



laetus in praesens

Alternative view of segmented documents via Kairos

25 March 2012 | Draft

Towards the Dynamic Art of Partial Comprehension

-- / --

Introduction

Shadows, shades of gray and *wabi sabi*

(In)comprehension as impermanence and mindlessness

Probabilistic worldview

Partial (in)comprehension

Imperfect comprehension

Requisite incomprehension

Comprehensive patterning of (in)comprehension and (im)perfection

References

Annex B of *Living with Incomprehension and Uncertainty: re-cognizing the varieties of non-comprehension and misunderstanding* (2012)

Introduction

Shared binary commitment: Curiously, and as illustrated by Catholic commentary on the Galileo Affair ([main paper](#)), science and religion share a profound commitment to binary logic. This takes the form of truth/falsehood, right/wrong, correct/incorrect, believer/nonbeliever, etc -- as variously interpreted. Shades of gray are condemned. This commitment is evident in the military operations they variously reinforce -- in the distinction between friend/enemy, or victory/defeat, and the very nature of launching missiles against targets. As profit/loss, the latter pattern permeates commercial marketing and foreign policy, as previously discussed (*Us and Them: Relating to Challenging Others*, 2009; *Enhancing Sustainable Development Strategies through Avoidance of Military Metaphors*, 1998).

Ironically this logic is applied by religion to science and by science to religion -- with little evident capacity to reframe their relationship fruitfully. For religion, unbelief in divinity is highly questionable as a form of incomprehension, and even worthy of the severest condemnation. For science, such belief is a manifestation of incomprehension of the truth of evidence-based methodology, and similarly worthy of the severest condemnation.

Aesthetic subtlety: Equally curious is the manner in which each of these values aesthetic dimensions, somehow distinct from the binary preoccupations. Religions reinforce the significance of their insight through artistic expression, whether in painting, architecture or music. Beauty and elegance are variously celebrated by the sciences, notably the natural sciences. The military celebrate their values through music, pomp and ceremony. Strategies may be valued as elegant. In the case of the military, a curious insight into (in)comprehension is achieved by [Chris Hedges](#) (*War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, 2002), most recently in the aesthetic coherence of the attitudes of combat soldiers on the ground in Afghanistan -- in relation to the killing of 16 Afghan women and children by a US soldier who "cracked" (*Murder Is Not an Anomaly in War*, [TruthDig.com](#), 19 March 2012).

Shadows, shades of gray and *wabi sabi*

Shadows: The interplay between extremes is fruitfully reframed by consideration of shadows and their cognitive implications as variously explored, most notably in the light of their aesthetic importance:

- Roberto Casati (*Shadows: Unlocking Their Secrets, from Plato to Our Time*, 2004)
- Michael Baxandall (*Shadows and Enlightenment*, 1997)
- Victor I. Stoichita (*Short History of the Shadow*, 1997)
- Junichiro Tanizaki (*In Praise of Shadows*, 1977)

The insights derived from degrees and patterns of shadow, and the manner by which they are engendered, are clearly of value in recognizing the nature of (in)comprehension and the manner by which it may itself be patterned. The creative aesthetic approach to

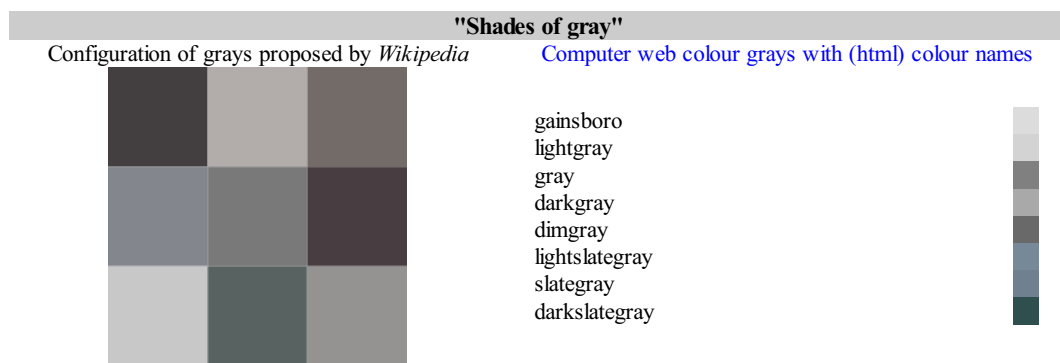
shadow fruitfully reframes the simplistic consideration of:

- comprehension = light, enlightenment
- incomprehension = dark, ignorance

The value of shadow is usefully "highlighted" by the appreciation of candlelight dinners, the ambiance they engender, and the nature of the communication they facilitate -- understood to be inhibited by an excess of "light", whether in a literal or metaphorical sense..

Shades of gray: Of related interest to shadow, the arts actively explores and value "shades of gray" -- reframing narrow preoccupation with a "false note" or "perfect pitch". As a metaphor, such shades are associated with recognition of the rich variety of human relationships and how they may be valued.

Technically it is interesting to note the distinctions recognized, as in the *Wikipedia* entry on "[variations of gray](#)". These include a pattern of [computer web colour grays](#) (as noted below), a set of 6 [achromatic grays](#), a set of 4 [off-grays](#), a set of 5 [cool grays](#), a set of 5 [warm grays](#).



Aesthetics of wabi sabi: The recognition of shadows is taken further by Japanese aesthetics through *wabi sabi* -- an appreciation of "imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete" -- perhaps to be appropriately extended to include degrees of "incomprehension":

- Andrew Juniper (*Wabi Sabi: The Japanese Art of Impermanence*, 2003)
- Diane Durston (*Wabi Sabi: The Art of Everyday Life*, 2006)
- Robyn Griggs Lawrence (*Simply Imperfect: Revisiting the Wabi-Sabi House*, 2011)



(In)comprehension as impermanence and mindlessness

Impermanence: Insight into the nature of [impermanence](#) is a key focus of Buddhism (as *anicca*), whereby everything is recognized as in a state of flux, of increase and decrease. Within this framework it follows that attachment to any form engenders suffering as a consequence of the change to which it is subject. An equivalent insight at the origin of Western philosophy, is that of [Heraclitus](#), famed for the alleged assertion: *No man ever steps in the same river twice* or *Everything flows*. Curiously [Siddhartha Gautama](#) and Heraclitus may well have been alive at the same time.

Paradoxically, for Buddhists, it is the incomprehension of impermanence which engenders suffering. However paradox is also evident in the assertion of impermanence being a form in its own right.

The challenge of (in)comprehension under conditions of impermanence -- as in recognizing shapes in clouds or flowing water -- has been variously recognized. With respect to a play by Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro note that in the response of Oedipus to Theseus (who cannot understand how his initiative should bring his city into conflict with its closest ally):

His belief in the permanence of the laws of his city and the alliances it constructs with other cities prevents him from seeing the same limit to his city's power that he sees in himself. Yet for the audience, in their current political situation, that limit is all too

distressingly apparent. This incomprehension evokes from Oedipus one of the great speeches of the play, in which he points out to Theseus the inevitable pattern of change and transformation that underlies all aspects of human life and that goes to the heart of the limit of human power:

*Dearest son of Aegus, none but the gods
escape old age and death; all else
time in its relentless flood sweeps away.
The strength of earth and of the body fades,
trust dies and distrust flourishes,
and the same spirit never endures
between friend and friend, city and city.
For some now, for others later,
joy becomes bitterness, then bitterness joy.*
(671-79/607-15)

Essential, then, to the kind of understanding Oedipus has, giving him the ability to judge both himself and others, is an awareness of the fundamental impermanence of the natural and the constructed world in which humans live. In the face of that impermanence, the challenge is to find the solid ground on which to base the choices we make and the actions we perform. (*The Complete Sophocles: The Theban Plays By Sophocles*, 2010, p. 314)

The argument is remarkably applicable to the current challenges of global governance and the assumptions typically made by superpowers confident in their dominance. The intimate relationship between impermanence and incomprehension is evident in the manner in which both comprehension and incomprehension may increase and decrease within the pattern of change -- as with recognition that this is so.

As an appropriate metaphor of illusions of permanence, a remarkable discussion of impermanence is offered by Simon Gregg (*Some Notes on Impermanence*, 2008, pp. 6-17) in relation to a city (Simon Gregg and Peter Andrew Barrett, *The Impermanent City: the rise and fall of Melbourne's skyline*, 2008). The focus is not about architecture in the normal sense, but cultural memory as manifest in architectural residue:

In this it echoes the sentiments of noted epistemologist [Michel Foucault](#), when he said, *My object is not language but the archive, that is to say the accumulated existence of discourse*. Buildings and building fragments form the symbolic framework of this discussion. Here, the spaces around fragments are not merely empty voids but charged, highly contested and politicised bodies.... The ruins and fragments of contemporary society, as noted by writer Dylan Trigg, *are privileged spaces, which simultaneously invoke reactions of repulsion and sublimity* [*The Aesthetics of Decay: nothingness, nostalgia, and the absence of reason* 2006]. Other buildings step politely over ruined fragments, or shuffle nervously around them, not quite sure how to approach them and confused as to why they linger on, when they are clearly no longer wanted or needed....

Fragments are like the empirical footprints left from former building epochs: the visible tip of a larger body now ghostly and spectral. Their protrusion into this reality is with the apparent improbability of having emerged from another, representing the impact point of two colliding universes. They are at once surreal and concrete, and curiously seem to attract a degree of embarrassment from those not in total ignorance of them.... Further, revelation of the fragment restores cultural memory to the public consciousness. For this reason it is often actively banished, obscured and belittled by political forces, for fear it may expose the flaws and weaknesses in society. The process of historical transformation revives *memories which*, as Chris Townsend has noted, *the dominant discourses that motivate such transformation often would have rather remained invisible*.

Such articulation serves to highlight the complex relationship between (in)comprehension and (im)permanence -- and the challenges to collective memory.

"Mindlessness": Whether in the light of Western or Eastern inspiration, an unusual mode of (in)comprehension is seemingly required to engage with impermanence and change -- one which does not grasp at temporary forms, as with attributing permanence to the forms of swirls in the river or clouds. Buddhism has given much attention to the nature of this modality, most notably exploring notions of "emptying the mind" of questionable forms, of "mindlessness", and of "emptiness" (Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness*, 1983; Joan Stambaugh, *Impermanence is Buddha-Nature*, 1990) .

As translated by Christopher Cleary (*On The Way* by Zen Master Ta Hui, *Daily Zen Journal*, 1977):

The path of Mindlessness is easy to seek out. So-called Mindlessness is not being inert and unknowing like earth, wood, tile, or stone. It means that the mind is settled and imperturbable when in contact with situations and meeting circumstances. Such a mind does not cling to anything, but is clear in all places, without hindrance or obstruction. Without being stained, yet without dwelling in the stainlessness this mind views the body and mind like a dream or illusion, yet without remaining in the perspective of dream's and illusion's empty nothingness.

In Western terms it might be framed as cognition "with a light touch", or through the cognitive equivalent to the adage "don't push the river, guide the canoe".

Probabilistic worldview

It is of course a misrepresentation to imply that science, the military, governance or marketing are unable to handle "shades of gray" -- despite their fundamental binary commitment. The necessity is reframed in terms of [probability](#), as for the military (target destruction), governance (opinion polls), and marketing (success rate). More intriguing is the religious case where there is a need to recognize degrees of sin (potentially requiring the severest of sanctions), or of holiness (potentially requiring recognition of some form of sainthood), but with the possibility of "flexible" allowance (in some cases) for the foibles of "human nature". In distinguishing "shades of gray", the language of probability offers the notion of [confidence intervals](#) with which are associated confidence levels. Behaviourally these might well be understood in terms of so-called [comfort zones](#).

A probabilistic vision of the world has been integrated into aesthetic and religious considerations by the statistician-philosopher [Vasily Nalimov](#) (*Realms of the Unconscious: the enchanted frontier*, ISI Press, 1982). This offers a remarkable synthesis, drawing on the entire range of knowledge (including elements of semantics, natural and social sciences, mysticism, and the arts) in an effort to understand how the human mind perceives the world. The methodology is borrowed largely from physics (as capable of tolerating paradoxes within its own theories), with considerable attention to the role of metaphor and the function of human imagination in capturing manifestations of consciousness and unconsciousness.

Partial (in)comprehension

Partial language acquisition: The argument can be reframed more specifically in relation to the learning and use of languages. Typically the focus is on learning a language "completely", thereby severely restricting the number it is possible for the average person to learn -- especially since most make no claim to be fully competent in their mother tongue. In practice many with a need to communicate for a variety of specific purposes have only a (modest) degree of knowledge of a number of languages. They may use these without the ambition of avoiding errors -- provided an adequate level of communication is ensured. The need for competence may vary significantly between reading, writing and comprehension -- as in the case of "comprehension" of TV programmes and movies, with the possibility of a degree of audience satisfaction using competence at far less than 50%.

There is then an art to partial comprehension, especially where the need for greater competence is questionable -- even if there is that (theoretical) possibility. Arguably greater satisfaction can be derived from comprehending a greater variety of languages to more modest levels than through comprehending a single language to a high level of competence. For some this would offer the potential of greater competence and thrival ability in a multi-lingual society.

This example may be extended to other "languages", of which computer languages offer a useful illustration. This can be shown in the case of two Adobe applications (Photoshop and Illustrator), widely used in image production and manipulation, most notably for the web. As occasional creator of images using those applications, it is quite clear (to this writer) that only a small fraction of the features may be effectively used or even comprehended -- and that there is little need or motivation to acquire greater expertise, given other priorities.

This suggests that much greater attention should be given to the art of combining (very) partial skills, especially where that art may benefit considerably from being able to compensate for (relative) incompetence in one language by substitution of features from another -- perhaps increasing the challenge for the other party in a communication process. This interplay is evident in multilingual societies where a degree of partial appreciation of languages (very) poorly understood may be fruitful to social processes.

Substandard habitat construction: The art of partial comprehension may be even more evident in the construction of habitats, especially in resource-challenged environments. Whereas total comprehension of the most appropriate possibilities of building design may be evident to an expert, such insight may be of limited use where the resources are lacking. The most obvious example is the design and construction of a shack in a refugee camp or slum area, as contrasted with what might be advocated or required under other circumstances. Many are obliged to make use of that to which they have direct access in practice -- **making do with what they have** -- rather than seeking to emulate what might be otherwise advised. This is especially the case for those obliged to construct their habitats themselves.

The notion of "habitat" can of course be extended to a cognitive analogue -- to the cultural framework or worldview within which people live and which reflects their identity. This could be related to the argument of [Magoroh Maruyama](#) who distinguishes between "polyocular vision" and "subunderstanding" (Polyocular Vision or Subunderstanding, *Organization Studies*, 25, 2004, 3, pp. 467-480). It uses highlights the question of the requisite variety of "modes of knowing" for a well-rounded approach to life.

The organizational framework for the governance of society can be similarly understood as a form of "habitat" -- similarly constrained by the resources for its design and construction. Understandings of "democracy" merit reflection in such terms -- beyond the assertion of Winston Churchill that: *It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried*. Prudence is indicated when this assertion is made in societies which make no attempt to "try" alternative possibilities, to reflect on their possibility, or which actively intervene to disrupt such experiments, as in the case of the direct US involvement in the [Chilean coup d'état](#) (1973). This mindset effectively precludes the emergence of alternatives to democracy in which the future will presumably rejoice -- if innovation in governance is to be expected in the centuries to come. This raises the question as to whether the process of constitutional amendments will be seen as are mere tinkering from a future perspective (Sanford Levinson, *Responding to Imperfection: the theory and practice of constitutional amendment*, 1995).

Unfortunately the uncritical enthusiasm with which initiatives are undertaken to spread democracy around the world -- as an absolute good -- fail to take account of their relevance to societies obliged to make do with what they have. These merit comparison with efforts to ensure that severely resource-constrained societies restrict their building design and construction to the standards and materials of those of the most developed societies -- those priding themselves on the most complete comprehension of appropriate design. The

consequences of the application of this logic are only too evident in the disastrous aftermath of the delivery of "democracy" to Iraq, and in the process of its delivery to Afghanistan. This logic takes little account of criticism of democratic processes in the societies in which they are most fully implemented -- most notably signalled by accusations of corruption, electoral fraud and influence peddling.

Imperfect comprehension

Obsessive quest for comprehension and control: The argument emphasizes the point that current concerns with "[total information awareness](#)" may not be the most fruitful under the circumstances -- especially when the assumption is made that everything is being monitored appropriately, despite periodic indications that this is far from the case. The latest such example, at the time of writing, is the apparent failure to monitor a US soldier who "cracked" and the failure to monitor a known escapee from Kandahar prison -- both of whom massacred innocents, the former in Kandahar the latter in France. It is curious that major democracies should be evolving into a condition of control freakery -- mocked by them in the case of the former Soviet bloc.

The nervous need to grasp for explanatory closure is not suggestive of collective, self-assured maturity -- rather the contrary, namely of societies petrified by their own shadows (potentially to be understood in a psychoanalytical sense). As implied above, assumption of closure with total control precludes future discovery and development. It is a characteristic of [silo thinking](#) and reduces the capacity to envisage and respond to surprises.

The challenge is central to consideration of large computer systems. It was the theme of [6th IWPC International Workshop Program Comprehension](#) (1998), notably in the paper by (K. Erdos, *Partial comprehension of complex programs (enough to perform maintenance)*). A more recent clarification of the issue indicates:

Partial comprehension is a necessity in the evolution and maintenance of very large software systems. The programmers form not only partial comprehension of the code, but also partial comprehension of the application domain. To describe the comprehension process, we introduce ontology fragments and investigate how programmers form, use and extend them before and during concept location; concept location is a prerequisite of code changes. We conducted case studies of concept location in two large systems, Eclipse and Mozilla, that both have more than 50,000 methods. Using grep search and ontology fragments, the programmers were able to locate the concepts after inspecting on average less than 10 methods and operating with ontology fragments of around 14 concepts, a very small fraction of the total. (Maksym Petrenko, et al., *Partial Domain Comprehension in Software Evolution and Maintenance*, 16th IEEE International Conference on Program Comprehension, 2008).

Of particular interest therefore is consideration of a "unification theory" in this light (Ron Cottam, Nils Langloh, Willy Ranson and Emilie Cottam, *Humble Unification Theory: Partial Comprehension in a Quasi-Particulate Universe*, 1995):

It is possible to represent the dynamic nature of the understanding of our surroundings in a way which is similar to the scientific description of reactionary phenomena, with regions of stability corresponding to general acceptance of currently formulated perceptions, and regions of instability which give birth to the evolution of dramatic comprehensional phase changes in which previously stable perceptions are modified, replaced or annihilated.... We propose that comprehension itself can be looked upon as the localised result of a "survival"-type computation, and consequently that it can be treated as a quasi-particle, similarly to all other (real) localised entities. Quasi-particle emergence and stabilisation in this scheme consistently depend on "local" criteria, as for electron-positron emergence in "free space". If this description is valid, we should expect to see the "materialisation" somewhere in large-scale neural computational structures of extremely localised high-level perceptual representations of environmental features. It may be that there is an intimate link between this expectation and the emergence of semi-autonomous activity "bubbles" in continuum neural field theory modeling of the brain.

Imperfect implementation of strategic initiatives: It is curious that the approach to strategic initiatives worldwide focuses in advance on their appropriate completion in the light of the idealistic vision of their promoters. The reality of many projects is a degree of partial completion, if not virtually total failure (*EU-funded projects in Palestine destroyed by Israel*, *European Voice*, 22 March 2012).

The above argument suggests a degree of merit to a focus on the art of partial implementation -- of imperfect implementation -- as the nature of the reality with which people may be expected to live, after the promoters have "moved on". As phrased with respect to Iraq by Jim Molan (*Generals, statesmen, bureaucrats and 'strategy'*, *The Interpreter*, 16 August 2011): *There is a certain inevitability that these issues of strategic imperfection will not be addressed until the wolf is at the door.*

It is appropriate to note that economists have been obliged to give consideration to "imperfection" in the models of perfect markets (*Strategic Trade Policy: modelling imperfection*, Center for Economic Policy Research, 1990). Information "imperfections" have been explored as opportunities (Onno Truijens and Ard Huizing, *The Strategic Potential of Information Imperfections*). They have even been praised by Neil Bendle (*In Praise of Imperfection*, *Knowledge Quarterly*, 17 December 2010):

Bankers often strive for the perfect metric. This beguiling vision is paradoxically a problem for the adoption of metrics. Rejection of all metrics sometimes follows, as people realize that the metric didn't solve all of their problems.... But here's something that might. I'd like to provide a final and far less intuitive reason for continuing to use metrics: the very imperfectness of their nature can prove invaluable in aiding communication.

Most measurements have flaws. But these imperfections are the very sparks that ignite discussion, expose underlying assumptions and help to align strategy and tactics.... Even imperfect metrics hold tremendous power to bring assumptions to the

surface and facilitate healthy, productive communication.

(*Uncritical Strategic Dependence on Little-known Metrics*, 2009)

Requisite incomprehension

Requisite incomprehension for learning and innovation: Encouragement of lifelong learning requires a creative engagement with incomprehension -- building on knowledge at hand, irrespective of whether others elsewhere have access to far greater and more appropriate knowledge. Efforts to acquire or inculcate perfect comprehension prior to action, inhibit both action and innovation.

Adjusting to a degree of incomprehension implies an accommodation with making mistakes vital to learning. In introducing a discussion of learning from mistakes, Jonah Lehrer (*Why Do Some People Learn Faster?* *Wired*, 4 October 2011) remarks:

The physicist Niels Bohr once defined an expert as "a person who has made all the mistakes that can be made in a very narrow field." Bohr's quip summarizes one of the essential lessons of learning, which is that people learn how to get it right by getting it wrong again and again. Education isn't magic. Education is the wisdom wrung from failure.

As argued by Donald N. Michael (*On Learning to Plan and Planning to Learn*, 1973):

More bluntly, future-responsive societal learning makes it necessary for individuals and organizations to embrace error. It is the only way to ensure a shared self-consciousness about limited theory to the nature of social dynamics, about limited data for testing theory, and hence about our limited ability to control our situation well enough to be successful more often than not. ("On the requirement to embrace error")

A classic poetic expression of that insight is that of **John Keats**, (*Negative Capability*, 1817): *Capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.*

Such perspectives suggest that a characteristic of the knowledge-learning society of the future may well be the multiples instances of people "re-discovering the wheel", and perhaps the special theory of relativity -- but for themselves.

Requisite incomprehension in relationships: Whilst a strong case is frequently made for mutual "comprehension" in any partnership relationship, the above argument stresses the complementary need for "incomprehension". This avoids the need for "comprehensive" knowledge of the other which may well be experienced as unnecessarily invasive and indicative of insecurity. Not knowing gives the other space and allows for the possibility of surprise -- itself possibly vital to sustaining the magic of the relationship.

Requisite incomprehension in dialogue: As in the case of partnership relationships, fruitful dialogue may depend on sustaining a degree of mutual incomprehension -- avoiding the fretful need for comprehensive knowledge of each other. This is especially the case amongst a group of individuals with complementary styles and insights (Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams: creating the high-performance organization*, 1992; *The Discipline of Teams*, 2001).

Comprehensive patterning of (in)comprehension and (im)perfection

The patterning of colour offers one indication as to how to think about the possibilities for patterning (in)comprehension. This follows from the extremes of white and black, notably as potentially patterned into shades of gray (as indicated above). More challenging is the recognition of the continuing challenge of ordering the [spectrum of colours](#) into a comprehensive framework.

Degrees of "dot connectivity": In the quest for a way of providing a form of container for what otherwise appears as a challenging (white-black) polarization, one approach is to benefit from the yin/yang coding system explored in Chinese culture -- more simply in the *Ba Gua* pattern of 8 distinctions, further developed into the 64 distinctions of the *I Ching*. The argument is then that "comprehension" can be indicated by the unbroken "connectivity" of the yang line, in contrast to incomprehension as the "disconnectivity" of the yin line. In effect this is then a way of elaborating the process commonly described as "connecting the dots", most recently with respect to intelligence analysis by Kevin Fenton (*Disconnecting the Dots*, 2011).

Several explorations of related possibilities are described separately (*Discovering Richer Patterns of Comprehension to Reframe Polarization*, 1998; *Transformation Metaphors -- derived experimentally from the Chinese Book of Changes (I Ching) for sustainable dialogue, vision, conferencing, policy, network, community and lifestyle*, 1997; *Unknown Undoing: challenge of incomprehensibility of systemic neglect*, 2008).

Sterile interpretations: Of particular interest is the sense in which any such distinctions are equally (but differently) valued, rather than reinforcing cognitive entrapment in restrictive and unfruitful understandings of:

- comprehension = good, right, enlightened, positive, connected
- incomprehension = bad, wrong, ignorance, negative, disconnected

Expressed otherwise, it is an effort to move beyond the sense in which the "white" keys on a piano could be unfruitfully valued as "positive", and the "black" keys as "negative" -- thereby encouraging questionable efforts to make music with the white keys only. The approach endeavours to highlight the value of disconnection, for example, as a complement to that associated with connection. The possibilities of fruitful interplay between connection and disconnection are especially evident in the case of electrical systems -- exemplified by the ability to turn a light on or off.

A problematic interpretation is evident in the implication, now widely propagated with respect to social networking, that "connection" is "good", in contrast to "non-connection" -- curiously conflated with interpretation of "connected" in terms of telecommunication connectivity. These simplistic connotations have notably been challenged by William Powers (*Hamlet's Blackberry: a practical philosophy for building a good life in the Digital Age*, 2010).

The argument is far from trivial given the problematic consequences of associating yang with male and yin with female, such as to imply that yang is "good" and yin is "bad". With the elaborated variants understood as a form of game between yang and yin, the argument can be taken further (*Tao of Engagement -- Weaponised Interactions and Beyond: Fibonacci's magic carpet of games to be played for sustainable global governance*, 2010).

Variety of distinctions: Focusing on the possibility of distinct degrees of comprehension and incomprehension, and the manner in which they might interweave, the classical 8-fold Ba Gua pattern evokes the question of how these distinctions are recognized and valued in practice. Especially interesting is the possibility of drawing on insight into (in)comprehension in both interpersonal relationship and in patterns of dialogue -- in the light of recognition of the forms of (in)comprehension variously experienced and valued.

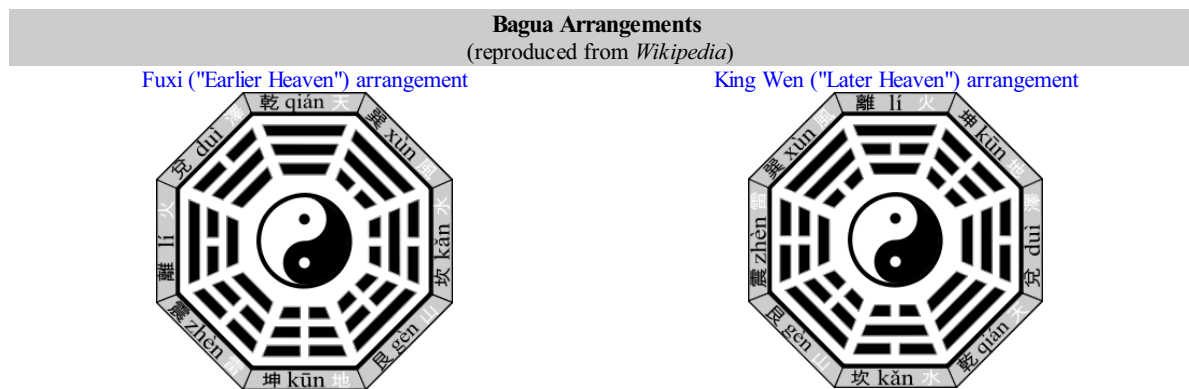
Again it is not simply a question of focusing on the "harmonious" and "peaceful" -- quickly recognized as unchallenging and boring in practice, as well-illustrated in music and drama. "Human" relationships call for a larger palette of colours or melodic devices -- readily evident in the exploration of drama capable of holding attention. These examples all point to the role of time in allowing for, or requiring, a pattern of alternation between the various form of (in)comprehension.

Rock vs Water? It is in this sense that a fruitful contrast is made by Edward de Bono between "rock logic" and "water logic" (*Water Logic*, 1993). The former restricts attention to a static pattern, with the latter highlighting a dynamic pattern. However the contrast also helps to emphasize the need for both in practice -- as is only too evident in the environment -- rather than encouraging cognitive entrapment in "rock" = "bad", and "water" = "good" -- or the need to switch from one to the other (*Recontextualizing Social Problems through Metaphor: transcending the switch metaphor*, 1990).

However, given the dependency on "rock logic" in practice, the need for the exploration of "water logic" is evident. There are various examples of such explorations (Douglas Hofstadter, *Fluid Concepts and Creative Analogies: computer models of the fundamental mechanisms of thought*, 1995; Viktor Schauberger). Their implications are discussed separately (*Enabling Governance through the Dynamics of Nature: exemplified by cognitive implication of vortices and helicoidal flow*, 2010).

Patterns of change: Providing a form of container for patterns of (in)comprehension, rather than implying a need to switch from incomprehension to comprehension, for example, offers a richer approach to the kind of "change" so widely sought and acclaimed. It suggests that the change may not be unidirectional -- from Bad Now to Good Future -- but that the change may rather be the embodiment of a pattern of alternation between conditions variously approximate to different circumstances. As the so-called *Book of Changes*, the *I Ching* offers insights that merit "mining" in the sense indicated by Susantha Goonatilake (*Toward a Global Science: mining civilizational knowledge*, 1999).

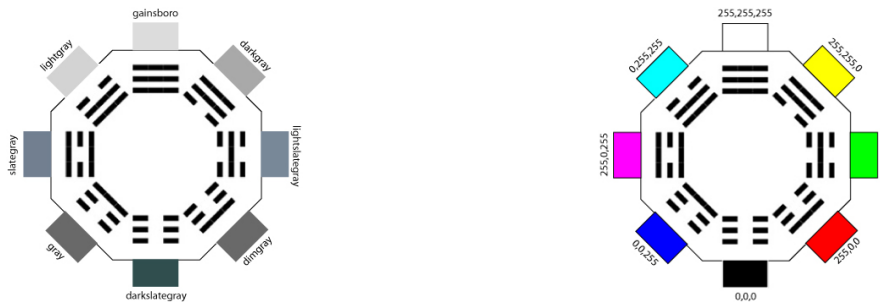
That coding system can be used to explore an 8-fold set of distinctions of forms of (in)comprehension, corresponding to the classical Bagua pattern. This is conventionally presented in two distinct arrangements of the same trigrams. Here, as a basis for discussion, a trigram of 3 unbroken lines is considered as representing "comprehension" (maximum connectivity), and that with 3 broken lines as "incomprehension" (maximum disconnectivity). There are then 6 intermediary conditions.



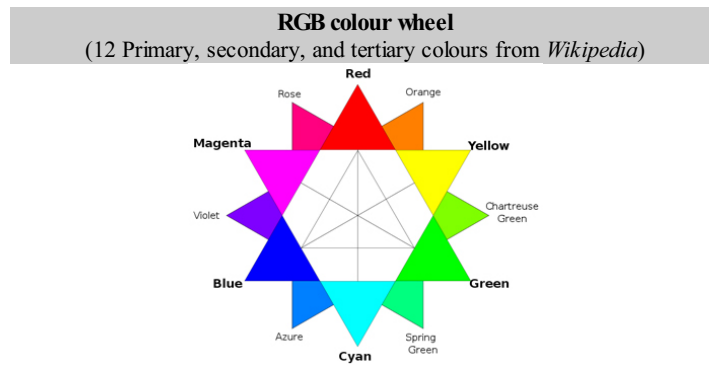
One merit of this representation is that it is strongly associated in its interpretation in Chinese culture with the sense in which **the trigram conditions in the pattern are indicative of conditions changing into one another within the pattern** -- effectively as the constituent lines "flicker" between unbroken and broken. **It is therefore indicative of a pattern of alternation appropriate to insight into the shifting conditions of (in)comprehension.**

Patterns of colour: Use of colour, as mentioned above, offers a way of further clarifying degrees of (in)comprehension by applying the 8 "shades of gray" distinguished in the Wikipedia presentation to the Bagua arrangement, using the Fuxi arrangement as an example in the image below. Here it is assumed that the darker the colour, the greater the "incomprehension".

Association of "colours" to the Bagua Fu Xi arrangement	
Indicative association of 8 "shades of gray"	Indicative association of 8 "colours"
(standard computer names are added for the shades)	(colours defined according to RGB colour model , according to lines: 255=unbroken line, 0=broken line)

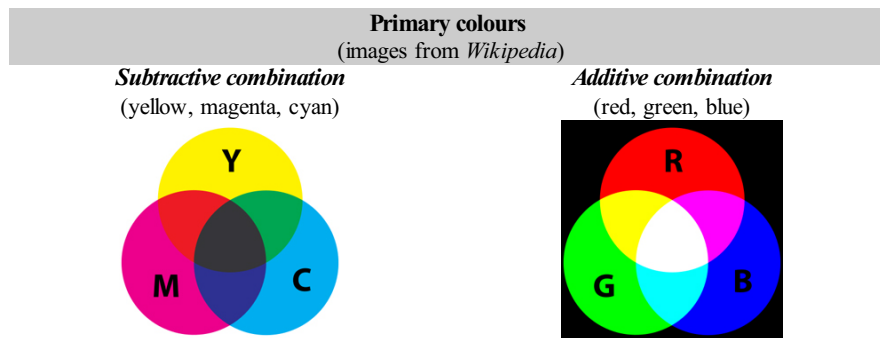


The variety of distinctions in the representation of (in)comprehension can be taken further in this way. The range of "shades of gray" can be extended to 16, for example. This could be represented using the Chinese convention by extending the above 3-line pattern to one with 4-lines. It is appropriate to note that there are many more "shades of gray" generated by combinations of red, green and blue. For example, a table of 33 shades of gray (including black and white) is obtained by using combinations of red, green and blue in equal proportions. There are many kinds of colour wheel (or colour circle), produced as an abstract organization of color hues around a circle that shows relationships between primary colours, secondary colors, tertiary colours, complementary colours, etc.



As an example, given their historically unfruitful relationship, fruitful discussion could potentially emerge from associating the three Abrahamic religions with different primary colours (red, green, and blue) in such a wheel. This offers the delightful possibility of a comparative "colour theology" -- in the light of its traditional exploration (cf Rudolf Ritsma, *The Realms of Colour*, 1974).

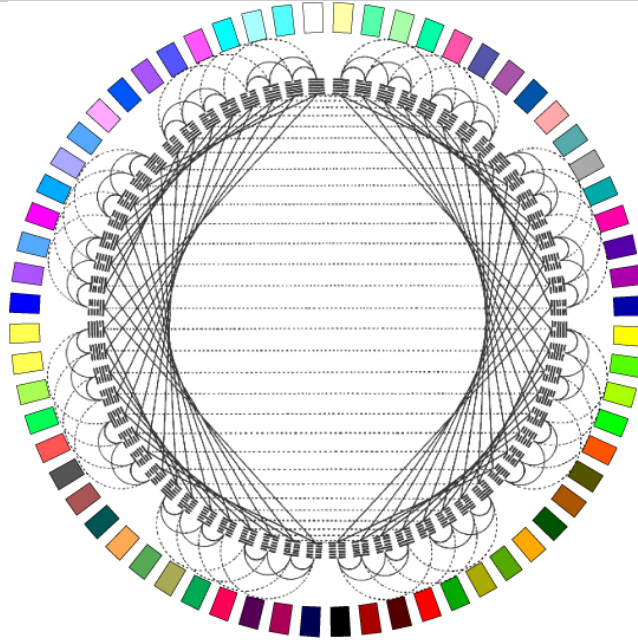
As additive colours, starting without light (as black), they together constitute white -- suggestive of their shared inspiration. As subtractive colours, starting with light (white), they together form black -- suggestive of the unproductive conflicts in which they repeatedly indulge, through the theocratic countries most representative of them. The dynamics are defined in geopolitical terms by Johan Galtung (*Islamism, Christianity, Judaism, Hoggar Institute*, 25 April 2011). The representation is of course provocative in that it implies that the comprehension within each religion, of the essential inspiration they share, is necessarily "partial" rather than "total" -- which would be consistent with any sense in which its nature is claimed to be mysterious. The example of course excludes consideration of the role of other religions in any such spectrum. As presented the argument is simplistic, given the detailed technical insight into colour -- offering a richer exploration of its use as a metaphor, as suggested by the complementarity in the RGB colour wheel between the colours in the two images below.



Potentially of greater value in exploring the representation of degrees of (in)comprehension is the use of other colours. For example, 16 colours are specifically named for use on the web: aqua, black, blue, fuchsia, gray, green, lime, maroon, navy, olive, purple, red, silver, teal, white, and yellow. As an experiment, the approach can be extended (in the figure below) to the pattern of 64 dynamically interlinked hexagrams, as described separately (*Alternating between Complementary Conditions -- for sustainable dialogue, vision, conference, policy, network, community and lifestyle*, 1981). The pattern is used as the logo of this website.

Experimental association of "colours" to the 64 hexagrams of the I Ching
 (colours defined according to the RGB colour model, using the set of 3 double lines in a hexagram to distinguish RGB
 broken/broken=0, broken/unbroken=85, unbroken/broken=170,
 unbroken/unbroken=255)

[lowest doublet: upper left quadrant=255; upper right quadrant=170; lower left quadrant=85; lower right quadrant=0]



Previous experiments with this pattern offer access, from each of the 64 positions, to classical Chinese commentary adapted with respect to [Dialogue](#) / [Vision](#) / [Conference](#) / [Policy](#) / [Network](#) / [Community](#) / [Lifestyle](#)

The above experiment invites a number of comments regarding its inadequacies. Clearly the manner of attribution of RGB colours to the hexagrams is arbitrary. The allocation could be reversed, reading the "red" value as the bottom doublet rather than the top. The pattern is suggestive of such alternative readings (as discussed in the [commentary](#)). Of interest is the questionable symmetry/complementarity of the colours across the image. It is appropriate to note that use was not made of so-called [web-safe colours](#).

Conclusion

Reflection on the "art of partial comprehension" suggests several areas to which it can fruitfully apply, following from the argument above:

Science vs. Religion?: There are of course initiatives by the religious to accommodate science and by science to accommodate religion. At the time of writing the *New Scientist* offers a special issue on [The God Issue: the surprising new science of religion](#) (17 March 2012). The introductory editorial argues:

In our enlightened world, god is still everywhere. In the UK, arguments rage over "militant atheism" and the place of religion in public life. In the US, religion is again taking centre stage in the presidential election. Try as we might, we just don't seem to be able to let go. Perhaps that is because we have been looking at god the wrong way. Atheists often see gods and religion as being imposed from above, a bit like a totalitarian regime. But religious belief is more subtle and interesting than that. In these articles we lay out a new scientific vision that promises to, if not resolve ancient tensions, at least reset the terms of the debate.

Separately the widely publicized view of scientific atheism of [Richard Dawkins](#) (*The God Delusion*, 2006) has been used to reframe assumptions regarding consensual belief systems, including science (*The Consensus Delusion: Mysterious attractor undermining global civilization as currently imagined*, 2011). The dependence on faith and belief, understood generally, suggests that "theology" might be fruitfully reframed to encompass the range of approaches to fundamental integrative belief, especially where those formulations substitute for the "divine" -- or are effectively treated as such.

As separately argued, there is a need for the study of belief systems -- or systems of confidence -- through which people are called upon to give coherence to their lives (*Mathematical Theology: future science of confidence in belief -- self-reflexive global reframing to enable faith-based governance*, 2011). Ironically, within a pattern of such beliefs, the "natural sciences" might even be recognized as "fundamentalist" -- if not "literalist" in their strict reading of the "Book of Nature". The relation between comprehension and belief is usefully summarized from a legal perspective by [Stephen R. Diamond](#) (*The unity of comprehension and belief, and the common failure to grasp opposing arguments*, *Disputed Issues: controversies in legal writing*, 24 March 2012) in the light of extensively documented arguments of [Daniel T. Gilbert](#) (*How Mental Systems Believe*, *American Psychologist*, 1991).

Of particular interest in exploring patterns of belief is the use of any general template of adequate complexity, such as the [periodic table of chemical elements](#) (*Tuning a Periodic Table of Religions, Epistemologies and Spirituality: including the sciences and other belief systems*, 2007; *Periodic Pattern of Human Knowing*, 2009; *Periodic Pattern of Human Life*, 2009). This offers another means for exploring patterns of partial (in)comprehension.

"Sustainability": In the desperate quest for global sustainability, there is a case for considering that comprehension of that condition -- and of how to sustain it -- will necessarily be partial. This conclusion applies as much for those who claim full comprehension of the

matter -- thereby effectively precluding the emergence of future insights on the matter, or those of others with whom they disagree. Comprehension will necessarily be partial on the part of constituencies with particular (vested) interests -- whose incomprehension of other perspectives on the matter will be deplored, as they are in turn deplored. Also of relevance is any "total incomprehension" of sustainability which may be regretfully recognized.

The sense in which degrees of (in)comprehension are better understood as being within a dynamic pattern highlights the possibility of **recognizing sustainability within the "harmony of the imperfections" of that pattern** -- rather than seeking to associate the appropriateness of sustainability with "perfect" comprehension of appropriateness (*Comprehension of Appropriateness*, 1986). Are there "melodies" of (un)sustainability to be associated with those of (in)comprehension?

Environment: Nature offers every variety of changing conditions, as with swirling water and drifting clouds. Efforts are made to offer comprehensive explanations of such dynamics systems through equations and modelling. These continue to be demonstrated to be less than adequate to the reality in which people live -- as indicated by flooding and other natural disasters, including those enabled by ill-considered destruction of protective tree cover. This systemically negligent effort to achieve cognitive closure contrasts with traditional skills in engaging with nature -- most notably those of sailors, farmers and hunters -- for whom "knowing" the environment involves an acknowledged degree of partial (in)comprehension. There is therefore a case for cultivating a degree of respectful incomprehension of what the environment may offer in the future, rather than promoting confidence in ill-founded comprehension.

Education: Clearly education can be understood as a process of ensuring and achieving comprehension and of reducing incomprehension. However achieving "total comprehension" is necessarily elusive, whether or not it is achieved in some measure in some domains or on occasion. The sense in which such comprehension must be "grasped" may also be inconsistent with its nature (*Beyond Harassment of Reality and Grasping Future Possibilities: learnings from sexual harassment as a metaphor*, 1996). Whatever the degree of education, individuals (and groups) are necessarily obliged to live with varying degrees of comprehension and incomprehension. This applies in particular to the young as they acquire comprehension and recognize, to a degree, the extent of their incomprehension.

Fruitful forms of education for survival and thrival may then depend not so much on acquiring "total comprehension" (in some particular domain) but rather on acquiring skills in the interplay between comprehension and incomprehension (*Higher Education ∞ Meta-education ?* 2011). There is a need to acquire skills in "non-comprehension" and the possibilities of engaging with it. This is evident to a degree in those required to function as "generals", whether in the military or in the governance of large enterprises -- arguably those variously advocated with regard to acquisition of an MBA (*Transforming the Unsustainable Cost of General Education*, 2009).

Employment: There is widespread preoccupation with creating jobs in support of economic growth, and ensuring that there are jobs for those terminating their formal education, in a period when "full employment" is elusive. Many are obliged to seek two or three jobs in order to make ends meet. Curiously education is not designed to respond to a situation in which employment possibilities are unpredictable and necessitate a degree of flexibility. There is increasingly as case for recognizing the advantages of being a "Jack of all trades" (according to the deprecated adage) -- rather than endeavouring to become a "Master of one", for which it may prove impossible to find a job. Employment then becomes the art of shifting dynamically between opportunities as possibilities manifest -- with fulfillment increasingly associated with the sense of that dynamic.

"Employment" itself calls for more flexibly reframing, such as to range from remunerated varieties, through voluntary work, and to honour the ability to act outside any formal structures, as with the full spectrum of "self-employment". This then fruitfully raises the question of under what conditions anyone can be held to be "unemployed" -- as with the problematic debates on "home work", "carers", "sex workers", the "retired", "hobbyists", "criminals", the "black economy", and membership of intentional communities. At a time when the "job for life" paradigm is challenged everywhere, partial comprehension of "employment" may fruitfully refocus attention on the ability of individuals and groups to create employment (*In Quest of a Job vs Engendering Employment*, 2009; *Sustainable Occupation beyond the Economic Rationale: Reframing employment, non-profit-making and voluntary*, 1998).

Ageing: Ageing may be inevitably associated with reduced capacity (memory, retention capacity, comprehension capacity, etc). The challenges may be notably increased by the emergence of new technologies. The elderly are then necessarily required to adapt to a degree of incomprehension, whatever the unusual degrees of comprehension they retain as the result of their life experience.

More interesting is how the elderly acquire skills in the interplay of their comprehension and incomprehension, especially as their capacities progressively decline. These may be observed in some employing rhetorical and other techniques to compensate for any apparent incomprehension -- anecdotes, humour, aphorisms, etc. The question raised by this approach is how incomprehension may be developed into an art form through which identity may be sustained in a manner experienced as fulfilling. Using a musical metaphor again, are there emergent melodies of (in)comprehension that can be fruitfully played -- as suggested by the framings of *Mary Catherine Bateson* (*Composing a Life*, 2001; *Composing a Further Life: the age of active wisdom*, 2010)? Is "wisdom" to be associated with the nature of such melodies -- the dynamics of remembering and forgetting?

Disability: The argument with respect to education and ageing necessarily also applies to those challenged by what are framed as mental disabilities or disorders. Rather than focus on increasing comprehension, there is then a case for increasing skills in engaging creatively with incomprehension -- whether their own or that of others.

Dialogue: Dialogue typically involves engaging with others having different degrees of (in)comprehension on any matter. A conventional approach is to endeavour to improve the comprehension of the other according to a particular perspective, by highlighting their incomprehension in that domain -- and minimizing acknowledgement of one's own incomprehension in that respect. This may be done subtly by skilled persuasion, by use of reason, or by ridicule, and the like. It is a widely publicized strategy epitomized by a classic process (*Roger Fisher and William L. Ury, Getting to YES: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, 1981).

The approach advocated here is to move beyond the win-lose approach of "dialogue tennis", such as to enhance the sustaining quality of the interplay between different forms of (in)comprehension. Participants may for example be understood as effectively embodying,

momentarily, any of the "colours" or "shades of gray" in the configurations above. However, the "art" of the dialogue then lies in the manner in which the interplay of those colours over time sustains new qualities of emergent significance. This art is partially implied by the approach advocated through the interplay of the coloured "thinking hats" of [Edward de Bono](#) (*Six Thinking Hats*, 1985).

Preoccupation with possibilities of enhanced dialogue has been promoted by the *Utne Reader* (Salon: how to revive the endangered art of conversation and start a revolution in your living room, *Utne Reader*, March/April 1991). As described by Kenneth N. Cissna and Rob Anderson (*Moments of Meeting: Buber, Rogers, and the potential for public dialogue*, 2002), the uptake resulted in subsequent publications (*It's Time to Meet*; *The Salon Keeper's Companion*; and Jaida n'ha Sandra and Jon Spayde, *Salons: The Joy of Conversation*, 2001). More recent initiatives include that of Thomas R Flanagan and Kenneth C Bausch (*Body Wisdom in Dialogue: Rediscovering the Voice of the Goddess*, 2012) and of [Anthony Blake](#) (*The Supreme Art of Dialogue*, 2009).

Consideration is given to the interplay, using a musical metaphor, in a separate discussion (*Enabling a 12-fold Pattern of Systemic Dialogue for Governance*, 2011).

Consensus and governance: The nature and possibility of consensus is clearly fundamental to current understandings of **governance**. Assumptions regarding its nature are curiously questionable in contexts where the consensus is that of a "majority", effectively marginalizing a "minority" which then exerts all efforts to become that majority in its turn. The quality of the consensus is even more questionable when there are multiple minorities. Consensus, as shared comprehension, is then essentially elusive since it fails to encompass those who hold the policies advocated by the majority to be "incomprehensible" (*The Consensus Delusion*, 2011). This points to the possibility that global governance may be inherently unstable according to this modality (*Ungovernability of Sustainable Global Democracy? Towards engaging appropriately with time*, 2011). Missing would seem to be any subtler engagement with the dynamics of shifting configurations over time -- supposedly the essence of democracy (*Eliciting a 12-fold Pattern of Generic Operational Insights: recognition of memory constraints on collective strategic comprehension*, 2011).

System dependence: Society is ever more dependent on interlocking technical systems (road, rail, energy, telecommunications, etc). There are frequent examples of their partial failure, most notably on the occasion of strikes, hardware or software incidents, accidents and natural disasters -- often experienced as "incomprehensible". People are then obliged to adapt to a degree of chaos -- and delivery failures for critical supplies. There is therefore a case for cultivating the capacity to adapt to conditions which are not as predictably comprehensible as is implied by descriptions of systems functioning according to expectations.

Justice and corruption: Problematic consensus is also evident in the judicial process, currently highlighted by two separate incidents -- the high profile killings of Afghans citizens, "allegedly" by [Robert Bales](#), and of Jewish and Muslim citizens of France, "allegedly" by [Mohammed Merah](#). Both incidents are considered "incomprehensible". Justice is held to have been appropriately done in the case of Merah, whereas Bales will only come to trial a year hence. Mitigating circumstances will be advanced in the latter case, despite Afghan public opinion -- notably following assertions by relatives and neighbours (*Sgt Robert Bales' wife says charges 'unbelievable'*, *BBC News*, 26 March 2012; *'He's a normal guy,' says neighbour of US sniper accused of Afghan killings*, *The Guardian*, 18 March 2012). None are imagined in the case of Merah, who claimed to be acting in response to injustices variously perpetrated by others. As noted by Ariane Chemin (*How the Merah massacre shook French politics -- into silence*, *The Observer*, 25 March 2012):

By contrast, we hear very little about what Merah says about the social malaise on our estates. And what he says about the state of affairs in our prisons, the indoctrination that takes place there, we hear nothing, or almost nothing.

The questionable nature of justice is evident in the incidence, nature and reframing of "corruption" at every level of society, including the highest. Tax avoidance is subtle but blatant. Diversion of institutional funds figures daily in the news. Cheating, plagiarism and copyright infringement are variously acceptable. Engaging in transactions "in the black", as a feature of the "black economy", is a matter of choice between the mutually consenting. If "corruption" is endemic, in one form or another, there is then a case for distinguishing degrees and patterns of "corruption" -- the "shades of gray" of current practice -- in order to elicit a healthier dynamic.

Integral theory: Colour has notably been used by [Ken Wilber](#) (*Integral Spirituality: a startling new role for religion in the modern and postmodern world*, 2006) to distinguish vertical stages of increasing comprehension within the AQAL quadrant framework of [integral theory](#). The theory thus uses the notion of general "altitude" as a content-free way of comparing and contrasting development across different domains either within or between those quadrants. A spectrum of colours is used to represent each distinct level (e.g., red, amber, orange, green, teal, turquoise). The spectrum also represents the general movement of increasingly wider identity and expanding awareness: from "me" (egocentric) to "my group" (ethnocentric) to "my country" (sociocentric) to "all of us" (worldcentric) to "all beings" (planetcentric) to finally "all of reality". This is also represented by the use of concentric circles to highlight the nested quality of levels transcending and including each other. AQAL is variously understood to be integrated with the theory of [spiral dynamics](#), for which there are infinite stages of progress and regression over time dependent upon the life circumstances of the person/culture ([Don Beck](#) and [Chris Cowan](#), *Spiral Dynamics*, 1996). Attaining higher stages of development is then not synonymous with attaining a "better" or "more correct" value system. All stages are held to co-exist in both healthy and unhealthy states.

The emphasis in the argument above is not on the aspiration to the most inclusive form of "comprehension" (associated in AQAL with turquoise), but rather on the capacity to shift between the colours in a manner which ensures expression of a "harmony of the imperfections" associated with each, given its particular form of "incomprehension". It is the harmonious interplay of colours (perhaps reminiscent of [Chladni patterns](#)) which is then indicative of a more appreciable modality than attachment to the obsessive quest for the most perfect comprehension. It is eliciting this harmony through interference effects -- in dialogue between those favouring different patterns of expression -- which merits consideration, rather than the kinds of "competitive integrality" characteristic of the quest by physicists for a Theory of Everything (cf. *Self-reflexive Challenges of Integrative Futures*, 2008).

The argument can then be recognized as consistent with the cognitive paradox of the biblical parable: *The first shall be last, and the last*

shall be first (Matthew 19:29-30). The challenge to "integral thinkers", such as those recognized by integral theory, is then their capacity to dialogue meaningfully with those who lack (more) adequate comprehension. A trend in this direction is recognized by Brett Thomas (*Integral Should Be More Like Apple, Integral Thinkers*, 29 November 2011) who raises the question: *Why isn't Integral more popular?*.

Happiness: The implications of the argument can be usefully considered in relation to the "pursuit of happiness" enshrined so centrally by the US Constitution. Concern with achievement of happiness has recently become the focus of a variety of studies and surveys (cf. Daniel Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness*, 2006). The question is whether "happiness" should necessarily be associated with "total comprehension" or whether it might be more fruitfully associated with the dynamics of appropriate engagement with patterns (in)comprehension. This is most clearly highlighted using a weather metaphor.

Is "happiness" best associated with the ideal of "sunny weather", or is it better associated with appreciation of the variety of weather conditions characteristic of the changing seasons? Are there paradoxes to appreciation of the subtler and more sustainable forms of happiness, as discussed separately (*Embodying the Paradoxes and Contradictions of the Pursuit of Happiness*, 2011; *Happiness and Unhappiness through Naysign and Nescience: comprehending the essence of sustainability?* 2008).

Growth: There is a curious sense in which the pursuit of happiness and sustainability are conflated in a particular understanding of growth as the panacea for the psychosocial ills of global civilization. It is curious to witness so many countries and corporate initiatives aspiring to be "world leader" in one or more economic domains and in the scientific and technological sectors which enable growth. That many are called to the race is evident. The failure to recognize that so very few can "win" is surprising. Failure to recognize that the world cannot sustain the growth -- to which so many aspire -- is also poorly recognized.

The issues of (in)comprehension in relation to this pattern merit consideration. There is a sense in which "comprehension", as the capacity to "get it", is conflated with the preoccupation with "growth". Failure to "get it" is associated with the "incomprehension" of "losers". Given the limitations of this dynamic, there is a case for exploring patterns of (in)comprehension in relation to patterns of (de)growth or (un)growth. Is it possible that the growth which merits appreciation is better associated with an as yet poorly recognized "mixed economy", involving a dynamic mix of patterns of (de)growth? It is appropriate to note the succession of international conferences specifically exploring "degrowth" (Paris, 2008; Barcelona, 2010; Venice, 2012).

Relationships: As noted above, relationships like dialogue, provide the ultimate laboratory for exploring patterns of (in)comprehension. It follows that the self-other relationship can be reframed in terms of shifting patterns of (in)comprehension, rather than any obsessive preoccupation with fully comprehending the other -- or being understood by the other. As with dialogue, one question is how to embody disagreement into such a pattern -- "agreeing to disagree". How then to agree with Alf Temme (*Agreeing to Disagree*) who argues that: *Disagreement is a very useful tool in life to drive improvement and progress.*

Also of interest in this context is when "yes" mean "no" and when "no" mean "yes". In that respect, what is to be learned from cultures where "yes" is readily said to avoid the embarrassment of saying "no" (Masaaki Imai, *16 Ways To Avoid Saying No: an invitation to experience Japanese management*, 1981)? What of the nature of consensus in repressive societies where saying "no" is fatal to career, livelihood and even life -- or where it is extorted under duress? The Japanese case is especially interesting because of the reliance in management on a culturally unique process of consensual decision-making (*ringisei*). Curiously there would seem to be no generic articulation of "16 Ways To Avoid Saying Yes" -- presumably of value when responding to unwelcome solicitation.

"The Pivot"

(*The Way of Chuang Tzu*, interpreted by Thomas Merton London. Unwin, 1970)

"Tao is obscured when men understand only one of a pair of opposites, or concentrate only on a partial aspect of being. Then clear expression also becomes muddled by mere word-play, affirming this one aspect and denying all the rest. Hence the wrangling of Confucians and Mohists; each denies what the other affirms, and affirms what the other denies. What use is this struggle to set up "No" against "Yes", and "Yes" against "No"? Better to abandon this hopeless effort... The possible becomes impossible; the impossible becomes possible. Right turns into wrong and wrong into right -- the flow of life alters circumstances and thus things themselves are altered in their turn. But disputants continue to affirm and to deny the same things they have always affirmed and denied, ignoring the new aspects of reality presented by the change in conditions.

The wise man therefore... sees that on both sides of every argument there is both right and wrong. He also sees that in the end they are reducible to the same thing, once they are related to the pivot of Tao. **When the wise man grasps this pivot, he is the center of the circle, and there he stands while "Yes" and "No" pursue each other around the circumference"**

References

- Michael Baxandall. *Shadows and Enlightenment*. Yale University Press, 1997
- Don Beck and Chris C. Cowan. *Spiral Dynamics*. Blackwell Publishers, 1996
- Anthony Blake. *The Supreme Art of Dialogue*. DuVersity Publications, 2009
- Bodhipaksa. *Living As a River: Finding Fearlessness in the Face of Change*. Sounds True, 2010
- Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro. *The Complete Sophocles: The Theban Plays By Sophocles*. Oxford University Press, 2010
- Roberto Casati. *Shadows: Unlocking Their Secrets, from Plato to Our Time*. Vintage, 2004

Ajahn Chah. *Everything Arises, Everything Falls Away: teachings on impermanence and the end of suffering*. Shambhala, 2005

Pema Chödrön. *Comfortable with Uncertainty: 108 teachings on cultivating fearlessness and compassion*. Shambhala, 2003

Kenneth N. Cissna and Rob Anderson. *Moments of meeting: Buber, Rogers, and the potential for public dialogue*. SUNY Press, 2002

Richard Dawkins. *The God Delusion*. Bantam Books, 2006

Edward de Bono:

- *Six Thinking Hats*. Little Brown, 1985
- *Water Logic*. McQuaig Group, 1993

Didier Dubois, Henri Prade and Philippe Smets. Representing Partial Ignorance. *IEEE Trans. on Systems, Man and Cybernetics*, 26, 1996, pp. 361-377 [[abstract](#)]

Diane Durston. *Wabi Sabi: The Art of Everyday Life*. Storey Publishing, 2006

Roger Fisher and William L. Ury. *Getting to YES: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*. Penguin, 1981

Thomas R Flanagan and Kenneth C Bausch. *Body Wisdom in Dialogue: Rediscovering the Voice of the Goddess*. Ongoing Emergence Press, 2012

Daniel Gilbert:

- *Stumbling on Happiness*. Random House, 2006
- *How Mental Systems Believe*. *American Psychologist*, 46, 2, February 1991

D. T. Gilbert, D. S. Krull and P. S. Malone. Unbelieving the Unbelievable: some problems in the rejection of false information. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59, 1990, pp. 601-613.

Susantha Goonatillake. *Toward a Global Science: mining civilizational knowledge*. Indiana University Press, 1999

David Hodge and Hi-Jin Hodge. *Impermanence: Embracing Change*. Snow Lion Publications, 2009

Douglas Hofstadter. *Fluid Concepts and Creative Analogies: computer models of the fundamental mechanisms of thought*. Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995 [[summary](#)]

Jeffrey Hopkins. *Meditation on Emptiness*. Wisdom Publications, 1983

Shotari Iida. *Reason and Emptiness*. Kokuseido, 1980

Andrew Juniper. *Wabi Sabi: The Japanese Art of Impermanence*. Tuttle Publishing, 2003

Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham. *The Spirituality of Imperfection*. Bantam Books, 1992

Simon Gregg and Peter Andrew Barrett. *The Impermanent City: the rise and fall of Melbourne's skyline*. City Museum at Old Treasury, 2008 [[text](#)]

Robyn Griggs Lawrence. *Simply Imperfect: Revisiting the Wabi-Sabi House*. New Society Publishers, 2011

Rudolf Ritsema. *The Realms of Colour*. Brill Archive, 1974

Jaida Nha Sandra. *Joy of Conversation: The Complete Guide to Salons*. Diane, 1997

Jaida n'ha Sandra and Jon Spayde. *Salons: The Joy of Conversation*. New Society Publishers, 2001

Joan Stambaugh. *Impermanence is Buddha-Nature: Dogen's Understanding of Temporality*. University of Hawaii Press, 1990

Victor I. Stoichita. *Short History of the Shadow*. Reaktion Books, 1997

Junichiro Tanizaki. *In Praise of Shadows*. Leete's Island Books, 1977

Dylan Trigg. *The Aesthetics of Decay: nothingness, nostalgia, and the absence of reason*. Lang, 2006

William Powers. *Hamlet's Blackberry: a practical philosophy for building a good life in the Digital Age*. HarperCollins, 2010

Ken Wilber. *Integral Spirituality: a startling new role for religion in the modern and postmodern world*. Shambhala, 2006



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

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