



laetus in praesens

Alternative view of segmented documents via Kairos

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Configuring the Varieties of Experiential Nothingness

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Introduction

This is a further exploration of a possible reframing of cognitive despair in the face of the outcomes of highly questionable strategic initiatives, past, present and as currently envisaged. The despair is necessarily both planet-wide and highly personal (*Implication of Personal Despair in Planetary Despair*, 2010). The condition can be described as a form of cognitive "ground zero" -- a sense of pointlessness notably articulated through recognition that the future offers "nothing", especially for those reduced to "nothing" by a combination of factors, as separately discussed (*Reintegration of a Remaindered World*, 2011; *Way Round Cognitive Ground Zero and Pointlessness*, 2012). This forms part of a more general discussion, where relevant references are located (*Way Round Cognitive Ground Zero and Pointlessness: embodying the geometry of fundamental cognitive dynamics*, 2012; see alternative [table of contents](#)).

Curiously, at a time when many are faced with the experience of some form of "nothing", physicists are giving increased recognition to the fundamental role of "nothing" in relation to cosmology and the emergence of "everything" (Lawrence Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing: why there is something rather than nothing*, 2011; John D. Barrow, *The Book of Nothing: vacuums, voids, and the latest ideas about the origins of the universe*, 2002). The integrative implications are separately discussed (*Fundamental integrative role of nothing - the ultimate remainder?*, 2011). For Krauss, space and time come from "nothing", understood as an extremely unstable state from which the production of "something" is virtually inevitable. A major meeting of physicists and cosmologists highlighted unresolved issues in that respect (Lisa Grossman, *Death of the Eternal Cosmos*, *New Scientist*, 14 January 2012).

The paradox of the times is strangely "embodied" in the person of the world's premier cosmologist, Stephen Hawking, tragically afflicted by an incurable disease since the age of 21. His early death was then predicted by specialists, although he has inexplicably survived to the age of 70. Professionally Hawking has striven to demonstrate the emergence of the universe from "nothing" and the absence of any requirement for a "creator". Personally he has necessarily been confronted on a daily basis with the threat of an anticipated cognitive dissolution into "nothingness", given his worldview. Due to illness, he was absent from the meeting of physicists on his recent 70th birthday to discuss "nothing" in celebration of his achievements in that respect (*Stephen Hawking misses 70th birthday celebration following hospitalization*, 8 January 2012). As with the majority of those in his discipline, he has "nothing" to offer those faced like himself with "nothingness". In response to the "nothingness" faced by humanity, Hawking has famously recommended leaving the planet (*Stephen Hawking: mankind must move to outer space within a century*, *The Telegraph*, 9 August 2010; *Stephen Hawking: Colonize Space or End the Human Race Yahoo! Contributor Network*, 8 January 2012).

Given such serious attention to the engendering power of "nothing" by astrophysicists, it might be asked why so little insight of this quality translates into new understanding of the engendering power of the "nothing" which individuals and groups experience so tragically worldwide. The question here is the nature of the empowerment brought to light by these circumstances. Is there scope for more than what might be described as "palliative care" of a tragically dying civilization and of those condemned to experience its death throes? (*Conceptual Ground Zero: empowerment declaration*, 2002)

In attributing a key role to "nothing", the radical rethinking achieved by physics is held to have been inspired by "dreams" (Stephen Hawking (Ed.), *The Dreams That Stuff Is Made Of: the most astounding papers of quantum physics -- and how they shook the scientific world*, 2011). What then of the nature of the "dreams" of those faced with "nothing" in their own lives? What is the cognitive "stuff" thereby engendered? What of the much-deprecated [Dreamtime](#) of the Australian Aborigines inspired by the emptiness of the desert -- as with the [Desert Fathers](#)? How might the world of governance be fruitfully "shaken"?

This articulation follows from a previous exercise (*Responsibility for Global Governance: Who? Where? When? How? Why? Which? What?* 2008) in the light of another (*Where There is No Time and Nothing Matters*, 2009). The latter drew attention to the process of "mattering" (*Import of Nothingness and Emptiness through Happening and Mattering*, 2009). With respect to the experience of boredom, this relates to the challenge of having "nothing to do" -- especially as experienced by both the young and the elderly.

As explored here, a potentially fruitful way of engaging with the disparate experiences of "nothing" is to consider patterns through which these may be configured -- notably patterns offering mnemonic associations to integrative symbols which continue to be active in cultural memory and a focus of long-term consideration of the implied paradoxes.

Varieties and dimensions of experiential nothingness

A set of distinct experiences of "nothing" or "emptiness" can be tentatively presented as follows -- in contrast with corresponding experiences of "somethingness". Detailed comments on each follow in the next section.

Varieties and dimensions of experiential nothingness				
"Dimension"	"Nothingness" and "Emptiness" ["is not"]	"Somethingness" and "Plentifulness" ["is"]		
		Constrained (selective)	Disparate (unparticular)	Total (inclusive)
"things": resources for living, especially tangible possessions [1]	nothing	something	anything	everything
"place" "to be" qualitatively, and especially physically [2]	nowhere	somewhere	anywhere	everywhere
"time": quality time, especially future convergence [3]	no-when (no-time)	some-when (some-time)	any-when (any-time)	all-the-time (eternity)
"choice": freedom and ability to choose, especially from a variety of options [4]	no-which (no-choice)	some-which (some-choice)	any-which (any-choice)	every-which (every-choice)
"why": reason, rationale, justification, especially a sense of purpose [5]	no-why (no-reason)	some-why (some-reason)	any-why (any-reason)	every-why (every-reason)
"identity": a sense of self (esteem), especially within community [6]	no-who (no-identity)	some-who (some-identity)	any-who (any-identity)	every-who (every-identity)
"how": means and capacity to act, especially a sense of know-how [7]	no-how (no-means)	some-how (some-means)	any-how (any-means)	every-how (every-means)
"action": undertaking action, especially taking initiative [8]	doing nothing (inaction)	doing something	doing anything	doing everything

The experiential contrast between "nothingness" and "plentifulness" can be usefully considered in relation to:

- **subjectivity and objectivity:** to the extent that the sense of either may be dependent on whether one is experiencing the condition oneself or interpreting the experience of others, possibly denying their sense of reality as misguided or deluded (*Defining the objective ∞ Refining the subjective ?! Explaining reality ∞ Embodying realization*, 2011). Of particular relevance is the sense in which the life of some is held to be "full" or "rich" by themselves or others, but may equally be held to be "empty" and "impoverished", whether by themselves or others.
- **imagination:** whether the experience is framed as "mere imagination", by the person experiencing it or by others assessing it, this then plays a key role in the need to bridge between such realities (*Living as an Imaginal Bridge between Worlds: global implications of "betwixt and between" and liminality*, 2011).
- **dynamics:** to the extent that both "nothingness" and "plentifulness" are better recognized as processes. The experience of some form of plenty tends to be undermined by a sense of what it is not, whilst that of nothing may readily evoke recognition of plenty previously ignored.

Comments on experiential nothingness and somethingness

1. **"Things":** Physically only too evident in the case of extremes of deprivation, especially with respect to livelihood, food and shelter. Highlighted for the well-endowed by recognition of ultimate mortality and the implication of being unable to "take it with them".

Reframed cognitively by the case made for monastic poverty and **simple living** (Duane Elgin, *Voluntary simplicity: toward a way of life that is outwardly simple, inwardly rich*, 1993; Jim McKnight, *A Procrastinator's Guide to Simple Living*, 2001). For Buddhists this may be extended to inappropriate attachment (*Upadana*), recognized in understandings of the so-called **"emptiness of form"**.

A Christian perspective is offered by Duane Williams (*Meister Eckhart and the Varieties of Nothing, Medieval Mystical Theology*, 2011, 20):

These senses of nothing are understood to function within an ontological hierarchy, beginning with the understanding that all nothings are things, and moving in ascending order to the assertions that all things are nothing, that things are nothing but God, nothing but God, and finally God as Nothing. This scale of degrees is ultimately understood to mean that the nothings are nothinged by the nothings nothinged.... Accordingly, the metaphysical significance of the word "nothing" as relative rejection rather than absolute denial, is seen to point to a grammatical ground as opposed to a grammatical fiction.

In the Christian ascetic tradition, this may be framed as a doctrine of emptiness, a discipline of silence in which no trace of consciousness remains, a "standing still of the mind and of the world" -- termed *hesychia*.

Contrary: Evident, especially for the deprived, in efforts to grasp opportunistically at "something", or "anything". Extreme forms are evident in monopolistic efforts to "grasp" everything within a universal explanation, as by religion, or by the [Theory of Everything](#) of physics. Of related interest regarding the production of "something" versus "nothing", are the cognitive implications of the perspective of [George Ritzer](#) (*The Globalization of Nothing*, 2004/2007). Ritzer argues elsewhere that:

Given the great demand, it is far easier to mass-produce and mass-distribute the empty forms of nothing than the substantively rich forms of something. Indeed, many forms of something lend themselves best to limited, if not one-of-a-kind, production.... Of course, there are the rare masterpieces that may bring millions of dollars, but in the main these are small-ticket items. In contrast, thousands, even many millions, and sometimes billions of varieties of nothing are mass-produced and sold throughout the globe.... the various forms of nothing can range in cost from a dollar or two to thousands, even tens of thousands of dollars. The cumulative total is enormous and infinitely greater than the global trade in something. (*Readings in Globalization: Key Concepts and Major Debates*, 2010, p. 366).

Ritzer extends his analysis there to *The Globalization of Nothing* (p. 367) and *The Economics of Nothing* (p. 371). An earlier discussion of *Americanisation, McDonaldisation and nothing* had noted that:

On the one hand, an increasingly global market insists on large numbers and great varieties of nothing to satisfy the increasing demand for it, at least part of this fabricated (through advertising and marketing) by the forces (corporations, states) that profit from the widespread distribution and sale of nothing. On the other hand, production of so much nothing, and the requirement that it be profitable or successful, leads to increasing pressure to find ever more remote global markets for nothingness (Neil Campbell, et al., *Issues in Americanisation and Culture*, 2004, p. 52)

2. **"Place":** Physically evident with respect to shelter -- or having "a place one can call one's own". Psychologically evident in the quest for a place that "feels like home" and in the sense that "things are going nowhere". Evident in use of the phrase "there is nothing there" (for me). Lack of any sense of personal location or focus -- the placelessness dramatized by [homelessness](#) and [statelessness](#). Especially important in those cultures which attach particular significance to where a person "comes from" as a means of establishing identity -- in a time when many frame themselves as coming from "no where", perturbed by a deep sense of rootlessness, possibly aggravated by lack of knowledge of parents or family origins (Andrew Tatsuko, [Rootlessness and Simulacra: the loss and recovery of cultural foundations](#), *Quodlibet Journal*, 2, 4, 2000).

Reframed cognitively in terms of the design patterns of a "good place to be" by [Christopher Alexander](#) (*The Timeless Way of Building*, 1979, p. x) or in the sense that any focus on particular physical locus is contrary to the essential nature of man (*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head*, [Matthew 8:20](#)). The latter being echoed in the lifestyle choice of [nomadism](#), [psychical nomadism](#) or randomness (Antonio Maurice Daniels, [Rootlessness is the Source of Randomness](#), *Revolutionary Paideia*, 9 March 2011), possibly framed in terms of uncertainty (Dennis Merritt Jones, *The Art of Uncertainty: how to kive in the mystery of life and love it*, 2011). Also reframed through the complex insights of quantum mechanics into [non-locality](#).

The tradition of Christian asceticism offers the sense of "living like a stranger", like a foreigner, or like a guest (*xeniteia*), described by [James Cowan](#) as:

It is a curious term that means more than "exile", in that a nomadic existence is not implied. Its meaning pertains to a sort of journey *away* from the world, a world from its contingencies, in pursuit of a deeper awareness of the shortness and fragility of life. Xeniteia also suggests a desire to be unknown and of no account, and a willingness to be more flexible in one's approach to one's professional life... with the acquisition of humility. (p. 62)

Contrary: Evident in the effort to claim and control space, most typically land in the form of property -- in its extreme form as imperialism and world system dominance. or possibly justified by divine mandate. An equivalent is evident in the possessiveness manifest in relation to intellectual property and virtual real estate. Webpages, as on [Facebook](#) or [MySpace](#), may be understood as providing a sense of relatively secure personal space for many

3. **"Time":** Recognized in terms of increasing [time pressure](#), leaving people with "no time" to fulfil intentions, whether in the short term or the longer term, especially when death is recognized to be imminent as a prelude to the "nothingness" of an illusory afterlife. Variously highlighted by [Jeremy Rifkin](#) (*Time Wars: the primary conflict in human history*, 1987), the [pace of life](#) (Robert V. Levine and Ara Norenzayan, *The Pace of Life in 31 Countries*. *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology*, 30, March 1999, pp. 178-205). Also evident in the experience of [panic](#) or concerns with regard to the lack of [quality time](#), especially in relationships.

Reframed cognitively with respect to imminent doom by [James Lovelock](#) (*The Vanishing Face of Gaia: a final warning: enjoy it while you can*, 2009). Reframed cognitively in preoccupation with "hope" regarding future possibilities, a sense of "now" or "timelessness" as discussed separately (*Where There is No Time and Nothing Matters*, 2009). This is most evident as an

anticipated characteristic of an eternal [afterlife](#).

Contrary: Evident in efforts to avoid "wasting time", notably through [time management](#) and dependence on [just-in-time](#) strategies. Also evident in efforts to "fill time" through an unrelieved pattern of distractions, especially to ensure that there is "no time" to reflect -- particularly when this may result in disruptive questioning of institutionalized belief systems. This may be related to the temporal focus and expectation offered by "[doom-mongering](#)" or "hope-mongering" (*Credibility Crunch engendered by Hope-mongering*, 2008).

4. "**Choice**": Recognized with regard to circumstances in which people have no choice, no opportunities and few options for consideration, if any. Exemplified in an extreme form in the debate between the "[pro-life](#)" and "[pro-choice](#)" perspectives regarding abortion -- clearly extensible to those regarding the relief of suffering through [euthanasia](#). Deliberate restriction of choice is evident in the marketing of products, health care, entertainment, and patterns of belief to avoid exposure to options deemed to be disruptive of convention. In the case of political strategies, it is exemplified through spurious arguments for "jobs vs environment", with the options relating to global warming in process of reduction to the case for [geoengineering](#).

Reframed cognitively by Taoist recognition of the value of [choicelessness](#) and the associated understanding that having to choose is an indication of having already made a mistake.

Contrary: Evident through the apparent choice maximization in "democracy" or a supermarket. The latter exemplifies the manner in which a profusion of options can be deliberately used to disguise the exclusion of other options, such as organic and fair trade foodstuffs.

5. "**Why**": Recognized widely in the form of senselessness and the irrational, notably as "[nonsense](#)" (exemplified by "[Catch-22 situations](#)"), in experience of the pointlessness to daily life, and currently highlighted with respect to electronic communication (*The Pointlessness of Your Life Revealed in Email*, 2011). It may be exacerbated by a sense of [boredom](#). A [lack of meaning to life](#) has long been explored by commentators, notably by existentialists and nihilists. The perspective is inherent in the mindset of science, as noted in the conclusion of the much-acclaimed work by [William James](#) (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902):

In the vast rhythm of [Nature's] processes, as the scientific mind now follows them, she appears to cancel herself. The bubbles on the foam which coats a stormy sea are floating episodes, made and unmade by the forces of the wind and water. Our private selves are like those bubbles, epiphenomena, as Clifford, I believe, ingeniously called them; their destinies weigh nothing and determine nothing in the world's irremedial currents of events.

A sense of meaninglessness, when "nothing matters", may be a characteristic of depression and despair, both individually and collectively (*Implication of Personal Despair in Planetary Despair*, 2010). As "unreason" and "[absurdity](#)", the nature of the condition has been variously articulated: [Charles Handy](#) (*The Age of Unreason*, 1989; *The Age of Paradox*, 1995), Michael Foley (*The Age of Absurdity: why modern life makes it hard to be happy*, 2011).

Reframed cognitively in terms of "[paradox](#)" (as by Handy), this lends itself to an appreciation of the "[surreal](#)", consistent with the possibility of "[crazy wisdom](#)". This is itself consistent with the recognized role of "humour" in the darkest of situations (*Humour and Play-Fullness: Essential integrative processes in governance, religion and transdisciplinarity*, 2005). Well-recognized efforts are made to celebrate the surreal through art. Less evident is its aesthetic expression through [asemic writing](#) and song -- and how this may speak to those experiencing nothingness in some manner. As widely quoted, the tedium of boredom is reframed in the quotation by [Jean Paul Richter](#): *A variety of nothing is superior to a monotony of something*. Might the "mattering of nothing" offer other insights, as discussed separately (*Where There is No Time and Nothing Matters*, 2009).

Contrary: Evident in efforts to give meaning to life under particular circumstances -- "doing something meaningful" -- or to define it as inherently meaningful within a particular belief system, possibly actively hostile to any doubts on the matter. Political parties and religions, for example, necessarily have a deep commitment to justifying their actions as meaningful -- irrespective of arguments to the contrary, as with the case made by [Richard Dawkins](#) (*The God Delusion*, 2006), itself susceptible of a more general interpretation (*The Consensus Delusion*, 2011).

6. "**Identity**": Recognized in the experience of being a "nobody" and being so categorized, possibly with a consequent competitive aspiration to status of some kind. This sense may be exacerbated by lack of "identity papers", paper certification of "qualifications", or conventional professional "labels". Such a sense of "worthlessness" and lack of [self-esteem](#) is a common focus of concern and commentary, especially when pathologically compounded by depression and lack of any sense of self. The condition may be intimately related to (and aggravated by) physical "dis-ease" -- understood as a lack of integrity as a "whole person", culminating in a sense of being much diminished and even recognized as "no longer there" ([R. D. Laing](#), *The Divided Self: an existential study in sanity and madness*, 1965; *Politics of Experience*, 1983).

A confused sense of identity may well be associated with a sense of [social alienation](#) and [anomie](#), curiously exacerbated by "[identity theft](#)", or the implication for identity intimately associated with physical attributes progressively lost through aging. Collective forms are evident in the loss of collective memory (*Societal Learning and the Erosion of Collective Memory*, 1980; *Pointers to the Pathology of Collective Memory*, 1980).

Reframed cognitively in Buddhism where preoccupation with personal identity is understood as a hindrance to greater enlightenment. Christian ascetism recognizes the merits of social disengagement, or withdrawal, as *anachoresis* -- effectively "becoming a nobody" (Kallistos Ware, *The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?*).

Contrary: Evident in institutional efforts to attribute specific roles to people -- recognizing that every individual has a "place", as in corporate environments. This process is exemplified by any consequent sense of self-fulfillment.

7. "**How**": Recognized in the often desperate sense of being unable to determine "how" to remedy problematic conditions, whether through lack of resources, contacts, or "**know-how**". Increasingly evident in the failure of collective initiatives to engender viable strategies -- whether or not they lead to effective action (*Ungovernability of Sustainable Global Democracy?* 2011).

Reframed cognitively through the appreciation of "**not knowing**" and "knowing nothing" by some (otherwise) acknowledged as wise, as with Socrates: *All I know is that I know nothing*. With respect to Christian ascetism, James Cowan (*Journey to the Inner Mountain*, 2002):

Complicity with negation was one of the first rule of apophatic behaviour, and one of the goals of asceticism. The pursuit of nothingness made it possible to attain to a pure state of self-awareness (p. 24)

Contrary: Evident in the promotion of particular strategies, or arrays of strategies, and even "global plans", variously acclaimed as coherent responses to gain total control of a condition -- typically ignoring learnings from past initiatives. Some may even be promoted as a form of strategic panacea, as with the [Project for the New American Century \(PNAC\)](#), [Agenda 21](#) or the [Millennium Development Goals](#).

8. "**Action**": Recognized in a sense of individual or collective inability to act -- or of achieving nothing as a consequence of actions undertaken (*Mapping Paralysis and Tokenism in the Face of Potential Global Disaster*, 2011), most remarkably demonstrated by responses to the global financial crisis and the lack of action against those who engendered it and who remain honourably in place. Pointedly framed by the slang phrase "*where's the action?*" Also evident in complex situations in which there is "nothing to say" and silence prevails (Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, 1983) or the "unsaid" (*Varieties of the Unsaid*, 2003). Notably articulated by Philip Larkin (*Nothing To Be Said*, 1964) prior to current usage (Duncan Richter, *Nothing to be Said: Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinian Ethics*, 1996; Marian Houk, *There is nothing to be said about the "direct" peace talks that resumed today*, *UN-Truth*, 14 September 2010). Framed in the following terms by E. M. Forster (*A Passage to India*, 1924):

Most of life is so dull that there is nothing to be said about it, and the books and talks that would describe it as interesting are obliged to exaggerate, in the hope of justifying their own existence. Inside its cocoon of work or social obligation, the human spirit slumbers for the most part, registering the distinction between pleasure and pain, but not nearly as alert as we pretend. There are periods in the most thrilling day during which nothing happens, and though we continue to exclaim, "I do enjoy myself", or, "I am horrified," we are insincere.

Reframed cognitively through Taoist insights into **non-action** or not-doing, whether individually or as a key to appropriate governance -- with potentially problematic side-effects (*The Quest for the Socio-Economics of Non-Action*, 1993; *Unknown Undoing: challenge of incomprehensibility of systemic neglect*, 2008)

Contrary: Evident in initiatives best described as tokenism, creating a semblance of effective action, but possibly disguising various forms of abuse (*Abuse of Faith in Governance*, 2009). Such tokenism is highlighted in the discussion of "doing nothing" by Thomas Sowell (*Varieties of Nothing*, *Jewish World Review*, 9 June 2009):

Doing nothing might seem to be simple and easy. But there are many varieties of nothing, and some kinds of nothing can get very elaborate and complex... A study in Britain found that, among criminals caught, convicted and sentenced, only 7 percent of these sentences involved being put behind bars. Most of what is done in the other 93 percent of the cases amounts to virtually nothing.... Had there been no United Nations, it would have been obvious to all and sundry that we were doing nothing -- and that could have had dire political consequences at election time. However, thanks to the United Nations, there is a place where political leaders can go to do nothing, with a flurry of highly visible activity -- and the media will cover it in detail, with a straight face, so that people will think that something is actually being done.

Excluded from the above variants, death is the form of "nothingness" which necessarily cannot be experienced -- although envisaged as such by some, such as Hawking (as noted above). The "nothingness of death" has long been recognized, as described by Bernard N. Schumacher (*Death and Mortality in Contemporary Philosophy*, 2011, pp. 151-167) who concludes:

All contemporary philosophical thanatologists, to varying degrees, have noted the importance of the Epicurean thesis of the "nothingness of death" in speculation about death. (p. 216)

As noted by Angelos Mouzakis (*Worlds Emerging: approaches to the creation and constitution of the common*, 2006), despite Heidegger's later attempt in his book *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1959) to describe *Dasein* as fundamentally violent, there is still

missing in Heidegger's text something similar to [Emmanuel Levinas's](#) equation of death as nothingness with the will to annihilate the Other through murder:

More profoundly and as it were a priori we approach death as nothingness in the passion to murder. The spontaneous intentionality of this passion aims at annihilation. Cain when he slew Abel should have possessed the same knowledge. The identifying of death with nothingness befits the death of the other in murder. (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: an essay on exteriority*, 1969, p. 232)

Of relevance is the poignant experience of the passing of cultures and languages -- and the "nothingness" left by absent loved ones. Of interest is the perception of the extinction of species, as articulated by Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam ([Banished behind the Curtain of Nothingness: the ecological problem of species extinction](#)):

To cause the extinction of a species is tantamount to banishing it for ever behind the veil of nothingness. The extinction of a species is, in philosophical terms, a passage from ens to non-ens, from being to non-being, from existence to non-existence. The mass extinction of species is not just death for the individual species concerned, but death of birth itself, as the extant species are consigned for ever in the cauldron of nothingness with no hope of re-birth.... Extinction is indeed the loss of evolutionary history itself,⁶⁸ as no living traces of the extant species remain, with its evolutionary course brought to a sudden and abrupt standstill, being flung across the abyss of nothingness.

Experimental configuration of nothingness as an "eightfold way"

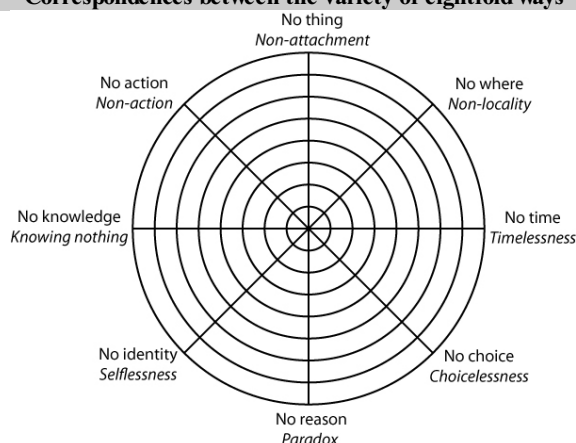
As noted above, a potentially fruitful way of engaging with the disparate experiences of nothing is to consider patterns through which these may be configured -- notably patterns offering mnemonic associations to integrative symbols which continue to be active in cultural memory and a focus of long-term consideration of the implied paradoxes.

For example, the set above might be configured in a circle to imply the confluence of pressures and their enhancement through mutual reinforcement. This then also implies a higher dimensionality to the requisite cognitive reframing through which they might be more appropriately engaged. Use of concentric circles suggests degrees of such recognition. This might usefully integrate the degrees and stages of measures of "happiness", as with [Gross National Happiness](#) (GNH) developed in Bhutan, as might be understood in cognitive terms.

As currently understood, GNH is considered to be transcultural (rather than dependent on a Buddhist context) in its appreciation of sustainable development, cultural integrity, ecosystem conservation, and good governance. These "four pillars" of GNH have been given further specificity by the Centre for Bhutan Studies in the form of eight general contributors to happiness: physical, mental and spiritual health; time-balance; social and community vitality; cultural vitality; education; living standards; good governance; and ecological vitality. Such considerations have been incorporated into a [Global GNH Survey](#).

An "8-fold" configuration then highlights the limitations of assumptions regarding the possibility of any "one-way" (cognitive) approach so typical of efforts at (global) strategic formulation. This then offers possible cognitive and mnemonic associations to (and from) the [Noble Eightfold Path](#) of Buddhist doctrine, the [Eightfold Way](#) of particle physics and the so-called [Eightfold Path](#) of policy analysis.

Correspondences between the variety of eightfold ways

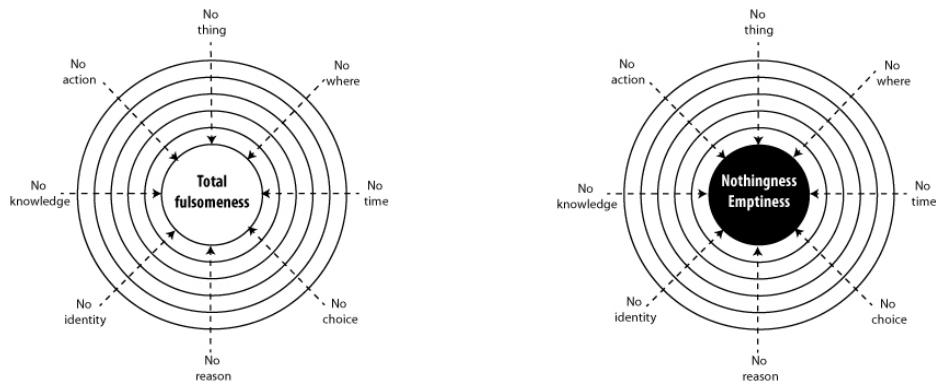


The above configuration needs necessarily to be considered in alternative forms -- contrasting the sense of "nothingness" with the sense of "fulness" through which the experience of nothingness can be so readily denied. Ironically "happiness" might well then be understood in terms of "fulness" -- a "positive" denial of the "negativity" with which "nothingness" is so readily associated ([Embodying the Paradoxes and Contradictions of the Pursuit of Happiness](#), 2011).

8-fold patterns of nothingness

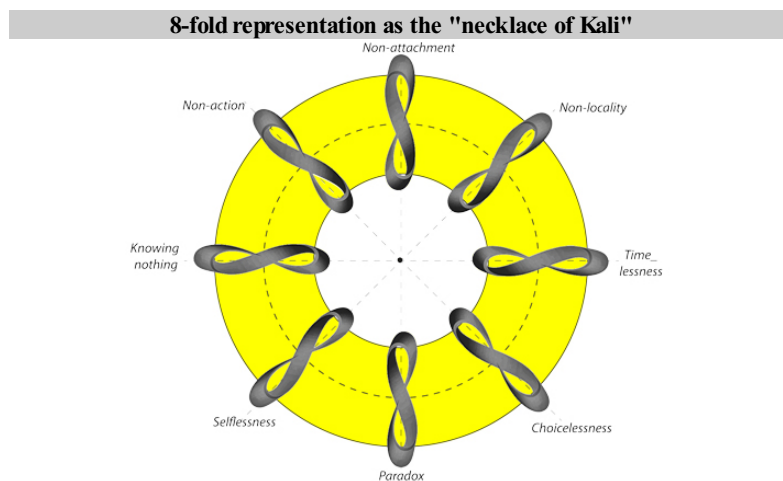
8-fold impulse from "nothingness" to "somethingness"
(and undermining the sense of "nothingness")

8-fold pressure augmenting the experience of "nothingness"
(and undermining the sense of "fulness")



Given the implicit cognitive alternation associated with the above configurations -- dramatically exemplified for some individuals by the phases of [bipolar disorder](#) -- the challenge could be framed as one of identifying forms which integrate those alternatives and the paradoxical dynamics between them. How to frame the process by which "everything" becomes "nothing" and "nothing" becomes "everything" -- notably explored in Buddhism as [impermanence](#) (David Hodge and Hi-Jin Hodge, *Impermanence: embracing change*, 2009). Appropriate to the cognitive ambiguity, the Theory of Everything of physicists has been speculatively "reframed" by [Russell Standish](#) (*Theory of Nothing*, 2006).

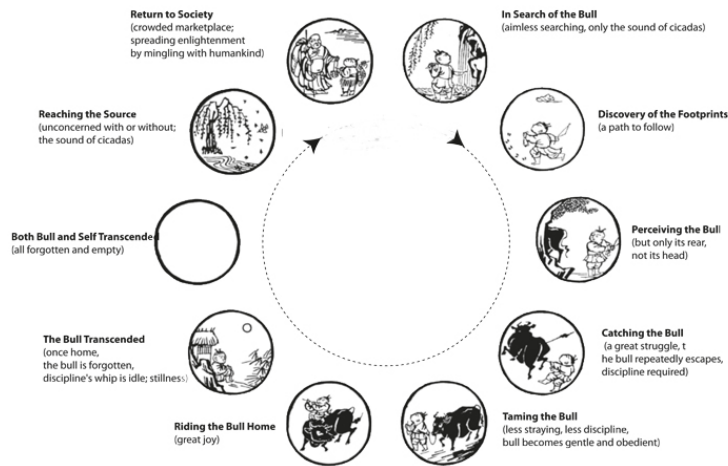
The following is one example of such a form in which each "way" is represented by the paradoxes of a [Möbius loop](#) rather than by the conventional linear directional arrow. The role of such a "strange loop" has been the focus of work by [Douglas Hofstadter](#) (*I Am a Strange Loop*, 2007), building on his earlier insights (*Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid*, 1979). Used in this way, this then highlights the potential cognitive significance of the integration of the configuration of eight such loops, as implied below by the threading of a circle through the loops to form a "necklace" or "torc". In the sense in which each "bipolar way" integrates processes of creating and destroying "something", this is reminiscent of the significance traditionally attached to the necklace of the Hindu deity [Kali](#) -- a focus of dread, as the goddess of time and change, and notably of human redemption.



Another traditional configuration of interest is the significance held by the [Ten Bulls](#) (or Ox-Herding Pictures) of Zen Buddhism. Various interpretations as increasing cognitive subtlety in engaging with otherness (understood as a "bull"), these might also be appropriately understood as the stages or learnings in engaging with the "bull" now so characteristic of government propaganda and "spin" (*Transformation of Global Governance through Bullfighting*, 2009). The pattern has also been related to degrees of self-reflexivity in responding to the global problematic (*Progressive integration of the shadow of non-self-reflexivity*, 2007).

As a further exemplification of the above argument, the traditional linear sequence of those "ox-herding" images can however be configured in a circle as follows.

Circular representation of the classic *Ten Ox-Herding Pictures* of Zen Buddhism

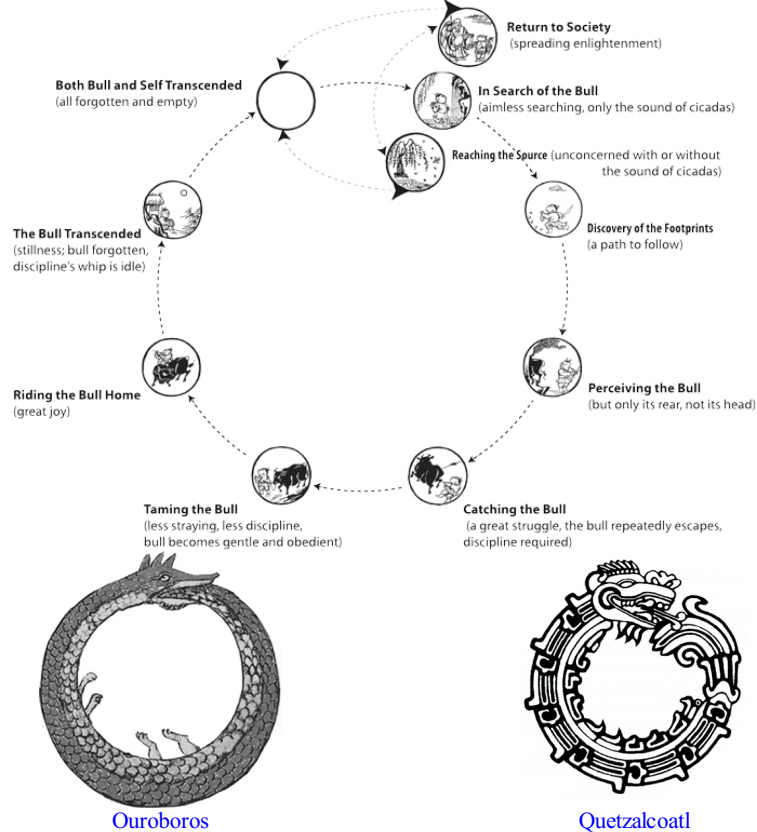


Adaptation into circular form of the traditional [linear version](#) in *Wikipedia*, as derived from [Nyogen Senzaki and Paul Reps, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: a collection of Zen and pre-Zen writings*](#) (Charles E. Tuttle, 1957)

With respect to the above argument for an "eightfold way", it is appropriate to note that the last two images of the sequence relate to cognitive modalities transcending the 8 dynamics held by the Mobius strips in the earlier diagram -- effectively subsequent to the cognitive modality of the eighth. They might be understood as relating to the two distinct axes of the toroidal form of the "necklace" -- that threading the individual strips together and that associated with its wearer.

The circular configuration of 10 images could then be reconfigured (as below) into an 8-fold pattern with the two additional modalities (or dimensions) represented as overlapping, encompassing or englobing the first in the original sequence. This can be understood as reminiscent of another traditional image, namely that of the [Ouroboros](#) -- the dragon "biting" its tale -- as a symbol of cyclical recurrence, understood cognitively. Mnemonically, the two additional images can then be recognized either as the "eyes" or the "jaws" of the dragon.

Suggestive reconfiguration of the above 10-fold circular ox-herding representation into the form of an "8-fold way" offering mnemonic associations to the cognitive vigilance implicit in the symbol of the Ouroboros



To the extent that the Mobius strips used in the "Kali necklace" configuration are visually reminiscent of the forms taken by feathers during bird flight, the toroidal form of the configuration is then suggestive of the [feathered serpent deity](#) of the Mesoamerican creation myth, as celebrated by [William Irwin Thompson \(*Blue Jade from the Morning Star: an essay and a cycle of poems on Quetzalcoatl*, 1983\)](#) and [D. H. Lawrence \(*The Plumed Serpent*, 1926\)](#). In addition to its association with worldwide variants of the myth of the "plumed-serpent" and the [caduceus](#), it has been specifically associated with the Ouroboros, especially since the feathered-serpent is occasionally depicted as biting its tail (as shown above).

Thompson uses such myth to advocate an approach he terms *Wissenkunst* ("knowledge-art"), namely "the play of knowledge in a world

of serious data-processors." (*The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light: mythology, sexuality and the origins of culture*, 1981) (Jeremy Johnson, *Bridging Worlds of Myth and Science: the poetic scholarship of William Irwin Thompson, Beams and Struts: a magazine for hungry brains and thirsty souls*, 2011).

Conclusion

The governance challenge of the future of civilization has been fruitfully framed as one of navigating the [adaptive cycle](#), notably by [Thomas Homer-Dixon](#) (*The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity, and the Renewal of Civilization*, 2006). The widespread tragic experience of "nothing", together with the high quality of the current "objective" reflection of astrophysicists on how experiential reality is engendered from "nothing", suggest an unexplored opportunity for reframing the potential of global governance.

One difficulty is the comprehensibility of the valuable insights of both the astrophysicists concerned with "nothing" and the systemic considerations relating to the adaptive cycle. Additionally both exclude the experiential dimension essential to the widespread credibility of such discourse. The question is how to embody such understanding (*Psychology of Sustainability: embodying cyclic environmental processes*, 2002). Geometry offers a key, especially given its metaphoric role in strategy formulation, as separately discussed (*Way Round Cognitive Ground Zero and Pointlessness*, 2012). Hence the focus on configuration in the argument above.

As an example, the "Kali necklace" configuration of "nothingness" ([above](#)) offers several fruitful associations. Whilst endeavouring to hold the paradoxical ambiguity of life experience in an "8-fold way", the image is however also suggestive of the design of both the [supercolliders](#) (used by physicist to advance their understanding of "nothing") and of the associated [nuclear fusion reactors](#) (offering hope for generating unlimited energy resources "from nothing"). Curiously these are reminiscent of the paradoxical traditional challenge of designing a container for that which can dissolve "anything" -- in this case the experiential sense of "nothingness".

It is possible that the cognitive patterns of such designs have implications for engaging more fruitfully with "nothingness" in the light of the arguments made separately for technomimicry (*Engendering a Psychopter through Biomimicry and Technomimicry*, 2011; *Enactivating a Cognitive Fusion Reactor: Imaginal Transformation of Energy Resourcing*, 2006; *Massive Elicitation of Psychosocial Energy: Requisite technology for collective enlightenment*, 2011). Is the experience of "nothingness" or "everythingness" to be associated with a cognitive analogue to the [superconductivity](#) essential to the design and operation of supercolliders (*Hyperaction through Hypercomprehension and Hyperdrive*, 2006)? Following the argument of the developer of the Bell helicopter, [Arthur M. Young](#), technomimicry might then be a key to the design of what he named as a psychopter -- a "winged self" (*The Geometry of Meaning*, 1976).

Whether in controlling a helicopter or a fusion reactor, the cognitive challenges are usefully highlighted by the feather-like Mobius loops in the "Kali necklace" figure. Through their resemblance to feathers, they are especially reminiscent of the process of "[feathering](#)" used in the [control of propellor blades](#), as a [re-entry technique for spacecraft](#), or in alternately [engaging and disengaging an automotive clutch](#). This cognitive "ambivalence" required in the experiential control of vehicles is echoed in the relevance of that metaphor to the [blurring of edges in computer graphics](#). It is suggestive of [liminality](#) as the nature of the art of engaging experientially with nothingness (*Living as an Imaginal Bridge between Worlds: global implications of "betwixt and between" and liminality*, 2011).

The requisite cognitive modality might then be appropriately described as "hovering" -- notably with respect to those depicted in the final phases of the *Zen Ox-herding images* ([above](#)) or in articulations relating to mystical engagement with the mundane. It can be usefully explored in the light of the integrative patterning developed by [Chris Lucas](#) (*What Difference Does It Make? Calresco*, 2006). Is the quest for the "hovering-modality" of sustainability then to be compared with that for the "Holy Grail" of global governance (*In Quest of Sustainability as Holy Grail of Global Governance*, 2011)? It is in this sense that the circular dynamic of the figures above, complete with "tail-biting", is so suggestive of both civilizational self-destruction ("eating itself alive" through consumption of [non-renewable resources](#)) and the remedial potential of embodiment of the adaptive cycle as a means of enabling a form of civilizational [immortality](#).

A further connotation is offered by failure to engage appropriately with the paradoxical implications of the Mobius strip, resulting in a reduction of complexity which could be understood as transforming understanding of the Mobius dynamic into a "thorn-like" problem through [reification](#). and "misplaced concreteness". Rather than the cognitive implications of the Kali-necklace or torc, the latter is then usefully depicted as a "crown of thorns", as separately discussed (*Implication of Toroidal Transformation of the Crown of Thorns*, 2010). The "hovering" to be sustained by a pattern of cognitive "feathering" is then appropriately explored through fluid dynamics, as in work of Douglas Hofstadter (*Fluid Concepts and Creative Analogies*, 1995), or in the light of that of [Viktor Schauberger](#), as discussed separately (*Enabling Governance through the Dynamics of Nature: exemplified by cognitive implication of vortices and helicoidal flow*, 2010).

Of further potential relevance to the future efficacy of governance is the widespread perception (by the "99%") that those at the highest level (the "1%") are primarily concerned with "feathering their own nest". This refers to the use of power and prestige by the latter to provide selfishly for themselves. Curiously this is reminiscent of a pattern which is a major preoccupation of astrophysics, namely [black holes](#) centered on [gravitational singularities](#) -- with the the universe itself understood as originating from such a singularity. As a pattern, "singularity" has been appropriated to recognize a [technological singularity](#). Of greater relevance to the above argument is recognition of a memetic form (*Emerging Memetic Singularity in the Global Knowledge Society*, 2009).

Nothingness is often described by those experiencing it as a "black hole", effectively a singularity framing the totality of their experience. In astrophysics singularities are distinguished according to whether they are covered or "cloaked" by an [event horizon](#) or not, namely whether light (and information) regarding them can be perceived from elsewhere. Appropriately this pattern, in its cloaked form, is shared both by those experiencing "nothingness" and by those experiencing "everythingness" -- as an incomprehensible transcendence of normal understanding, impossible for others to appreciate. In the case of those few amassing unimaginable wealth through "feathering their own nest", as "black holes" in the social system they necessarily operate in a realm in which their activities are effectively cloaked.

The lack of transparency associated with such "holes" is compounded by the evident complicity of governance and the military-industrial

complex -- inspiring every form of conspiracy theory. Curiously this effective censorship of information regarding them is consistent with the pattern explored by astrophysics, namely the [cosmic censorship hypothesis](#). It can of course also be seen in the pattern of systemic "ignorance" and denial regarding the condition of nothingness experienced by so many. The issue was highlighted by [Donald N. Michael](#) (*Leadership's shadow: the dilemma of denial, Futures*, 1994) as separately discussed (*The Future of Leadership: reframing the unknown*, 1994) to which the notion of "dragons" may well be relevant ([Tom Munnecke](#), *Let There Be Dragons: ways of managing the unknown*, 2002). The [serpent-like dragon](#), curled as guardian around the sacred [tree of supernal knowlege](#) (notably in the [Garden of the Hesperides](#)), is common to the mythology of the Abrahamic religions.

As a holding pattern, both the "Kali necklace" and the feathered-serpent Quetzlacoatl, embody the serpentine connotations of the challenge of engaging vigilantly with the dangers of chaos. Appropriately the serpent metaphor has been explicitly used in recognizing the nature of the instabilities of plasma in a toroidal fusion reactor -- as with those of the financial system -- and in understanding the design requirements to govern them appropriately. The art of governing both might well be described as implicit in "feathering" the "serpent" -- as in the creation myth with which Quetzlacoatl and other "plumed serpents" are associated.

The numerous efforts to suggest the dynamics of a feathered-serpent through imagery, as with the many currently appreciated animations and enactments of the dragon, are suggestive of an imaginative confluence of requisite insight into the "operation" of what is traditionally symbolized by the Ouroboros. With the increasing role of China in global civilization, it is perhaps extremely appropriate that an argument in terms of "*Wissenkunst*" should be made at the start of the much-anticipated *Year of the Dragon* (*Year of the Dragon brings promise of change*, *CBC News*, 22 January 2012; *Chinese New Year 2012 rings in Year of the Dragon*, *EarthSky: a clear voice for science*, 22 January 2012; *Year of The Water Dragon: 12 Chinese maritime developments to look for in 2012*, *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 January 2012).

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