negligence*, 2004). Within any such consensus, it then becomes difficult to distinguish between "freedom fighter", "outlaw", "terrorist", "criminal", and "covert extrajudicial operations". The "retributive justice" of Gaia for the extrajudicial measures against Bradley Manning and Julian Assange will be intriguing to note.

A critical perspective from the USA, presented by Joshua Holland (*Five Eye-Opening Facts About Our Bloated Post-9/11 'Defense' Spending*, *AlterNet*, 28 May 2011), highlights the following challenges of "consensus" in relation to Barack Obama's assertion that *We do these things because we believe not simply in the rights of nations; we believe in the rights of citizens*:

1. Post-9/11 defense increases equal five times the "[Medicare Gap](#)": The amount of money needed to balance the program's finances over its 75-year horizon, is less than 0.3 percent of GDP, approximately one-fifth of the increase in the rate annual defense spending between 2000 and 2011.
2. Afghanistan costs alone could pay for 15.6 Years of the [Head Start Program](#).
3. Covering the uninsured: it has been estimated that 45,000 people die every year in the USA from problems associated with lack of coverage. The costs of the Afghanistan conflict alone could cover every uninsured American for 1.7 years.
4. Closing state budget gaps in the USA: 46 states face budget shortfalls in this fiscal year, totaling \$130 billion nationwide.
5. Iraq, just in 2011: The \$50 billion to be spent on the remaining "non-combat troops" would contribute significantly to many urgent remedial projects in the USA

It is then appropriate to question what agendas are effectively camouflaged by this cultivated consensus delusion -- and its analogue in other domains. *Cui Bono?*

Beyond the currently limited literature on the "epistemology of consensus" is the possibility that any such "consensus" has "terrifying" implications for humanity. This is suggested by the title chosen by [Gregory Bateson](#) (*Angels Fear: towards an epistemology of the sacred*, 1988). The nature of that question is raised separately (*Thinking in Terror: refocusing the interreligious challenge from "Thinking after Terror"*, 2005). The possibility may also be provocatively explored in the light of a hypothetical cognitive analogue to the [mirror test](#) of self-awareness as currently applied to animals -- as it might be applied by extraterrestrials to humans (*Self-reflective Embodiment of Transdisciplinary Integration (SETI): the universal criteria of species maturity?* 2008).

Fortunately this argument makes the point that we do not have to reach consensus on its relevance. Each can formulate a "*Declaration of Universal Independence*" (2009). The challenge would seem to be how to balance the potential subtleties of mirroring and self-reflexivity against those of emergent patterns of self-governance (*Consciously Self-reflexive Global Initiatives: Renaissance zones, complex adaptive systems, and third order organizations*, 2007).

Who is terrified of what -- and why?

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