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Indicators of Political Will, Remedial and Coping Capacity?

Ungovernability and indifference to analysis as engendered by increasing population

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Introduction

Many issues are now variously highlighted as potential crises -- with some framed as extremely urgent. It is curious to note how the emphasis is placed on the need for action but little is said about the capacity to follow through on that need.

A distinction can usefully be made between the capacity to cope with an emerging problem (using existing institutions, methods and procedures), the capacity to remedy the issues of which the problem is a manifestation (with new institutions, new technology, or new thinking), and the political will to do either of the former. There are few indicators regarding the capacity to respond to problems, despite the variety of indicators of their number and nature as profiled in the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential*. The exception to this assessment is a degree of attention to emergency preparedness and disaster response capacity. This focus can be seen as avoiding attention to the manner in which capacity is more subtly and progressively eroded, raising the spectre of global system ungovernability, exacerbated by the controversial increase in population numbers on which little can currently be said (*Ungovernability of Sustainable Global Democracy?* 2011).

The calls for "action now" are only too evident in the range of demonstrations and protests world wide. These seem to be accompanied by an unquestioned assumption that there is no lack of capacity to cope both with such unrest and with the problems which are their focus. Similarly there is an assumption that there is the capacity to remedy the underlying issues. Less evident is the existence or adequacy of the political will to do either -- beyond some kind of token response, rationalized for purposes of public relations. Although in the case of political will, unlike the others, it is fairly evident that this is lacking, other than for repressive measures.

In a curious sense the apparent absence of effective action, or the delays to such action, places most people in a "waiting mode" -- awaiting resolution (*Types of waiting: web resources*, 2018). As the antithesis of action, this merits exploration in its own right.

The following exercise endeavours to clarify these distinct factors in responding to the crises to which society is increasingly exposed -- of which climate change is the most clearly articulated. Unfortunately it is less than clear that it is the root cause of the malaise -- which it is so conveniently claimed to be, rather than a convenient surrogate, as argued separately (*Vigorous Application of Derivative Thinking to Derivative Problems*, 2013; *An Inconvenient Truth -- about any inconvenient truth*, 2008).

Missing indicators of coping capacity

There are numerous indicators of the evolving nature of issues with which the world is confronted, especially in developing countries and regions. These notably feature in reports on the "State of the World", the Environment, and the like, as listed separately (*Transforming titles of official reports on global processes*, 2013). That list is the focus of an argument in favour of dynamic reporting, rather than reinforcing a dangerously static perspective (*Dynamic Transformation of Static Reporting of Global Processes: suggestions*

for process-oriented titles of global issue reports, 2013). Arguably "coping" requires a dynamic perspective -- perhaps to be understood as a second-order perspective. It is not the problem which requires attention but the capacity to respond to it and contain it in some way.

There are numerous indicators of the performance of institutional programmes in response to the range of issues which typically figure in any election manifesto, or in the annual reports of the relevant agencies. Clearly it may indeed be inferred from the disparity between the development of the issues and the performance of the institutional programmes, whether their capacity to "cope" with the issues is adequate to the challenge -- especially if an indication of their foreseeable development into the future is offered.

Unfortunately it is evident that other factors come into play:

- incompetence in governance and management
- institutional face-saving and the requirement for upbeat reporting
- the necessity to cover-up inadequacies and failures to the extent possible, reinforcing highly controversial patterns of lack of transparency -- and their vigorous denial
- a focus on increasing the resources of a programme or institution, notably with regard to its funding -- and the understandable need to protect them over successive budgetary cycles
- contextual political factors essentially unrelated to the issues but for which the latter are a feature of horse-trading
- the questionable manner of appointment of any oversight and expert committee charged with reviewing such matters -- and the resources devoted to that process
- commercial interest in proposing solutions whose implementation is constrained by licensing arrangements and available funding
- the role of systemic exploitation and corruption

It is then appropriate to ask whether there is any real insight into the coping capacity of institutions at this time. Framed otherwise, to what extent is any such understanding primarily a feature of optimistic (or negligent) reporting to forestall unwelcome criticism? Especially problematic is whether any review of such capacity is itself credible -- beyond the immediate convenience for political and other purposes. Is the dependence on upbeat reporting inhibiting any challenge to prevailing assumptions, as argued separately (*Coping Capacity of Governance as Dangerously Questionable: recognizing assumptions and unmasked questions when facing crisis*, 2019)?

Rather than through "coping", another approach is through "incompetence" -- a matter which tends to be difficult to highlight, especially in the case of governments and internationally. To what extent is the incompetence of the United Nations, or other such agencies, a matter of attention -- more particularly the "international community" (*International Community as God or Sorcerer's Apprentice?*, 2015):

- J. Steven Ott and Jay M. Shafritz: *Toward a Definition of Organizational Incompetence: a neglected variable in organization theory*, *Public Administration Review*, 54, 1994, 4)
- Pedro Sanjuan: *The UN Gang: A Memoir of Incompetence, Corruption, Espionage, Anti-Semitism and Islamic Extremism at the UN Secretariat* (Doubleday, 2005)
- Anthony Banbury: *Former UN official accuses world body of 'colossal mismanagement'* (*The Guardian*, 19 March 2016)
- Henry I. Miller: *The U.N. Was Designed To Fail -- And It Does Inefficiency and incompetence are in the U.N.'s DNA* (*Daily Caller*, 24 October 2018)
- Stephen M. Walt: *The Global Consequences of Trump's Incompetence* (*Foreign Policy*, 18 July 2017)
- Ibrahim J. Gassama: *The Incoherence and Functional Incompetence of International Law: toward a new paradigm of human relationship* (*Fordham International Law Journal*, 53, 2013).
- *The Government's Incompetence* (*El Universal*, 8 November 2018)
- *Britain's equilibrium of incompetence* (*The Economist*, 6 September 2018)

Striking indications of the challenge are evident in the limited capacity to cope with rising levels of crime, especially in the light of recognition of the existence of [organized crime](#) and its various extremes. Indications are regularly offered that the [crime clearance rate](#) is highly problematic; police services and the judiciary are explicitly recognized as overwhelmed. Is it naive to claim that authorities cope successfully with urban violence? At the time of writing, there are major ongoing protests and demonstrations in many countries -- variously challenging any capacity of authorities to cope. Other examples are offered by health facilities -- and the long waiting times for treatment. Are lengthening queues to be understood as a measure of "coping" by authorities?

Can it honestly be said that authorities have been able to cope with migration, emerging gang culture, and substance abuse -- even in countries hitherto considered exemplars of development (Paulina Neuding, *Bomb attacks are now a normal part of Swedish life*, *The Spectator*, October 2019). The latter argues that gang violence is now at a level where it threatens to undermine the Swedish state. More generally the challenge is indicated by waiting times in a wide variety of arenas -- including democratic voting -- suggestive of the fact that institutional facilities are "stretched" to the point of being essentially "unable to cope".

There is widespread media coverage of the failure of institutions to cope effectively with the problems within their mandate. How indeed to determine whether an institution and its programmes are "fit for purpose"?

It is appropriate to note an early effort to study the capacity of the United Nations system to handle the resources made available by the UNDP. Known as the "Jackson Report", this originated with the UNDP's Inter-Agency Consultative Board and was made by [Robert Jackson](#) (*A Study of the Capacity of the United Nations Development System*, 1969), as discussed at that time (*Study of the Capacity of the UN Development System*, 1970). Although it is now in all probability too late in the day to consider the question, it might be asked what sense there is now of the coping capacity of the UN or other global programmes -- and where that might be found -- given the accumulating pattern of crises.

A far more recent study for the European Commission by Peter Billing and Ulrike Madengruber (*Coping Capacity: towards overcoming the black hole*, Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO), 2005) presented a quantitative model to measure coping capacity of countries in a comparative perspective towards the elaboration of a *Coping Capacity Index*. Citing a study to a UNU workshop by Joern

Birkmann (*Measuring vulnerability and coping capacity*, United Nations University, 2004), this noted that:

The notion of coping capacity of populations affected by natural disasters is a key concept in vulnerability assessments. Paradoxically, however, there seem to be few systematic methodological approaches to the subject. In particular, very few - if any - datasets and methodologies actually permit a quantitative approach to compare coping capacity across countries. Such a methodology would be an essential support tool for the design of natural disaster reduction strategies by donor organizations like ECHO.

This offered the definition of coping capacity as: *The level of resources and knowledge available in a community and the manner in which people use these resources and abilities to face the adverse consequences of a disaster*. This would seem explicitly to exclude, unfortunately, the capacity to cope with non-disastrous situations now so typical of the inability of institutions to cope with that by which they claim to be overwhelmed. It is also curiously focused on the aftermath of disaster and not on the ability to cope with the conditions engendering it.

On the occasion of the same UNU expert workshop, an approach to measurement was offered by Erich Plate (*Measuring Vulnerability and Coping Capacity: an Index for Human Security*, 2004). One participant, Hans van Ginkel, stressed that: **Vulnerability and risk increase with increasing population density**. Again it seems to have been concluded that coping capacity is only associated with disaster of some kind, whereas **it is clear that significant incapacity is evident in the absence of "disaster" -- and that "vulnerability" is potentially inherent in current modes of organization, readily understood as a disaster-in-making**. By contrast, perhaps this merits recognition as "creeping incapacity". Why is it that current understanding of coping capacity requires that a disaster be formally declared before the capacity to cope can be considered?

Switching the focus of coping capacity to one of vulnerability to disaster unfortunately enables attention to focus primarily on the well-framed issue of "emergency preparedness". Whilst this avoids insight into the subtly inherent aspects of coping incapacity, the obvious failures of preparedness offer insights in that regard, as argued separately (*Enabling Collective Intelligence in Response to Emergencies: illustrated by the case of deep oil spill containment*, 2010; *Anticipating Future Strategic Triple Whammies -- in the light of earthquake-tsunami-nuclear misconceptions*, 2011; *Disastrous Floods as Indicators of Systemic Risk Neglect*, 2011).

Clearly the current framings do not contribute to the distinction of any remedial capacity -- with which the notion is typically conflated. Stated more clearly, the question is whether such institutions can cope with the problems for which they have a mandate -- without being systematically overwhelmed by them, however subtly -- especially when unable to admit to that fact. Can the problem be "contained" -- irrespective of whether it can be "cured" in any more permanent sense?

Further insight might be obtained from the cybernetic theory of **viable systems**, but there appears to be little reference to "unviable systems" with which it might be expected that "pre-disaster coping" would be associated. There is necessarily a more extensive literature on system failure as a consequence of coping failure (*Variety of System Failures Engendered by Negligent Distinctions*, 2016). The capacity to "ride out" any emerging crisis seems to be a feature of the literature on "resilient capacity" and "adaptive capacity" (*Defining Resilience, Adaptive Capacity, and Vulnerability*, InTeGrate, 11 January 2018; Helen Jeans, et al, *Absorb, Adapt, Transform: Resilience capacities*, Oxfam Policy-Practice, 25 Jan 2017). However, rather than with the capacity to cope with an externally emergent challenge, these possibilities imply a primary focus on systemic survival -- "self-healing" -- rather than with successfully containing externalities.

Insights of relevance to institutions and governance could also be obtained from research on the coping capacity of individuals, as suggested by the following, especially the distinction from any remedial possibility:

- James H. Amirkhan: *A Factor Analytically Derived Measure of Coping: the Coping Strategy Indicator* (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59, 1990, 5)
- Deirdre Desmond, et al: *Dimensional analysis of the coping strategy indicator in a sample of elderly veterans with acquired limb amputations* (*Semantic Scholar*, 2006)
- Katharine Greenaway, et al: *Measures of Coping for Psychological Well-Being* (In: *Measures of Personality and Social Psychological Constructs*, 2015)
- Arlete Portella Fonte and Anita Liberalesso Neri: *Coping strategies as indicators of resilience in elderly subjects: a methodological study* (*Ciencia & Saude Coletiva*, 24, 2019, 4)

The challenge of containment -- whether for institutions or individuals -- is most notably evident in the case of migration, irrespective of the nature of the challenge of climate change and its related phenomena (floods, wildfires, drought, etc). From a policy science perspective, the question may be understood as to how the current complex of institutions can contain so-called "**wicked problems**" -- again irrespective of any remedial response. Are such problems to be recognized as exceeding coping capacity -- or is it the inability to remedy the situation which they make evident, namely a failure of remedial capacity?

The deployment of ever increasing measures of surveillance, control and regulation could be claimed as evidence of institutional capacity to cope with complexity. Arguably missing is appropriate recognition of the rate of increase in the complexity of the systems on which viable governance now depends. Succinctly stated, **is the challenge of complexity increasing in response to rising population numbers such as to render the coping capacity of authorities ever more problematic and questionable?**

On an increasingly resource-challenged planet, are there studies of a change in coping capacity with progressive increase in the number of "mouths-to-field" whether at the household level, nationally, regionally or globally? Seemingly rare examples might include:

- Rozanne Kruger, et al: *Food-coping strategy index applied to a community of farm-worker households in South Africa*, *Food and*

Nutrition Bulletin, 29, 2008, 1

- Janet Ranganathan, et al: *How to Sustainably Feed 10 Billion People by 2050, in 21 Charts* (World Resources Institute, 5 December 2018)
- Simon Feeny: *Household Vulnerability and Resilience to Economic Shocks: Findings from Melanesia* (Routledge, 2016)

The point is more sharply made through a thought experiment highlighting the dilemmas in a context of decreasing resources (*Resource Insights from Plus or Minus 12 People on a Liferaft*, 2014). More suspect is the strange possibility that in such circumstances governments necessarily find it easier to avoid undue popular protest by effectively enabling population increase rather than restricting it to levels within their coping capacity.

Missing indicators of remedial capacity

Beyond the capacity for problem containment there is then the distinct question of remedial capacity, as separately discussed (*Remedial Capacity Indicators versus Performance Indicators*, 1981). What sense is there that anything effective can be done about the problem?

Of particular relevance in this respect is the systemic distinction between technical possibilities and the reality of operational systems in practice, again separately discussed (*Recognizing the Psychosocial Boundaries of Remedial Action: constraints on ensuring a safe operating space for humanity*, 2009). The naivety of techno-optimists is succinctly clarified as a systemic adaptation of *Le Chatelier's Principle* by management cybernetician [Stafford Beer](#) in the following terms:

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

What indeed constitutes a viable remedy in practice rather than in theory or principle -- and beyond any minimal token response to enable adequacy of response to be publicly claimed in response to critics?

With respect to commercial solutions, however vigorously proposed, the problem is well-documented in the case of diseases for which the pharmaceutical industry offers remedies -- at a price (*Report condemns swine flu experts' ties to big pharma*, *The Guardian*, 4 June 2010; *World Health Organization Scientists Linked to Swine Flu Vaccine Makers*, *ABC News*, 5 June 2010; *Report Criticizes WHO's Response to Swine Flu*, *The New York Times*, 10 March 2011). More generally it could be asked whether remedial capacity is then constrained in a manner beyond the funding currently available. There is a sense of effective institutional response being held to ransom whenever possible -- as suggested by commercial aspirations to the discovery of a "killer-app", a panacea for which the world will be obliged to pay whatever is demanded.

This tendency is exacerbated when any remedy is more subtly constrained by proprietary metaphors by which application of any "new thinking" is inhibited (*Future Coping Strategies: beyond the constraints of proprietary metaphors*, 1992). The preoccupation with intellectual property tends to take precedence over the relevance of new thinking to remedial capacity. This may even extend to inhibiting mention and articulation of that new thinking without responding to copyright constraints -- whatever the cost. This recalls the curious legislation with regard to [injunctives](#) to prevent discussion of a controversial issue -- extending in some cases to so-called "[super-injunctives](#)" preventing discussion of the injunction itself. Arguably the constraints on discussion of overpopulation can be recognized in this light (*Prohibition of Reference to Overpopulation of the Planet: draft proposal for an International Convention*, 2018).

Beyond any sense of remedial response to a particular issue is the question of its efficacy in a systemic sense. This is recognized in the manner in which any remedial strategic response can be perceived (especially by critics) as a problem in its own right -- through engendering an array of other problems. Ironically many problems may themselves be perceived as "solutions" to others. This complex of interacting feedback loops has been a feature of the profiling in the data sets of the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential* (*Feedback Loop Analysis in the Encyclopedia Project*, 2000).

What form might an indicator of remedial capacity take? In that light, is it possible that the remedial capacity of the current complex of institutions may be completely "unfit for purpose" -- despite vigorous claims to the contrary by optimists and those benefitting from "business-as-usual"?

The question is ironically highlighted in the case of the UN's [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) for 2030 -- readily recognized as the ultimate collective remedial response to the crises of the times. A target of one of the goals is [Capacity-Building](#) aiming to: *Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation*. Arguably missing is any measure of the remedial capacity of the SDGs as a strategic objective -- although the [SDG Monitoring and Reporting Toolkit for UN Country Teams](#) offers statistical tools relating to [Capacity Building and Coordination](#).

Of relevance to the question is criticism of the SDG approach (Ranjula Bali Swain (*A Critical Analysis of the Sustainable Development Goals*, In: *Handbook of Sustainability Science and Research*, 2017; Thomas Block, *Pitfalls of the SDGs*, *Centre for Sustainable Development Ghent*, 21 June 2018). Given the adopted definition of capacity-building focusing on developing countries, and the arguments above with regard to creeping incapacity in developed countries, is there a possibility that the latter may call for similar medicine? Worse, is the focus on developing countries an exercise in displacement by the developed countries to avoid confronting a challenge too close to home?

Despite claims, assumptions and wishful thinking, **is there any "concrete proof" of the remedial capacity implied by the SDGs?** The current lack of such remedial capacity is indicated at the time of writing, as clarified by Thalif Deen (*UN Turns to Global Investors for Billions Needed for its 2030 Development Agenda*, *Other News*, 29 October 2019). As noted:

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres thanked member states for their pledges and commitments at three high-level summit meetings: on Climate Action, on SDGs and on Financing for Development (FfD). *But to make serious progress*, he told the ministers, *we need to fill the financing gap for SDGs -- some \$1.5 trillion dollars per annum*. According to the 2014 World Investment Report by the Geneva-based UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the financing gap to achieve the SDGs in developing countries is even higher -- and estimated to be around \$2.5–\$3.0 trillion per year.... At the same time, Guterres has said there is a need to replenish the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to meet the commitment to mobilize \$100 billion per year for climate action, including mitigation and adaptation in developing countries, by next year. But at the GCF Pledging Conference in Paris October 24-25, 27 rich nations pledged only \$9.8 billion to the Fund... In his annual report for 2019, the secretary-general was unequivocally clear that **at the current pace, we will not reach our targets** -- unless there is much greater urgency and ambition, including enhanced international cooperation, private-public partnerships, adequate financing and innovative solutions. *[emphasis added]*

This recognition is confirmed in a [joint statement](#) (16 October 2019) launching the [Global Investors for Sustainable Development Alliance](#) (GISD):

The necessary transformation of business and finance to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is not happening at the required scale or speed. While investment into sustainable development has become increasingly important, there is more work to be done to bring this long-term and inclusive approach into the mainstream

As noted by Damian Carrington (*Most countries' climate plans 'totally inadequate' – experts*, *The Guardian*, 5 November 2019):

The world is on a path to climate disaster, with three-quarters of the commitments made by countries under the Paris agreement "totally inadequate", according to a comprehensive expert analysis... *The current pledges made under the Paris agreement are totally inadequate to put us on a pathway to meet either the 1.5C or the 2C goal...* Of the 184 national Paris pledges made, 136 are judged insufficient in the report, published by the [Universal Ecological Fund](#).

Potentially more problematic, is there any "concrete proof" that the "trillions of dollars" sought -- once marshalled -- can be applied effectively, given the widespread recognition of the questionably efficacy of development aid with its dubious levels of uncontrollable corruption (F. Niyonkuru, *Failure of Foreign Aid in Developing Countries: A Quest for Alternatives*. *Business and Economics Journal*, 7, 2016; Karl Thompson, *Criticisms of Official Development Aid*, *ReviseSociology*, 22 February 2017; Viktor Jakupec, *A Critique of the Development Aid Discourse*, In: *Development Aid: Populism and the End of the Neoliberal Agenda*. Springer, 2017).

Missing indicators of political will

There is frequent reference to political will and the lack thereof -- most notably at the highest levels of global governance. It is necessarily elusive and as such does not merit an entry in *Wikipedia*. Various efforts to clarify its nature can be noted.

Especially valuable is a document by the UK Department of International Development (*Understanding 'Political Will'*, January 2004) which notes:

When the success or failure of development policies is discussed, we frequently hear it said that "political will" -- or the lack of it -- affected the outcome. But it is often unclear what this term means. "Political will" is commonly used as a catch-all concept, the meaning of which is so vague that it does little to enrich our understanding of the political and policy processes. There is, however, a way to make it a useful analytical tool. We must begin by giving "political will" a quite specific and narrow meaning. Let us define it as **"the determination of an individual political actor to do and say things that will produce a desired outcome"**. This definition has several important implications.

First, it omits a number of things. The incapacity of political or administrative instruments to achieve an outcome is excluded. So is an insufficiency of material resources. So are institutional (or other) impediments and opposition from interest groups which may prevent the desired outcome from occurring....

One last implication of this definition deserves to be treated separately. "Political will" -- defined in this way -- is a neutral concept. It can produce both benign and invidious outcomes. Lincoln had "political will" in abundance, but so did Hitler. We therefore need to avoid celebrating "political will" for its own sake, and to ask what purpose it is serving.

Of particular relevance is the summary by David Roberts (*What is "political will," anyway? Scholars take a whack at defining it*, *Vox*, 24 December 2017):

Environmentalists are fond of saying that we have all the technology we need to address climate change -- all we lack is political will. They say it so often it has become a running joke among cynical climate journalists. Everything's in place except that one

little element! Soon as somebody tackles that, we're golden. But what exactly is political will? How do you make it? How do you know when you have it?

Such claims by those of natural science persuasion ignore the psychosocial factors, as discussed separately (*Are Environmentalists and Climate Scientists in Denial? Climate change recognized as primarily a psychological challenge*, 2019).

Roberts notes the study by Lori Ann Post, Amber Raile and Eric Raile (*Defining Political Will, Politics and Policy*, 25 August 2010) as being an attempt to pull together various threads in the academic literature on political will into one clear definition, broad enough to cover different circumstances and institutions but with enough substance to allow for analysis and action in individual situations:

Although frequently invoked as a rhetorical tool in political discussions, "political will" remains ambiguous as a concept. Acknowledging the centrality of political will to policy outcomes, the authors propose a pragmatic and systematic approach to definition. This approach facilitates analysis by identifying particular shortcomings in political will. This identification in turn permits the application of appropriate theoretical frameworks from various disciplines and the effective construction and use of ameliorative measures.

Intriguingly that initiative was supported by the U.S. Department of Defense (under Topic OSD07-T002, *Measuring and Mapping Political Will*), about which an insightful critical comment has been offered by a blogger (*How do you measure political will?*, *Catnip*, 13 March 2007). It is unclear what form the outcome of this project took -- unless that above is to be understood as such. Far more worrisome is if the conclusions to the study for the DoD are effectively classified in the interests of US national security -- a possibility of which the probability is currently high.

This was followed by the comment of Mark Funkhouser (*What People Get Wrong About 'Political Will'*, *Governing*, May 2018), arguing that it is not some innate quality -- good leaders must create it:

At a recent *Governing* roundtable, I heard once again that the failure to act on a serious public problem was due to a lack of "political will". Hearing this from people who are wise and good public officials always leaves me a little annoyed. I agree with David Roberts of *Vox*, who wrote, *To me, it has always sounded like the political equivalent of the Force in the Star Wars movies. It explains everything and nothing.*

When you hear a public official or pundit say that the reason this or that desirable thing cannot be done is because of a lack of political will, what you are actually hearing is that person blaming other people's moral failings. This is born of a lack of insight and analysis.

It is curious that the theme has been evoked over decades without clarification, most notably with respect to the international system of governance (*International Organizations and the Generation of the Will to Change: the information systems required*, 1970). Currently it is complemented by invoking the intervention of the so-called "international community", an institutional complex as vague and ill-defined as political will itself, as discussed separately (*International Community as God or Sorcerer's Apprentice? Strategic chaos in the absence of an interlocking temporal pattern of longer-term cyclic processes*, 2015). As such is the international community to be understood as especially endowed with political will? The uncritical naivety of such appeals is symptomatic of more fundamental issues.

A very recent effort in response to the absence of such an indicator is that of Jonatan Lassa, et al. (*Measuring Political Will: an index of commitment to disaster risk reduction*, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 34, 2019, March). As the title implies, and as remarked in the case of coping capacity, the focus is curiously restricted to political commitment in relation to potential disaster:

The future of societal resilience depends largely on political commitment to allocate resources to manage and reduce disaster risks and vulnerabilities and build resilience. Lack of political commitment has often been cited as one of the culprits inhibiting countries to prioritise actions towards mitigating hazards and reducing risks in short and long term. While acknowledging existing global disaster risk assessments such as [World Risk Report](#), [Climate Risk Index](#), and [Global Assessment Report on DRR](#), etc., we advocate for a new index with the intention to trigger critical discussion that drive political commitment for disaster risk reduction worldwide. Under the aegis of 2030 global targets of meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, governments should work collaboratively to substantially reduce global disaster mortality and mitigate loss and damage of economic assets and infrastructures.

As with the comment on coping capacity, missing is any focus on political will in a global society in which it is "creeping incapacity" and creeping erosion of political will with respect to factors accumulating to engender a disaster. Can such measurement anticipate what is not conventionally recognized as "vulnerability" -- given that identification of the latter may be highly controversial, especially in a political context. Every political faction frames the policies of other factions as dangerously engendering vulnerability of some kind.

Creeping incapacity has been especially evident in the accumulation of factors leading to crises in the financial system, most obviously that of 2008 -- and currently widely anticipated for the near future (Phillip Inman, *Pessimists are predicting a global crash in 2020*, *The Guardian*, 5 January 2019; *4 Early Warning Signs of the Next Financial Crisis*, *Investopedia*, 4 June 2019). As currently understood, measurement of political will would not be able to detect the associated vulnerabilities, despite the disaster to which they may give rise. Much the same could be said of rising inequality, as suggested by the surprising forms of lockdown to which governments are then exposed, as by the massive [Yellow Vest](#) protest across France in 2018-2019 (*Systemic Function of Highly Unrepresentative Minorities: recognizing the role of the "Dark Riders" of social change*, 2018).

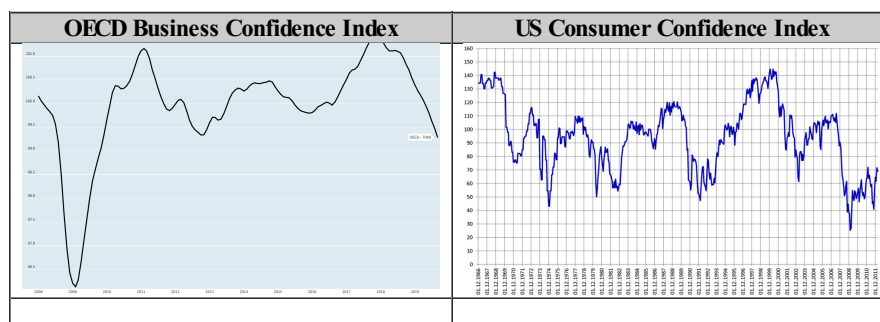
Confidence index in relation to political will?

There is an interesting correspondence between the elusiveness of political will and the manner in which the arguably analogous sense of confidence is measured. The concern in the latter case is a continuing feature of polling with regard to the confidence in institutional authorities (Tom R. Tyler, *Public trust and confidence in legal authorities*, *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 19, 2001, 2; Juan Carlos Martin, et al, *Design of an indicator of confidence in the public authorities based on fuzzy logic*, *Investigacion Regionales*, 43, 2019).

Potentially more relevant is the manner in which the business community measures confidence in various countries and regions. Thus the OECD [Business Confidence Index](#) (BCI):

... provides information on future developments, based upon opinion surveys on developments in production, orders and stocks of finished goods in the industry sector. It can be used to monitor output growth and to anticipate turning points in economic activity. Numbers above 100 suggest an increased confidence in near future business performance, and numbers below 100 indicate pessimism towards future performance.

This is notably complemented by [consumer confidence indices](#), most notably in the USA. Other indices include the [Employee Confidence Index](#), namely a measure of employees' overall confidence in the economy, their employer, and their ability to find other employment. A [Voter Confidence Index](#) has been developed by NBC in the USA. Of related interest are indices of trust, as with the [Edelman Trust Barometer: global report](#) (2019) and the SAI Global [Consumer Trust Index](#), the Chicago Booth/Kellogg School [Financial Trust Index](#).



Missing would appear to be any analogous measure of confidence in either the coping capacity or the remedial capacity of authorities. Nor do measures of business confidence (or confidence in the business and financial community) translate into confidence in their ability to act effectively on issues outsourced by government authorities. The relation between measures of confidence and political will would seem to remain elusive.

A striking example of the challenge would appear to be any measure of confidence in military capacity -- to the extent that this is understood as the ultimate fallback for governments overwhelmed in their capacity to cope with a problem, let alone to offer remedial options -- other than those of a repressive nature. It would be expected that a body like NATO would have developed some (necessarily "confidential") measure of military capacity of its members beyond that of any assessment of the equipment and personnel they each control. A publicly available equivalent is evident in the [Global Firepower](#) ranking of military strength. The unclassified aspects are extensively summarized by NATO under the heading [NATO's capabilities](#) (6 July 2018)

NATO's modern defence posture is based on an effective combination of two key pillars: cutting-edge weapons systems and platforms, and forces trained to work together seamlessly. As such, investing in the right capabilities is an essential part of investing in defence. NATO plays an important role in assessing what capabilities the Alliance needs; setting goals for national or collective development of capabilities; and facilitating national, multinational and collective capability development and innovation.

Unfortunately the focus on "capability", understood in terms of hardware and personnel, avoids the question of the "political will" enabling its effective use by individual members or by the Alliance as a whole. This lack is especially evident at the time of writing in the repeated claims of President Donald Trump to be in command of the far strongest military force in the world. This claim is at variance with the multi-decade challenge of Afghanistan and other conflict arenas -- and the "political will" to achieve successful resolution there, most notably with respect to the original goal of "nation building".

As many have remarked, there would seem to be a fundamental disconnect between military capability and any notion of remedial capacity (*Transforming the Unsustainable Cost of General Education: strategic insights from Afghanistan*, 2009). Under the circumstances, any complementary notion of "soft power" invites an interpretation in terms of lack of political will.

Military situation rooms may indeed offer an unquestionable sense of coping capacity but they would seem to lack any insight into remedial capacity -- other than framed in repressive terms. Seen as a remedy, use of weapons of (mass) destruction is always an option offering the illusion of effective control -- even though this is only elusively related to any durable remedy (like nation building). This is the challenge of "revolution" as so widely advocated -- and of calls for "action now".

Operational glass ceiling in the face of crisis?

The arguments above suggest that humanity is faced with a form of "glass ceiling" to its efficacy, most notably with respect to remedial capacity and the political will to "marshal" resources for appropriate action. That military metaphor could well be undermining that

capacity of response, as previously argued (*Enhancing Sustainable Development Strategies through Avoidance of Military Metaphors*, 1998; *Mobilization for Alienation vs. Catalysis for Participation: the critical choice for the United Nations system*, 1973).

The subtle nature of a "glass ceiling" has been extensively discussed in relation to the participation of minorities and women. It could be extended to the manner in which the engagement of unconventional cognitive resources is subtly and systemically deprecated and avoided (*Tank Warfare Challenges for Global Governance; extending the "think tank" metaphor to include other cognitive modalities*, 2019). So framed, it might then be asked what resources are not appropriately interrelated and focused in response to strategic challenges? Which resources are considered irrelevant and why?

Rather than the glass ceiling constraint on women, as notably explored by [Elise Boulding](#) (*The Underside of History: a view of women through time*, 1976), there is then presumably a case for a more general study of the *Underside of Governance* constrained by a more general form of glass ceiling. Operating "under" that constraint, then merits recognition of the manipulation of categories associated with *The Art of Non-Decision-Making* (1997).

Especially evident is the pattern of responses to a situation held to be "unacceptable" -- a term extensively used by authorities only too evidently unable to cope. Readily framed as effective, these are characterized by a panoply of forms of inaction: resolutions, condemnations, appeals, expressions of regret, and the like. These may well include appeals for the action by others. These are all modalities which are the antithesis of the "operacy" for which Edward de Bono has argued (*Judgment, recognition and operacy, Extensor*).

If the current situation, and the "operation" of the glass ceiling, ensures and reinforces what has been termed "subunderstanding", there is then a need for "polyocular vision" as argued by [Magoroh Maruyama](#) (*Polyocular Vision or Subunderstanding? Organization Studies*, 25, 2004).

Both the glass ceiling and subunderstanding offer the dubious implication that humanity's organizational capacity is constrained by a form of the [Peter Principle](#). This is a concept in management developed by [Laurence J. Peter](#) and [Raymond Hull](#) (*The Peter Principle*, 1969). It observes that people in a hierarchy tend to rise to their "level of incompetence". In other words, an employee is promoted based on their success in previous jobs until they reach a level at which they are no longer competent, as skills in one job do not necessarily translate to another. Is this equally the case with institutions of global governance?

Any such conclusion is consistent with various commentaries on the need for some form of "breakthrough", cognitively, institutionally or otherwise. Arguments for "action now" which fail to recognize the constraints noted above are then to be recognized as being as much a part of the problem as of any adequate remedial response. In this respect it is appropriate to recognize the etymological relationship between "will" and "volition" and how they are entangled in interpretations of "will to change" and "revolution" ([Michal Kuz](#), *Tocqueville's Dual Theory of Revolution, The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms*, 20, 2015, 1; [Gregory Leadbetter](#), *Coleridge and the 'More Permanent Revolution'*, *The Coleridge Bulletin*, 30, 2007; [Jafe Arnold](#), *The Multipolar Revolution: Syncretic Perspectives*, *Geopolitika*, 2019).

Progressive erosion of capacity and political will

Given the systematic lack of attention to the complex of coping capacity, remedial capacity and political will, the question can be usefully raised as to whether remedial capacity is being progressively eroded -- as with any political will to act effectively rather than in some manner which fails to engage with the complexity of the global problematique and its wicked problems.

There have been a number of studies of the "world dynamics" of the global system, inspired by the Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth* (1972), or in reaction to it. This was enabled by the model of [Jay Forrester](#) (*Counterintuitive Behaviour of Social Systems, Technology Review*, January 1971), originally presented at a hearing of a committee of the US House of Representatives (7 October 1970) and later incorporated into book form ([Jay Forrester](#), *World Dynamics*, 1995). The associated possibilities and controversies have been valuably reviewed by [Magne Myrtveit](#) (*The World Model Controversy, Working Papers in Systems Dynamics*, 2005).

These typically avoid the difficulties of taking into account the subtle psychosocial factors which are potentially the focus of the missing indicators discussed above. An early speculative "adaptation" of the world dynamics approach argued for one such inclusion (*World Dynamics and Psychodynamics: a step towards making abstract "world system" dynamic limitations meaningful to the individual*, 1971).

Of further relevance to this argument is the increasing recognition of the [carrying capacity](#) of the Earth. Understood in relation to humanity, this is the maximum population size of the human species that the environment can sustain indefinitely, given the food, habitat, water, and other necessities available. This has been variously highlighted ([Charlotte McDonald](#), *How many Earths do we need? BBC News*, 16 June 2015):

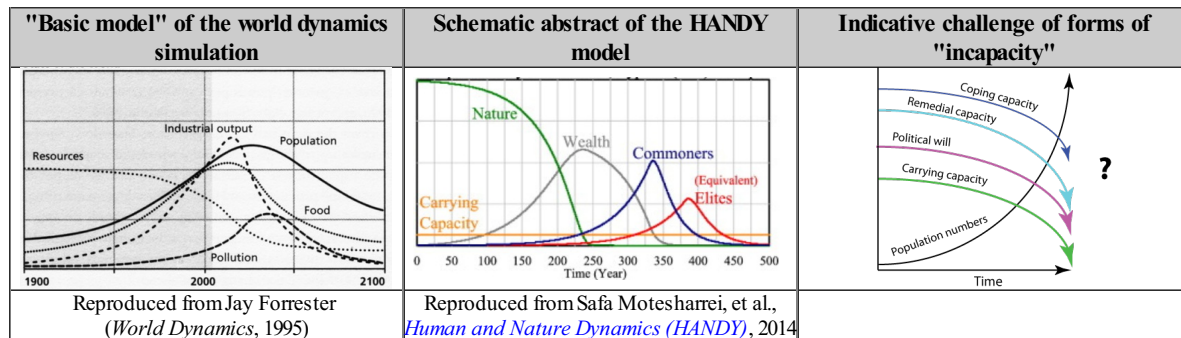
It has been suggested that if everyone on the planet consumed as much as the average US citizen, four Earths would be needed to sustain them.... according to the Global Footprint Network, the world's population is currently using not one, but one-and-a-half Earths.

A recent modelling exercise placed particular emphasis on this in relation to other social dimensions effectively absent from the early world model, largely as a consequence of increasing sensitivity to inequality ([Safa Motesharrei](#), et al., *Human and Nature Dynamics (HANDY): Modeling inequality and use of resources in the collapse or sustainability of societies, Ecological Economics*, 101, 2014, May):

We propose a simple model, not intended to describe actual individual cases, but rather to provide a general framework that

allows carrying out "thought experiments" for the phenomenon of collapse and to test changes that would avoid it. This model (called HANDY, for Human and Nature DYNamics) advances beyond existing biological dynamic population models by simultaneously modeling two separate important features which seem to appear across so many societies that have collapsed: (1) the stretching of resources due to the strain placed on the ecological carrying capacity..., and (2) the economic stratification of society into Elites and Masses (or "Commoners").... In many of these historical cases, we have direct evidence of Ecological Strain and Economic Stratification playing a central role in the character or in the process of the collapse...HANDY is based on the classical predator-prey model, the inclusion of two societal classes introduces a much richer set of dynamical solutions, including cycles of societal and ecological collapse, as well as the possibility of smoothly reaching equilibrium (the ecological carrying capacity). We use Carrying Capacity in its biological definition: the population level that the resources of a particular environment can sustain over the long term.... In this paper, we call these environment resources "Nature".

In juxtaposing the schematic insights from the early world dynamics model and the recent HANDY models below, it is appropriate to add a crude schematic (below right) indicative of the challenge implied by the argument above with regard to less obviously measurable factors. The point stressed is that **with increasing population numbers (irrespective of any foreseen diminution) a progressive "catastrophic" erosion of coping capacity, remedial capacity and political will may be readily imagined.**



It is appropriate to ask why the subtle factors in the schematic on the graph have not been considered in relation to the more readily measurable factors in the other models. This is especially the case to the extent that it is they that are a primary influence on any rational uptake of the insights from the more substantive models. It could in fact be asserted that it is the the factors on the right which are of greater relevance than those on the left which otherwise define themselves to be purely academic exercises -- whatever token attention is accorded to the warnings that may be inferred from them.

A useful hypothesis suggested by the schematic on the left is that some form of erosion of capacity and political will merits recognition in relation to the progressive increase in population numbers and the ever shorter the time-focus of preoccupations of people concerned with their daily survival in an increasingly resource-constrained context. Rather than the substantive indications of the schematics on the left, the question is how their implications are reframed, overlaid or otherwise obscured by the factors in the schematic on the right.

Arguably this is a recognizable process since widespread dissemination of *The Limits to Growth* (1972). Indeed, despite the ever wider dissemination of information on the issues associated with the schematics on the left since that time, how is it that so little significance is accorded to them in a policy context, in the media, or in public debate? Is there a largely unrecognized process of erosion of collective memory, especially in relation to longer term factors, as separately argued (*Societal Learning and the Erosion of Collective Memory*, 1980). The latter took the form of a critique of a later report to the Club of Rome: *No Limits to Learning: bridging the human gap* (1979). The critique formed part of the introductory report of a panel on *Utilisation of International Documentation* of the Second World Symposium on International Documentation (Brussels, 1980).

The set of international strategic reports, especially including those associated with the Club of Rome, offer the possibility of another approach (*Reports to the Club of Rome*, 2018). Each such report may be recognized as effectively having a "half-life", namely the time required for its significance to reduce to half of its initial value. This would be consistent with arguments regarding the **half-life of knowledge** or facts, especially with the increase in complexity (*Samuel Arbesman, The Half-Life of Facts: why everything we know has an expiration date*, 2012; *Overcomplicated: Technology at the Limits of Comprehension*, 2016). It is appropriate to note that insights from reports of the past are rarely cited in newly produced strategic studies -- a pattern consistent with the **long-tail** power law, namely the portion of the distribution having many occurrences far from the "head" or central part of the distribution. There is, for example, no case made for feeding any such range of reports into text analysis (and concept mapping) software such as *Leximancer* -- slogan: *text in -- insight out*. Why no such case is made increasingly becomes of greater strategic relevance than why such an experiment is not undertaken, despite its simplicity.

Indifference to indicators and root cause analysis

Whether or not it is accepted that some indicators of relevance are indeed missing, even more relevant is the importance seemingly decreasingly attached to any indicators deriving from any form of **root cause analysis**. This is a method of problem solving used for identifying the root causes of faults or problems -- as the pattern of global crises could be recognized to be. As indicated above, the framing of critical analysis may well now be rigorous, if not vigorous, but is resistant to any implication that it may be derivative (*Vigorous Application of Derivative Thinking to Derivative Problems*, 2013).

In the case of climate change, which was far from being an obvious factor of any urgency in the framing of *The Limits to Growth*

(1972), can it really be claimed that it has been subject to an appropriate form of root cause analysis? The policy focus, and the calls for action now, have been concentrated on "reducing carbon emissions". No other factors have warranted consideration. Does this merit recognition as a derivative problem in the absence of appropriate focus on the factors driving such emissions?

The relative indifference to the assertions over decades of climate scientists and environmentalists in that regard have led them to evoke a whole literature on climate change denial. This is tantamount to denial of assiduously updated variants of selected graphs originally presented in *The Limits to Growth* (1972). There is no recognition whatsoever that those same disciplines might themselves be accused of being "in denial", as argued separately (*Are Environmentalists and Climate Scientists in Denial? Climate change recognized as primarily a psychological challenge*, 2019).

Indifference to the arguments of science is strangely (and perhaps appropriately) complemented by the indifference of science to the disciplines which might enable it to comprehend that indifference (*Knowledge Processes Neglected by Science: insights from the crisis of science and belief*, 2012). There is consequently little capacity to act in the light of "weak signals" -- nor to design processes to detect them -- in curious contrast to the enthusiasm of the security services and astronomy in that regard (Pierre Rossel, et al, *Weak Signals, Futures: Special issue*, 44, 2012, 3; *Identifying Weak Signals is Vital for Strategic Foresight*, *Prescient*, 20 March 2019; Peter Saul, *Seeing the Future in Weak Signals*, *Journal of Futures Studies*, 10, 2006, 3).

Exemplifying this failure is the absence of any understanding of how the leader of the world's superpower is a climate sceptic -- let alone sensitive to the other possible inferences of that Club of Rome report. More generally it could be argued that the policy-making community can be readily recognized as considering relatively irrelevant other more recent strategic reviews of impending crises, whether carefully documented by science or by economics. The most recent include:

- Ernst von Weizsäcker and Anders Wijkman: *Come On! Capitalism, Short-termism, Population and the Destruction of the Planet* (2018), as separately critiqued (*Exhortation to We the Peoples from the Club of Rome*, 2018)
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): *Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°* (2018) as summarized by Jonathan Watts (*We have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe, warns UN*, *The Guardian*, 8 October 2018)
- William J. Ripple, et al: *World Scientists' Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice* (*BioScience*, 67, 2017, 12)
- Gerardo Ceballos, et al: *Biological annihilation via the ongoing sixth mass extinction signaled by vertebrate population losses and declines* (*PNAS*, 25 July 2017)
- The Royal Society: *People and the Planet* (The Royal Society Science Policy Centre, 2012), as separately critiqued (*Scientific Gerrymandering of Boundaries of Overpopulation Debate*, 2012)
- Johan Rockström, et al.: *Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity* (*Ecology and Society*, 14, 2009, 2)
- UN Conference on Environment and Development: *Agenda 21* (1992)

Efforts are made to frame the urgency through devices such as [Earth Overshoot Day](#), as by the [Global Footprint Network](#). However such a device lends itself to similar criticism in failing to take into account the psychological factors detracting from the treatment of such a warning as of any significance. The point can be argued by shifting metaphors (*Ecological Mouthprint versus Ecological Footprint: learning action avoidance from rabbits in anticipation of disaster*, 2019).

Where are the studies of "learning capacity" in relation to such strategic challenges, especially in the light of constraints arising from [information overload](#) and other factors, as separately summarized (*Comprehension of Numbers Challenging Global Civilization*, 2014)? Does this suggest that recognition of impending disaster and the necessity of response may be highly dependent on "comprehension capacity"? Comprehension of complex systems is not a requirement of political leadership.

With respect to the perspective of President Trump (as with the indifference of other leaders, such as Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia), there is a remarkable contrast between that view and the recently released report commissioned by the Pentagon (Max Brosig, et al., *Implications of Climate Change for the U.S. Army*, United States Army War College, 2019). A summary notes that a combination of global starvation, war, disease, drought, and a fragile power grid could have cascading, devastating effects -- notably on the operating capacity of the US military itself (Nafeez Ahmed, *U.S. Military Could Collapse Within 20 Years Due to Climate Change* *Vice*, 24 October 2019). Coincidentally one precursor manifestation is evident at the time of writing (*California Wildfires: millions warned of possible power cut*, *BBC News*, 26 October 2019; *Climate Change: California wildfires 'can now happen in any year'*, *BBC News*, 4 March 2019). Few would expect that such phenomena would engender significant policy changes in the USA -- or in Australia.

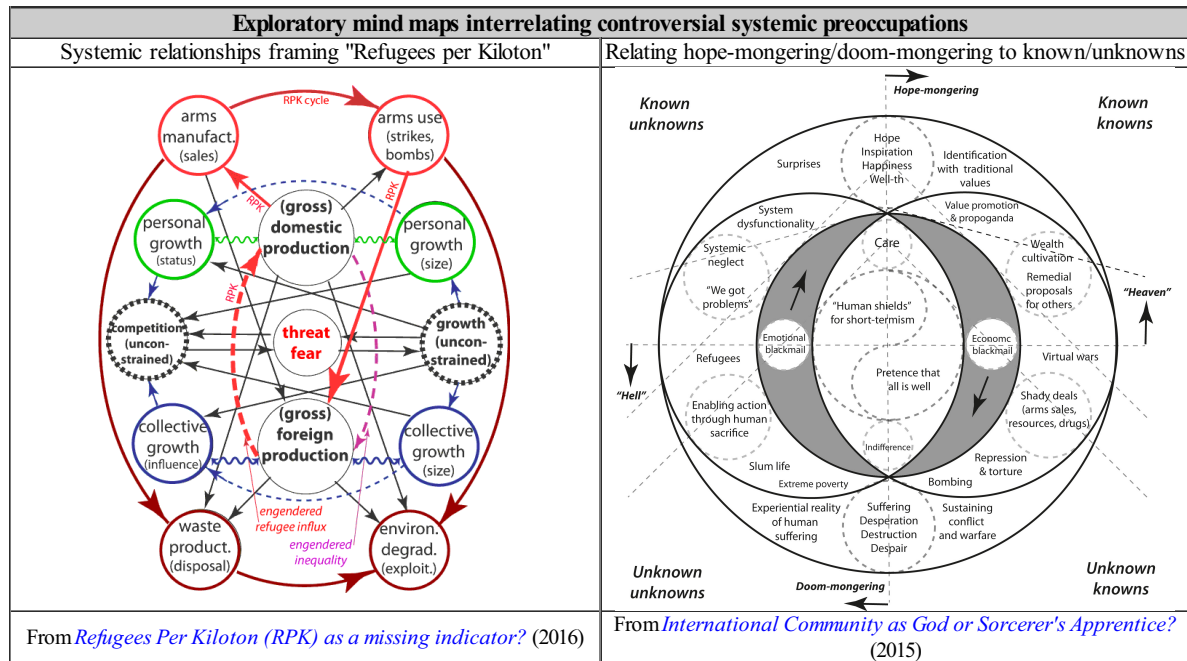
In the light of the political response of such leaders, and the framing offered by the mass media, the argument can be taken further by envisaging a thought experiment regarding a widely publicized imminent disaster of global proportions. As originally discussed, the announcement of mass death by starvation or an asteroid strike in the weeks or months to come invites reflection on the nature of the response (*Remedial Capacity Indicators versus Performance Indicators*, 1981). Typical responses would include brief panic for a news cycle, denial, and its challenge as a form of fake news. From that perspective it will be interesting to note the uptake of the conclusions of the 2019 report commissioned by the Pentagon (contradicting the perspective of Donald Trump) by comparison with the subsequent uptake of the Forrester report to the US House of Representatives in 1970. Missing from both studies is any recognition of the dysfunctional pattern of indifference to such reports, of which there are many (see, for example, Hemany Singh, *List of Reports Published by International Organisations*, 20 December 2018).

Arguably the phenomenon of so-called [psychic numbing](#) in response to disaster and images of it will become characteristic of global responses to any threats, as argued with respect to a specific example (*Starvation Imagery as Humanitarian Trump Card? Counterproductive emotional blackmail engendering worldwide indifference*, 2016). This tendency is reinforced by increasing intellectual disconnect from global issues through the [filter bubbles](#) identified by Eli Pariser (*The Filter Bubble: what the Internet is hiding from you*, 2011). Such bubbles are carefully curated in support of political and commercial agendas. This metaphor offers a curious challenge, as argued separately (*Pricking the Bubble of Global Complacent Complicity*, 2017).

There is a sense in which the erosion of any collective coping or remedial capacity will be effectively preceded and enabled by a breakdown in effective global communication, as argued separately (*Imminent Collective Communication "Info-death"? Collapse of global civilization understood otherwise*, 2018). The potential for such breakdown would be expected to increase with increasing population numbers and systemic complexity.

Transcending hope-mongering versus doom-mongering?

Optimistic statements regarding the illusion of remedial capacity and political are now especially dangerous in obscuring the reality which few dare to articulate. Whilst doom-mongering is itself unproductive, **hope-mongering** is dangerous in its own right (*Varieties of hope-mongering*, 2008; *Doom-mongering and hope-mongering*, 2015). The following mind maps are exercises in encompassing dimensions which are typically ignored, if not deliberately so.



The dimensions of these systemic maps arguably frame the space from which so-called **Black Swan** surprises emerge, as argued by Nassim Nicholas Taleb (*The Black Swan: the impact of the highly improbable*, 2007). The fourfold distinctions relating **known** and **unknown** were widely (and controversially) publicized by Donald Rumsfeld as US Secretary of Defense in 2002. The pattern of categories has become important to risk assessment. As being that which we intentionally refuse to acknowledge that we know, the unknown known has been emphasized by psychoanalytic philosopher Slavoj Zizek (*Living in the End Times*, 2010). Implications of that fourfold pattern are discussed separately (*Requisite confusion to engender an elusive functional literacy?* 2013). The implications of such a pattern can be further explored in terms of "real versus imaginary" in the case of the problematique, resolutique, "imaginatique" and "irresolutique" (*Imagining the Real Challenge and Realizing the Imaginal Pathway of Sustainable Transformation*, 2007).

Such representations could be enhanced by integrating current challenges with regard to information itself (*Varieties of Fake News and Misrepresentation*, 2019; *Vital Collective Learning from Biased Media Coverage: acquiring vigilance to deceptive strategies used in mugging the world*, 2014). Such mapping can be envisaged from another perspective (*Map of Systemic Interdependencies None Dares Name: 12-fold challenge of global life and death*, 2011).

Use of mind maps of that kind can be extended to encompass the notion of collapse, as presented separately in 2D and 3D (*Mind Map of Global Civilizational Collapse: why nothing is happening in response to global challenges*, 2011; *Convergence of 30 Disabling Global Trends: mapping the social climate change engendering a perfect storm*, 2012). Complementary approaches may be taken in the quest for "enabling maps" (*Framing Cognitive Space for Higher Order Coherence*, 2019; *Time for Provocative Mnemonic Aids to Systemic Connectivity?* 2019). The latter notably addresses the challenge of reframing "hope-mongering versus doom-mongering" as one of reconciling the "headless hearts" and the "heartless heads" -- recognized as another pattern undermining effective insight, most obviously with respect to migration.

Part of the difficulty is evident in disparate current articulation of global strategy in patterns with little attention to their reconciliation or comprehension, as discussed separately (*Global Coherence by Interrelating Disparate Strategic Patterns Dynamically: topological interweaving of 4-fold, 8-fold, 12-fold, 16-fold and 20-fold in 3D*, 2019). A further difficulty is evident in the relation of knowledge to action and inaction (*Unknown Undoing: challenge of incomprehensibility of systemic neglect*, 2008).

Gaia will adjust -- but "we" may be "in the way"

The argument above suggests that despair is warranted with respect to the future of the planet. It is strange that neither despair nor hope feature in the models assiduously designed to foresee that future, as can be explored (*Implication of Personal Despair in Planetary Despair: avoiding entrapment in hopeful anticipation*, 2010). Speculating further, and with "depression" a term common to both the personal condition and planetary weather, there is a case for exploring their interplay as assiduously as do meteorologists with respect to climate change. Is there a system of psychosocial cyclones and anticyclones meriting attention?

The future can however be understood otherwise. From a more general perspective -- a universal perspective (?) -- there is no problem, as ETs might affirm. However, from the perspective of humanity, there is the question whether the failure to understand how it is part of the problem is an indication of an inability to comprehend the nature of the solution required -- and why Earth has seemingly not been a destination of choice for ETs (*Earth as a Shithole Planet -- from a Universal Perspective? Understanding why there are no extraterrestrial visitors*, 2018).

The deathly silence at this time of philosophers, and those with a meta-perspective, is remarkable. As articulated by Gregory Bateson: *The pattern which connects is a meta-pattern. It is a pattern of patterns. It is that meta-pattern which defines the vast generalization that, indeed, it is patterns which connect (Mind and Nature: a necessary unity*, 1979). To which he added in a much-cited phrase: **Break the pattern which connects the items of learning and you necessarily destroy all quality**. There is no lack of evidence that quality is being systematically eroded.

As a complex system, however, the planet will indeed adjust to rising temperatures, environmental pollution, the extinction of species, restricted availability of freshwater, loss of fertile arable land, desertification, and the like. The planet has seen "worse", but as a system other conditions will indeed be viable for some species -- which may well thrive (notably bacteria fatal to humans).

The question for humanity is the place it may be obliged to occupy in the new context -- if indeed the environment will permit the survival of some, if not many.

Curiously it could be concluded that humanity does not collectively need to "do" anything -- let alone "act now". A French political adage of Count Charles de Montalembert (1810-1870) could be appropriately adapted to read: **You may indeed choose not to bother with the environment, but the environment will nevertheless take care of you**. (original: *Vous avez beau ne pas vous occuper de politique, la politique s'occupe de vous tout de même*). The question is the nature of that "care".

Understood in this way, **any concern with ungovernability (as highlighted above) can be set aside**. Civilization has many processes in place which will drive "adjustment" by the environment without calling upon remedial capacity or political will -- or remedial intervention of any kind. The divisive dynamics of the social system, in conjunction with environmental processes, can be relied upon without any need for humanity to "get its act together".

Examples include:

- overshoot with respect to availability of resources on which human survival is dependent (*Checklist of Peak Experiences Challenging Humanity*, 2008)
- reduction of the population as a consequence of production, marketing and consumption of substances which will prove to be toxic, cancerogenic or engendering infertility in the shorter or longer term -- a confluence of processes sustained by business-as-usual and perceived economic dependence on consumerism and growth at any cost
- widespread violent unrest as a consequence of increased inequality -- potentially associated with a variety of forms of genocide as different segments are framed as blameworthy
- implementation of ill-conceived remedies engendering highly problematic side-effects, most obviously in the form of geo-engineering
- increasing levels of despair provoking far higher levels of suicide

Curiously the ongoing adaptation by humanity to global crisis bears comparison with a form of regression "back to the Stone Age". This is already evident in the manner in which the deprecated conditions of developing countries are now engendered within developed countries, most obviously in the form of extensive slums and "no-go areas" controlled by gangs. There is a strange irony to the manner in which local "gangs" are now engendered -- to be compared with the local "community initiatives" so widely promoted as desirable alternatives to other modes of organization (George Kent, *Can Flourishing Communities Fix the World? Transcend Media Service*, 21 Oct 2019).

The chaotically irrational processes of democratic debate already bear increasing resemblance to the behaviour of competing tribes of monkeys -- as depicted by Banksy below. In that sense the environment is engendering behavioural functions to replace those lost through the extinction of species in the wild. The systemic functions of prehistoric megafauna are already well in evidence (*Systemic Biomimicry of Dinosaurs by Multinational Corporations: clearing the ground for future psychosocial evolution*, 2011).



In terms of the uncreative stasis patiently cultivated by religions, the biblical insight that *the meek shall inherit the Earth* merits particular reflection in the light of the levels of fatal disease foreseen by the above-mentioned report to the Pentagon (2019). It could be argued, especially in the light of ever-increasing resistance to antibiotics, that it is the bacteria and viruses which will inherit the Earth. Indeed it could be said that the "meek are getting ready". This suggests an urgent precautionary investment in the the possibility of transferring human memes to the smaller species as "carriers" -- namely to those most likely to survive (cockroaches, rats, etc), as a means of ensuring preservation of the human cultural heritage.

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