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Enabling Suffering through Doublespeak and Doublethink

Indifference to poverty and retributive justice as case studies

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Second part of the argument introduced in: *Indifference to the Suffering of Others: Occupying the moral and ethical high ground through doublespeak* (2013), where [References](#) are located

Cultivating indifference to suffering through doublespeak

The first part introduced the argument in following headings:

- [Introduction](#)
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As noted by the *Wikipedia* entry, [doublespeak](#) is language that deliberately disguises, distorts, or reverses the meaning of words. It may take the form of euphemisms -- "downsizing" for layoffs, "servicing the target" for bombing (William Lutz, *Doublespeak: From "Revenue Enhancement" to "Terminal Living": how government, business, advertisers, and others use language to deceive you.* 1987). In such cases it is primarily meant to make the truth sound more palatable.

It may also refer to intentional ambiguity in language or to actual inversions of meaning (for example, naming a state of war "peace"). In such cases, doublespeak disguises the nature of the truth. Doublespeak is most closely associated with political language. As noted by [Edward S. Herman](#) (*Beyond Hypocrisy: decoding the news in an Age of Propaganda*, 1992):

What is really important in the world of doublespeak is the ability to lie, whether knowingly or unconsciously, and to get away with it; and the ability to use lies and choose and shape facts selectively, blocking out those that don't fit an agenda or program

The term "doublespeak" is considered to have its roots in the dystopian novel of [George Orwell](#) (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 1949). Although the term is not used in the book, it is a close relative of one of the book's central concepts, [doublethink](#). Another variant, "doubletalk," also refers to deliberately ambiguous speech. It might be asked to what extent this practice now characterizes discourse within the international community and in the style of its preferred media presentations.

The current challenge of doublespeak is discussed separately (*Transcending One-eyed Global Modelling Perspectives: incorporating under-currents into global circulation of value*, 2010) in a section on *Psychosocial processes: under-currents versus surface-currents*. As remarked there part of the challenge is in the manner in which euphemism is used to indicate the existence of what is hidden or not readily admitted. But such practices, with which all are relatively familiar, actually hold the nature of the cognitive process bridging between two realities -- even two worlds. It might be said to start at the earliest age with "secrets" kept from the children -- or from the parents. In that sense, doublespeak and ["speaking with a forked tongue"](#) is what humanity does:

- References to "**national security**" are increasingly to be recognized as code for switching to doublespeak. Similarly references to the highest acclaimed values -- notably by politicians and religious leaders -- increasingly have the same implication. References by national leaders to "gross irresponsibility", such as by the prime minister of the country of which Julian Assange is a citizen, carefully avoid any reference to the espionage authorised by Clinton on the UN leadership. Is this to be interpreted as "gross irresponsibility"?
- References to "**freedom of information**" usually imply freedom to access information carefully sifted for reasons of "national security" for the protection of vested interests as noted above. Commentators have noted the contrast between Hillary Clinton's interventions in response to WikiLeaks and her much-admired recent speech and subsequent article (*Internet Freedom, Foreign Policy*, 21 January 2010).

The quality of doublespeak is evident from the announcement that the USA is to host Unesco's World Press Freedom Day event (Washington DC, 2011):

The theme for next year's commemoration will be 21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers. The United States places technology and innovation at the forefront of its diplomatic and development efforts. New media has empowered citizens around the world to report on their circumstances, express opinions on world events, and exchange information in environments sometimes hostile to such exercises of individuals' right to freedom of expression. At the same time, we are concerned about the determination of some governments to censor and silence individuals, and to restrict the free flow of information. We mark events such as World Press Freedom Day in the context of our enduring commitment to support and expand press freedom and the free flow of information in this digital age. (US Bureau of Public Affairs, *U.S. to Host World Press Freedom Day in 2011*, 7 December 2010)

- Double speak has been made evident as inherent in the world of **finance and banking**, as noted by Gordon Brown (*Beyond the Crash: overcoming the first crisis of globalisation*, 2010):
- Doublespeak is evident in **science**. It is what scientists do in excluding dimensions, vital to their own sense of psychosocial reality, from the models through which they recommend that that reality be apprehended. As helpfully clarified (above) by Derman, there may be good reason for this in practice -- but the practice merits explicit recognition if the approach to global governance is to be realistic.
- Doublespeak is a characteristic of many of the simplest **business** transactions -- as when the provider of a service does not make evident deficiencies associated with what is being sold, in comparison with claims vigorously made ("puffery").
- Doublespeak is only too evident in **politics**, in the discrepancy between what is promised by politicians in electoral manifestos and what they intend to provide when elected, or what they then claim to be providing through skillful use of "**spin**".
- Doublespeak is blatantly apparent in the **advertising** for many products when the explicit purpose is to create a favourable impression in order to disguise less acceptable practices -- as with much "**greenwashing**".
- The distinction between surface-currents and under-currents has been strongly made in relation to **women**, as documented by **Elise Boulding** (*The Underside of History: a view of women through time*, 1976). The challenge remains notably evident in meetings (*Women and the Underside of Meetings: symptoms of denial in considering strategic options*, 2009).

Doublespeak, as variously purveyed by the media, is a device central to the cultivation of indifference to suffering. Recent research has resulted in the claim that fast-moving virtual games and online news feeds may be encouraging indifference to human suffering (*Media Culture and Indifference to Suffering, Face to Face Intercultural*, 18 October 2009; Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, et al, *Neural correlates of admiration and compassion, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 20 April 2009):

In a media culture in which violence and suffering become an endless show, indifference to the vision of human suffering gradually sets in.

Wherever it is employed, doublespeak erodes the capacity for empathy in response to suffering (Mark Liberman, *Debasing the Coinage of Rational Inquiry: a case study, Language Log*, 22 April 2009). This is most evident in the manner in which it enhances voter apathy in the democratic process, as variously noted:

- James Adams, Jay Dow and Samuel Merrill III (*The Political Consequences of Alienation-Based and Indifference-Based Voter Abstention: applications to presidential elections. Political Behavior*, 2006)
- Travis Downing (*The Enthusiasm Gap, or Institutionalized Voter Indifference, Distasteful Inelegance*, October 2012)
- Chandran Kukathas (*Liberalism and Multiculturalism: the politics of indifference. Political Theory*, 26, 1998, 5, pp. 686-699)
- *Why Mass Citizen Indifference to the US Police State Monster?* (*Corrente*, 29 July 2012)

Enabling suffering through religious doublespeak

As noted above, the Pope recently condemned strongly the global indifference to suffering (*Pope Francis condemns global indifference to suffering, The Guardian*, 8 July 2013). This was on the occasion of a visit to the island of **Lampedusa** -- a tragic entry point of last

recourse for refugees seeking to enter Europe from Africa. The controversy associated with this island, and the many who die getting there on a perilous boat journey, is indeed a worthy subject for papal concern.

The case for even wider concern is however the long-term implication of Catholic policies regarding the evolution of the situation in Africa to the point at which people there see as their only recourse the possibility of successfully getting to Europe. The Pope frames the situation as one in which global indifference is a prevailing condition of the **moment** calling for action by others. This framing carefully avoids any reference to Catholic policies in the **longer term** which have contributed directly to that situation and will ensure that the number of people forced to undertake such desperate measures will continue to increase. Many will die in the process, as they have in the past -- or suffer under conditions which encourage some to engage in it.

There is no implication whatsoever that Catholic policies, for which the Pope is ultimately responsible, are themselves directly responsible in any way engendering the suffering which he deplores so explicitly. It could be said that he is blithely indifferent to the long-term indifference of Catholicism to its responsibilities in the matter. This could be framed as the epitome of moral irresponsibility (*Universal Declaration of Responsibilities of Human Intercourse: a draft proposal*, 2007).

As noted above, this attitude has previously been discussed more extensively (*Is There Never Enough? Religious doublespeak on population and poverty*, 2013), notably in a section on *Hypocrisy of current Papal focus on poverty?*, under the following headings:

- [Challenge of increasing global inequality](#)
- [Vatican complicity in inequality](#)
- [Misrepresentation of causes of poverty](#)
- [Contrasting strategic possibilities](#), arguing with respect to reducing suffering and tragic mortality, that the question to be asked of the Pope is how a distinction is to be made between the appropriateness of three approaches:
 - Seeking poverty alleviation assistance from the system in place
 - Awaiting a miracle -- as suggested by the Biblical accounts of [feeding the multitude](#) (whether "[feeding the 4,000](#)" or "[feeding the 5,000](#)")
 - Reducing the need for poverty alleviation -- by reducing the number born into poverty
- [Crimes against humanity?](#)

Religious doublespeak is perhaps most clearly evident in the framing of financial transactions and the denial of wrong-doing:

- [Vatican Bank](#) (Institute for the Works of Religion): This has been periodically, and extensively, associated with [financial scandal and corruption](#) ([Banco Ambrosiano](#); [Other allegations](#); [Class action suit by Holocaust survivors](#); [2009-2012 Vatican money laundering investigation](#); [Battista Ricca](#)). Curiously [Transparency International](#), in its annual *Corruption Perceptions Index*, has systematically failed to identify the Vatican as an independent state (as it claims to be) about which corruption was reported.
- [Operation Blessing International](#): A documentary has just been released showing how the televangelist [Pat Robertson](#) (a former US presidential candidate) claimed Operation Blessing was giving vital aid in response to the 1994 Rwandan crisis (*Mission Congo: how Pat Robertson raised millions on the back of a non-existent aid project*, *The Guardian*, 5 September 2013).
- [Indulgences](#): The controversial Catholic tradition of the [sale of indulgences](#) was recently offered a new twist by the Pope (Tom Kington, *Vatican offers 'time off purgatory' to followers of Pope Francis tweets*, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 16 July 2013). The Papal court handling pardons for sins indicated that contrite Catholics could win 'indulgences' by following World Youth Day on Twitter (Andrew Brown, *So, the pope's Twitter followers get time off purgatory. What's the problem?*, *The Guardian*, 17 July 2013)

This argument is consistent with what can be otherwise described as a failure of [due diligence](#) -- of systemic sloppiness in the analysis of a condition which is deplored (*Vigorous Application of Derivative Thinking to Derivative Problems: transcending bawling, hand-wringing and emotional blackmail*, 2013). As noted there, the focus is on the "downstream" present, and not on how the present condition was engendered -- and continues to be engendered by "upstream" factors. Unfortunately for the Catholic Church, a similar lack of systematic diligence has been evident in the analysis of widespread [sexual abuse by the clergy](#).

The unstated difficulty for the Catholic Church is that the poverty and suffering with which the newly elected Pope is so honourably concerned is in part a direct consequence of policies enabled and encouraged by that Church. These have ensured that there was no constraint on increase in population, even if resources were unlikely to be made available for a suffering-free livelihood.

The focus on proximate causes of suffering avoids the need to identify those which give rise to them from a systemic perspective -- possibly in order to favour a theological perspective on God's involvement in the matter. It can be described as a form of **"theological gerrymandering"**, to be compared with the scientific equivalent which it reinforces in environments responsive to faith-based governance (*Scientific Gerrymandering of Boundaries of Overpopulation Debate: review of The Royal Society report -- People and the Planet*, 2012).

Especially interesting in terms of theological gerrymandering is any claim by the Pope that he is "only following orders" as articulated in terms of the divine injunction to "be fruitful and multiply" (*Genesis 1:28*). In so doing any responsibility for global indifference to suffering is passed "upstairs" to God. The issue is then the theological one of how God can appear to be "indifferent to suffering" -- a theme frequently debated (as noted above).

Ironically any transfer of responsibility to God by the Pope might be appropriately described in terms of an adaptation of the **"Peter Principle"** according to which employees in any organization tend to be promoted to their level of inefficacy. Might this also apply to human articulations of fundamental principles.

Vatican bank reforms lead to rise in reports of suspicious transactions, The Guardian, 23 May 2014

UN denounces Vatican over child abuse and demands immediate action, The Guardian, 5 February 2014

Inside the Vatican bank: silence, secrets and Latin cash machines, The Guardian, 28 June 2012

Enabling suffering through legal doublespeak

This has been especially evident in the case of indifference to suffering on the part of the USA with respect to:

- [collateral damage](#) notably as a consequence of drone attacks ([in Afghanistan](#), [in Somalia](#), [in Yemen](#), and [in Pakistan](#))
- the process of [extraordinary rendition](#)
- the process of [extrajudicial killing](#)
- the process of [enhanced interrogation](#), (Abu Ghraib, etc)
- the process of [extended incarceration without trial](#) (Guantanamo Bay, etc)
- the economic and strategic interests associated with arms sales

In each case dubious legal justification has been produced such as effectively to contravene the principles of international treaties. The case with respect to torture has been the subject of many commentaries (Larry Siems, *The Torture Report: What the Documents say about America's Post 9/11 Torture Program*, 2012; Philippe Sands, *Torture Team: Rumsfeld's Memo and the betrayal of American values*, 2008; David Cole, *Torture Memos: rationalizing the unthinkable*, 2009).

As with the dubious arguments of "[just war theory](#)", it would appear that an analogue has been developed to legitimate infliction of suffering -- possibly to be termed "just suffering theory". Just war theory (or *Bellum iustum*) is a doctrine of military ethics of Roman philosophical and Catholic origin, studied by moral theologians, ethicists and international policy makers, which holds that a violent conflict ought to meet philosophical, religious or political criteria. There is clearly a case for adapting that to the infliction of suffering -- as has been variously justified in boot camps and for corporal punishment.

Legal doublespeak is especially evident at this time with respect to "[chemical weapons](#)", as defined by the [Chemical Weapons Convention](#) (CWC), and deplored as completely unacceptable in Syria (Dana Liebelson, *Are Chemical Weapons Reason Enough to Go to War? Mother Jones*, 30 August 2013). The US has however previously made extensive use of [Agent Orange](#) (Vietnam) and [White Phosphorous](#). The *Wikipedia* entry notes use of the latter in recent conflicts: [Iraq \(2004\)](#), [Israel-Lebanon conflict \(2006\)](#), [Gaza War \(2008-2009\)](#), [Afghanistan \(2009\)](#), [Yemen \(2009\)](#), [Israeli-Palestinian conflict \(2009-2012\)](#), [Libya \(2011\)](#).

Legal doublespeak is notably exploited in interpretation of [Protocol III](#) of the Chemical Weapons Convention whose loopholes and inconsistent restrictions limit its effectiveness, as noted by Stephen Goose and Bonnie Docherty (*White phosphorous: the new napalm? Human Rights Watch*, 8 June 2012). Forty years after Vietnam's most famous photo, incendiary weapons still kill and injure children. The authors remark:

The protocol's definition is too narrow, encompassing only munitions "primarily designed" to set fires or cause burn injuries, and creating exceptions for those with "incidental" incendiary effects. Thus, some governments, including the US, believe that white phosphorus munitions are not covered by Protocol III, even when used intentionally for incendiary effects. A broader, effects-based definition of incendiary weapons should be created to encompass multipurpose munitions with incendiary effects, such as white phosphorus.

In addition, the protocol prohibits attacks in populated areas with air-dropped incendiary weapons yet permits the same kinds of attacks with ground-launched models under certain circumstances. At the least, countries should bolster the protocol's restrictions by prohibiting the use of all incendiary weapons in civilian areas.

With respect to admission of the use of White Phosphorous in Iraq (as noted below), this has focused concern, as noted by Paul Reynolds (*White phosphorus: weapon on the edge, BBC News*, 16 November 2005):

The admission contradicted a statement this week from the new and clearly under-briefed US ambassador in London Robert Holmes Tuttle that US forces "do not use napalm or white phosphorus as weapons". The official line to that point had been that WP, or Willie Pete to use its old name from Vietnam, was used only to illuminate the battlefield and to provide smoke for camouflage.

The indifference associated with legal doublespeak by those in authority has been otherwise made by a blogger for the US (*The Fall of Empire and the Indifference to the Suffering of Others, Flinging Monkey*, 14 September 2011):

However, in the space of a week, the illustration of the depths to which it has sunk has come to the fore. In a Republican Presidential debate last week, [Rick Perry](#) was asked a question about his record in Texas where he has presided over two hundred executions, and whether he had any concerns that any of the people executed may have been innocent. A legitimate question, given that there is significant evidence that at least one innocent man has been put to death, and that Perry impeded the investigation into the circumstances. Putting that to one side, before the question was even finished, at the point where the number of people executed was mentioned by the host, the crowd cheered and whistled. Perry said he had no concerns, and that "if people come into our state and kill our citizens" they will face execution. More applause.

Enabling suffering through political doublespeak: Iraq vs. Syria

Denial of historical parallels: Especially striking, as noted above, is the debate regarding external intervention in Syria. Most impressive is the political effort to deny that there are any parallels with the well-documented process through which intervention in Iraq was justified -- to the point of excluding such mention in most media. The dilemmas of the situation are well summarized by Tom Geoghegan (*Shadow of Iraq looms over Syria*, *BBC News*, 29 August 2013). This notes the report by [Anthony H. Cordesman](#) (*The U.S. Intelligence Report on Syria: Learning from Iraq*, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 28 August 2013)

The Obama administration faces the reality that the US lost the credibility to argue from authority and on the basis of its reputation more than 10 years ago. The US government may trust the US government. That is not a trust the world shares, and recent polls indicate that it may not be a trust American people share as well.

The possibility, if not the probability, of such parallels is evident to an informed public unchallenged by the memory deficiency with which it is so readily assumed to be inflicted:

- **use of "unacceptable weapons"**, and failure to indicate the **complicity of those by whom they were supplied**:
 - **Syria:** claims made with the implication that no civilized country would make use of such weapons -- claims dependent for their credibility on legal doublespeak (noted above) regarding the extent to which sarin gas and white phosphorous were respectively covered by Protocol III of the Chemical Weapons Convention (Andrea Germanos, *Hypocrisy and Legacy of Death Linger as US Claims Moral Authority in Syria*, *Common Dreams*, 27 August 2013). The latter comments on the declaration of [John Kerry](#) to the effect that:

This is about the large-scale indiscriminate use of weapons that the civilized world long ago decided must never be used at all, a conviction shared even by countries that agree on little else... And there is a reason why no matter what you believe about Syria, all peoples and all nations who believe in the cause of our common humanity must stand up to assure that there is accountability for the use of chemical weapons so that it never happens again.

The [major policy declaration of Barack Obama](#) (31 August 2013) perpetuated the doublespeak by declaring that the use of chemical weapons in Syria was "the worst in the 21st century" (carefully omitting mention of any use by the US of "chemical weapons" in Fallujah in 2003). The possible complicity of the UK has recently been indicated (Gilad Atzmon, *Hot Off the Press: Britain sold nerve gas chemicals to Syria*, *Transcend Media Service*, 2 September 2013).

- **Iraq:** acknowledged use of previously denied "chemical weapons" by US-led forces in Fallujah:
 - George Monbiot (*The US used chemical weapons in Iraq - and then lied about it*, *The Guardian*, 15 November 2005)
 - Peter Popham (*US forces 'used chemical weapons' during assault on city of Fallujah*, *The Independent*, November 2005)
 - Karlos Zurutuza (*America's Fallujah Legacy: white phosphorous, depleted uranium -- the fate of Iraq's children*, *Global Research*, 17 April 2012)
 - *US used white phosphorus in Iraq* (*BBC News*, 16 November 2005)
 - *U.S. Broadcast Exclusive-"Fallujah: The Hidden Massacre" on the U.S. Use of Napalm-Like White Phosphorus Bombs* (*Democracy Now*, 8 November 2005)
 - *Fallujah Birth Defects Raise Specter Of U.S. Chemical-Weapons Use In Iraq* (*The Huffington Post*, 10 May 2010)
 - *U.S. Used Chemical Weapons In Iraq Veteran admits: Bodies melted away before us* (*Information Clearing House*, 11 May 2005).
 - *Foreign Policy* has reported that CIA documents show that the USA gave the location of Iranian troops to Iraq in 1988, fully aware that Saddam Hussein's regime was planning to attack Iran with chemical weapons -- including sarin.
 - **Iran:** Juan Cole (*US Protected Iraq at UN from Iranian Charges of Chemical Weapons Use*, 28 August 2013)
 - **Vietnam:** extensive use of [Agent Orange](#). The *Wikipedia* profile indicates that as a consequence of the US chemical warfare program during the Vietnam War (1961 to 1971) Vietnam estimates 400,000 people were killed or maimed, and 500,000 children born with birth defects as a result of its use.
- **intelligence reports:** with the implication that their authoritative content was beyond question:
 - **Iraq:** indications of the extent of "intelligence failure", being "misled" and subject to political pressure, most notably the requirement in the UK for reports to be "egged up" to conform to political imperatives (*Dossier 'over-egged' Iraq weapons claims*, *BBC News*, 3 September 2003). The term was applied in relation to the so-called "dodgy dossier" -- a briefing document for the UK Prime Minister (*Iraq: Its Infrastructure of Concealment, Deception and Intimidation*, 2003). In the case of the USA, this was evident in the notorious declaration of [Colin Powell](#), as US Secretary of State to the UN Security Council at which he declared: "We have firsthand descriptions of biological weapons factories on wheels and on rails. We know what the fermenters look like. We know what the tanks, pumps, compressors and other parts look like." He asserted that: "there can be no doubt that Saddam Hussein has biological weapons and the capability to rapidly produce more, many more." (*Remarks to the United Nations Security Council*, 5 February 2003).

- **Syria:** summaries of the questionable nature of the "concrete evidence" regarding those responsible for use of chemical weapons are indicated by William Bowles (*Chemical Hallucinations, Information Clearing House*) who cites the report of the [UK Joint Intelligence Committee](#) regarding the incident:

A chemical attack occurred in Damascus on the morning of 21 August, resulting in at least 350 fatalities. It is not possible for the opposition to have carried out a CW attack on this scale. The regime has used CW on a smaller scale on at least 14 occasions in the past. There is some intelligence to suggest regime culpability in this attack. These factors make it highly likely that the Syrian regime was responsible...

It is naive to assume that people will not consider such evidence to be as suspect as that offered in support of intervention in Iraq -- or as presented to the media on 30 August 2013 by [John Kerry](#), as US Secretary of State (*US set for Syria strikes after Kerry says evidence of chemical attack is 'clear'*, *The Guardian*, 30 August 2013). Immediately after Kerry's declaration reports were circulating contradicting his firm conclusions on the basis of which the US advocated immediate military intervention "to punish the regime" (Dale Gavlak and Yahya Ababneh, *Syrians In Ghouta Claim Saudi-Supplied Rebels Behind Chemical Attack*, *MintPressNews*, 29 August 2013; Paul Joseph Watson, *Rebels Admit Responsibility for Chemical Weapons Attack*, *Infowars.com*, 30 August 2013; *Syria submitted proof of chemical weapons use by terrorists*, *Daily Paul*, 28 August 2013) 08/28/2013). Unconfirmed new information (whether more or less factual than that of Kerry) indicates:

Syrian rebels in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta have admitted to Associated Press correspondent Dale Gavlak that they were responsible for last week's chemical weapons incident which western powers have blamed on Bashar Al-Assad's forces, revealing that the casualties were the result of an accident caused by rebels mishandling chemical weapons provided to them by Saudi Arabia.

This has been followed by a challenge from Russia (*Russia's Vladimir Putin challenges US on Syria claims*, *BBC News*, 31 August 2013; *Syria: Putin rubbishes chemical attack claims*, *The Guardian*, 31 August 2013). Putin argues that it would be "utter nonsense" for Syria's government to provoke opponents with such attacks when it was in a position of strength. This contrasts completely with information presented by the French government (*France releases new, 'undeniable' evidence against Syria*, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 September 2012):

We believe that the Syrian opposition does not have the capability to carry out an operation of such size with chemical weapons. No group of the Syrian insurrection has, at this stage, the capacity to stock and use these agents, and certainly not of a similar size to that used during the night of August 21, 2013, at Damascus. These groups have neither the experience nor the savoir-faire to carry this out, especially not the delivery means used during the 21 August attack.

Any careful examination of the "undeniable evidence" suggests that it is based on inference -- confirming use of chemical weapons -- **exceptionally weak with regard to any "concrete proof" of the direct responsibility of the Syrian regime** (*Washington's Blog, Point-By-Point Rebuttal of U.S. Case for War In Syria, Information Clearing House*, 3 September 2013).

It is completely questionable whether the evidence would stand the test of any court of law, especially since no consideration is given to the possibility that it was perpetrated by other parties in a covert operation. The process raises numerous questions regarding the **standard of proof** applied in such situations and how it is to be related to the "concrete proof" demanded by the USA in other circumstances, notably with respect to nuclear weapon production by Iran (*10 Demands for Concrete Proof by We the Peoples of the World*, 2012; *Politicization of Evidence in the Plastic Turkey Era: al-Qaida, Saddam, Assassination and the Hijab*, 2003)

At the time of writing there would appear to be no concrete evidence regarding the perpetration of the attacks by the Syrian regime. In a major interview (released on 4 September 2013), [Vladimir Putin has demanded "convincing" evidence](#) of the responsibility of the Syrian regime, indicating that currently available evidence does not fulfil these criteria - - and was reminiscent of the false data presented by the US administration to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As he argues:

And it ought to be convincing. It shouldn't be based on some rumours and information obtained by special services through some kind of eavesdropping, some conversations and things like that.

The weakness of the evidence has been noted with respect to that supplied by Israeli intelligence services, as reported by [Max Blumenthal](#) (*How Israel Is driving the US to War in Syria*, *AlterNet*, 3 September 2013). The manipulation of intelligence reports has been further analyzed by Gareth Porter (*How Intelligence Was Twisted to Support an Attack on Syria*, *Information Clearing House*, 4 September 2013) who notes:

Secretary of State John Kerry assured the public that the Obama administration's summary of the intelligence on which it is basing the case for military action to punish the Assad regime for an alleged use of chemical weapons was put together with an acute awareness of the fiasco of the 2002 Iraq WMD intelligence estimate.

Nevertheless, [the unclassified summary](#) of the intelligence assessment made public August 30, 2013, utilizes misleading language evocative of the infamous Iraq estimate's deceptive phrasing. The summary cites signals, geospatial and human source intelligence that purportedly show that the Syrian government prepared, carried out and "confirmed" a chemical weapons attack on August 21. And it claims visual evidence "consistent with" a nerve gas attack.

But a careful examination of those claims reveals a series of convolutedly worded characterizations of the intelligence that don't really mean what they appear to say at first glance.

The document displays multiple indications that the integrity of the assessment process was seriously compromised by using language that distorted the intelligence in ways that would justify an attack on Syria.

Matters have been given a dramatic twist through Putin's subsequent accusation regarding the presentation made by John Kerry to the US Congress (David Jackson, [Putin Calls Kerry a Liar on Syria](#), *Information Clearing House*, 5 September 2013). This had been preceded by the release of [Russian intelligence findings](#) communicated to the UN ([Russia Releases Key Findings on Chemical Attack Near Aleppo Indicating Similarity With Rebel-made Weapons](#), *Information Clearing House*, 5 September 2013). Whilst these relate to the incident of 19 March, the report particularly drew attention to *the massive stove-piping of various information aimed at placing the responsibility for the alleged chemical weapons use in Syria on Damascus, even though the results of the UN investigation have not yet been revealed.*

Worse still is the possibility that the most concrete evidence is that which has been classified with regard to the complicity of one or more permanent members of the UN Security Council in supplying chemical weapons (or their precursors) to the Syrian regime -- thereby inferred to be the perpetrators of the attack.

Is attacking and killing on the basis of inference precisely what characterizes the legal justification for incarceration without trial and targeted killing, including drone attacks -- of "suspects"?

- **official distortion of global democratic decision process** and of efforts to achieve a global "rule of law":
 - **Iraq**: complex efforts at coalition formation and achieving the legality of a UN resolution, distorted by deliberate presentation of misleading information to achieve consensus
 - **Syria**: bypassing the UN Security Council, effectively affirming a principle and precedent that each nation is free to go it alone, intervening wherever it pleases, in pursuit of its own values and interests -- upheld as exemplary
- **claims regarding the "unacceptable death toll"** and displacement of civilians are dubious when so many are dying around the world in greater numbers and under other circumstances, with or without the complicity of the US or its allies (Ronald Labonte, et al. *Fatal Indifference: the G8, Africa and global health*, 2004):
 - **Iraq**: deaths used as one justification for intervention
 - **Syria**: deaths used as one of the primary justifications for intervention -- after the death toll had been accumulating for many months
- **indifference to ongoing comparable levels of suffering elsewhere**, as with other refugee camps and the [Eastern Congo](#) (Glen Ford, *16 Years of U.S. Genocide in Congo*, *Global Research*, 13 December 2012). This raises the question as to the quantitative and qualitative level of suffering required to elicit moral outrage and a demand for direction action by the international community. Given figures widely cited regarding child mortality, starvation and disease, the "quality" and "quantity" of remedial measures can be seen as questioning the basis for the moral outrage regarding Syria. It could be argued that political doublespeak is a means of sustaining [double standards](#), reinforced by the religious and legal forms of doublespeak -- hence the challenges faced by the [Millennium Development Goals](#). As argued by [Michael Parenti](#): *The enormous gap between what US leaders do in the world and what Americans think their leaders are doing is one of the great propaganda accomplishments*. As argued by [Carl Herman](#) ([Since 9/11, US 1% killed over 100 million children from poverty: they don't care about innocent lives' in Syria](#), *Washington's Blog*, 4 September 2013):

Since 9/11, US reneged promises to end poverty have killed over 100 million children, twice the number of children enrolled in pre-kindergarten to 12th grade in the US. US 1% "leadership" care for "innocent lives" in Syria is the same as their care to poverty-murder every child in every US school, and then poverty-murder the same number of children again.
- **framing media coverage to exclude complicity of other parties** -- indicative of indifference to suffering -- as a means of furthering undeclared strategic interests:
 - **Iraq**: sale of chemical weapon precursors to Iraq (see [United States support for Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War](#)) was initially facilitated by [Donald Rumsfeld](#) (William Lowther, [Rumsfeld 'helped Iraq get chemical weapons'](#), *Daily Mail*, 4 September 2013; Glenn Kessler, [History Lesson: when the United States looked the other way on chemical weapons](#), *The Washington Post*, 4 September 2013; Jeremy Scahill, [The Saddam in Rumsfeld's Closet](#), *Common Dreams*, 2 August 2002).
 - **Syria**: inference, in the absence of concrete evidence (as noted above), that because the rebels would not have been able to

make acquire/disseminate the chemical weapons that therefore it could only have been the regime which was responsible, This simplistic conclusion excludes the possibility -- avoided by all commentators -- that other parties might have been interested in having the weapons used in order to trigger the crisis -- whether or not this was Israel or the USA. It is naive to assume that neither is incapable of [false flag](#) (covert) operations. It is a distortion of public debate not to take this factor into consideration as being a possible pretext for war ([James Bamford, *A Pretext for War: 9/11, Iraq, and the Abuse of America's Intelligence Agencies*, 2004](#)).

The question is who has most to gain or lose, as discussed in relation to a previous incident ([Cui Bono: Groupthink vs Thinking the Unthinkable?](#) 2005). Expressed otherwise, how much would it cost to fake "intelligence reports" and to devise scenarios characteristic of Hollywood imagination? See also the [Wikipedia](#) summary of use of covert operations in [United States support for Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war](#). Most curiously, little mention is made in the media of the strategic implications of the [Russian naval facility](#) in the Syrian port-city of Tartus -- the only Russian repair and replenishment base in the Mediterranean, sparing the need for warships to travel back to their Black Sea bases through the Turkish Straits. The extent to which the Syrian regime has been equipped with capacity to respond to any US strike has also been downplayed in the media (Michael Snyder, [Russia Has Equipped Syria With Their Most Advanced Anti-Ship Missiles](#), *Information Clearing House*, 3 September 2013).

Values and morality: Curiously significant is the self-righteous claim on the part of the US to be upholding American values -- if not universal values -- at a time when it is widely realized that US credibility and moral standing have been severely eroded by a variety of revelations. As argued by [Laurie Penny](#) ([There Are Too Many Bodies Buried On Britain's Moral High Ground](#), *Information Clearing House*, 3 September 2013):

This isn't about Syria. This is, for better or worse, about us - on the left and on the right. The generation that grew up watching the war in Iraq and Afghanistan has done a lot of "soul-searching" in ten years. We have walked across the moral high-ground that our leaders mapped out for us. We have discovered that it is a graveyard. The bodies buried on the Anglo-American moral high ground are beyond number, and the flowers that grow there are dank and reek of corruption. But not this time. Not again. Not in our name.

The attempt to claim that there is no parallel with Iraq, as articulated by John Kerry, is strangely reminiscent of that of [Jeane Kirkpatrick](#), US Ambassador to the United Nations in criticizing those claiming that there was "no moral difference" between the Soviet Union and democratic states (Jeane Kirkpatrick, [The Myth of Moral Equivalence](#), *Imprimis*, 1986). Most curious is the timing of the sudden emergence of righteous US moral repulsion at the use of chemical weapons, now strangely associated by Barack Obama with the [Chemical Weapons Convention](#) (drafted 1992; signed 1993; effective 1997). This is seemingly claimed to be the moment when the world defined the "red line" ([Obama Says 'World Set a Red Line' on Chemical Arms](#), *The New York Times*, 5 September 2013) -- and despite the "Fallujah-amnesia" from which US has subsequently suffered.

Untrustworthiness: The declaration of Colin Powell to the UN Security Council in support of intervention in Iraq, followed by disclosures regarding the level of secret spying on UN officials, embassies and allies worldwide, clearly undermines any capacity of US officials to speak with moral authority on any critical issue. It is difficult for US officialdom to reestablish trustworthiness and honourability when the contrary has been so clearly demonstrated to so many. A detailed comparison of the declaration of Colin Powell with that of John Kerry on 30 August 2013 merits careful study with respect to body language, assumed gravitas, strong assertion of knowledge of the facts, and moral righteousness -- especially in the light of contrary information subsequent to their authoritative declarations

Unfortunately politicians now have no means of providing concrete evidence that they are not lying -- given that any such evidence can be fabricated as required. Curiously it could be claimed that politicians now fail the [proverbial duck test](#): *If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck*. This could now be reframed as: ***If a politician looks like a truth-teller, is acclaimed as a truth-teller, and talks like a truth-teller, then he or she is probably not a truth-teller.***

The key question in response to potential doublespeak is clearly whether politicians would lie, if they thought they could get away with it in pursuit of undeclared interests. The answer is clearly "yes" in the light of the past track record. The fact that polls show confidence in politicians to be ever decreasing, both in the USA and the UK, is indicative of the reality of the situation.

Indifference to suffering: As to the indifference to suffering concealed by self-righteous reference to morality and democratic values through the pattern of doublespeak, this has been remarkably articulated in two instances involving previous US Secretaries of State. Having authorised the acquisition of information through spying on UN offices, [Hillary Clinton](#) personally expressed regret to the UN Secretary-General about the embarrassing disclosure of that fact by WikiLeaks ([Alleged Breach of UN Treaty Obligations by US](#), 2010). However it has been noted that the "regret" expressed by Hillary Clinton did not in fact take the form of an apology ([Hillary Clinton 'regrets' spying on Ban Ki-moon](#), *The Australian*, 4 December 2010).

Clinton's "regret" may well have focused on the revelation rather than on her action -- as would seem to have been the case with regard to her predecessor, [Madeleine Albright](#), in commenting on the death of 500,000 children in Iraq as a result of US-imposed sanctions: *"we think the price is worth it"*. By contrast, in his presentation on 30 August 2013, John Kerry focused on the extreme unacceptability of 1,429 deaths allegedly perpetrated by the Syrian regime using chemical weapons -- of which a third were children ([Syria crisis: Obama considering 'narrow' action](#), *CBC News*, 30 August 2013).

Potemkin Policy Presentation: There is a case for recognizing that efforts are systematically made to disguise indifference to suffering according to the precedent created by the [Potemkin village pattern](#) -- now adapted for use in legal systems, consistent with the above-

mentioned legal doublespeak. The *Wikipedia* entry notes:

The term "Potemkin village" is also often used by judges, especially members of a multiple-judge panel who dissent from the majority's opinion on a particular matter, to describe an inaccurate or tortured interpretation and/or application of a particular legal doctrine to the specific facts at issue. Use of the term is meant to imply that the reasons espoused by the panel's majority in support of its decision are not based on accurate or sound law, and their restrictive application is merely a masquerade for the court's desire to avoid a difficult decision.

This could be seen as an admirable description of the framing of the Syrian situation offered by the USA -- perhaps to be named as a "Potemkin Policy Presentation". This would be consistent with a more general framing, previously explored (*Globalization within a Global Potemkin Society: a strategic challenge to proactive participation in society*, 2000).

Credibility: There is a curious degree to which the current crisis regarding intervention in Syria is essentially a matter of credibility and the challenges to it. This is especially the case with respect to the evidence for chemical weapon use, the credibility of the international community, the credibility of the intelligence services, and the credibility of the USA. It is also the case with respect to media coverage of the crisis.

There is clearly a danger of various parties becoming overly convinced by narratives which they carefully craft for others to convince them of a particular perspective. For the USA there is clearly a danger of "losing face", having defined a "red line". The danger is aggravated by the seemingly elusive nature of the enemy to be the subject of punitive measures. The US engagement with such an enemy could even be caricatured by that of Inspector Clouseau in *The Pink Panther* comedies -- in which his manservant, an expert in martial arts, is instructed to attack him unexpectedly, to keep Clouseau's combat skills and vigilance sharp.

The caricature can be used to frame **the current need for a military strike of any kind against any credible target** -- to reinforce respect for US military might, **however imaginary the enemy** and however responsible for the chemical attacks those struck later prove to be. Unfortunately that need is echoed by the targeting policy with regard to drone attacks -- irrespective of whether those targeted are proven "valid enemies" rather than "civilian bystanders". The quest is for **retributive justice**, as claimed by Barack Obama with respect to the killing of Osama bin Laden (*Obama tells families of 9/11 victims that 'justice has been done'*, *CNN*, 2 May 2011) -- a claim challenged by **Geoffrey Robertson** (*Why it's absurd to claim that justice has been done*, *The Independent*, 3 May 2011).

The extent of doublespeak -- accompanied by claims and counter-claims obscuring and distorting supposedly factual arguments -- completely devalues any implication that "justice is being done" and suffering is being reduced. It is entirely questionable whether the further suffering ensured by military strikes, however "surgical", will effectively address the challenge. Use of "chemical weapons" as a "red line" unfortunately makes the further point that it is not the suffering of displaced millions and the many previously killed that is considered the primary justification, rather it is the suffering of the few which is used as a form of blackmail. The argument is essentially perverse, especially given the previous extensive use of chemical weapons by the USA.

Recognition of Political Double-speak on Syria

- Christian Sarich: *Untnigling the Doublespeak on Syria* (*Nation of Change*, 6 September 2013)
- Anna Neistat: *Welcome to Russia's Syria doublespeak* (*CNN*, 19 June 2013)
- Dave Ross: *Doublespeak on 'response' in Syria begins* (*MyNorthwest.com*, 27 August 2013)
- *The war' in Syria - an exercise in doublespeak* (*Erudite Knight*, 28 August 2013)
- Gwynne Dyer: *Deciphering the double speak on Syrian solutions and security* (*The New Zealand Herald*, 3 June 2013)
- Paul Craig Roberts: *Fake WMD "Intelligence" and Orwellian Double-speak: Washington Is Insane* (*Global Research*, 17 June 2013)
- Umberto Bacchi: *Syria Civil War: US Diplomatic Double-Speak Holds Clear Dangers* (*International Business Times*, 12 December 2012)
- Bobit Avila: *US Defense Sec'y, engaging in double speak!* (*The Freeman*, 3 September 2013)
- *Syria: Anders Fogh Rasmussen's doublespeak* (*Brussel.Bruxelles.Brussels*, 15 June 2013)
- Paula Puryear Martin: *It's 1984 All Over Again and I've Got a Doublespeak Headache* (*The Huffington Post*, 6 July 2013)

Exploiting suffering as a means of moral and emotional blackmail

Deploring suffering: The manner in which the various forms of doublespeak are blended cynically into the process of deploring suffering is separately discussed (*Vigorous Application of Derivative Thinking to Derivative Problems: transcending bewailing, hand-wringing and emotional blackmail*, 2013):

As indicated by the title, the concern... is with the nature of authoritative analysis of any problem situation such as to avoid any focus on generative factors. The subtitle is indicative of a secondary concern that this avoidance ensures every opportunity for many to wring their hands in compassionate despair for those who suffer as a consequence. For those variously claiming the highest moral authority, this may then be reinforced by their vacuous appeals to others of lesser standing to enable the resolution of the problem -- a form of emotional blackmail further reinforced by daily media coverage of that suffering.

As further noted:

Possibly most offensive at this time is the "hand-wringing" by authorities... This is reminiscent of that given prominence by **Pontius Pilate** in "washing his hands" to show that he was not responsible for the execution of Jesus, and in thereby reluctantly sending him to his death (*Matthew 27:24*). Associated with this process is the **emotional blackmail** by which responsibility for the

current global condition is thereby allocated to others.

Especially significant to the current argument is the manner in which human rights and the law are increasingly used as a form of decorative "fig leaf", variously adjusted to conceal the "erogenous zones" through which the problematique is engendered and sustained. Appeals to the "law" and its constraints then obscure the extent to which behaviour is conditioned by some form of "lore" to which little reference is made, as separately discussed (*Law and Order vs. Lore and Orders? Imagining otherwise the forceful engagement of singularity with plurality*, 2013).

Beggars as a case study: The challenge can be variously discussed (*Is There Never Enough? Religious doublespeak on population and poverty*, 2013) with respect to *Questionable appeals for compassion*. The nature of the challenge becomes personally evident in exposure to begging and consideration of possible responses. For the beggar, however justified the suffering, the key is to trigger a sense of empathy, compassion and guilt. This can be construed as moral or emotional blackmail meriting more sophisticated analysis than is typically accorded to it -- especially given its institutional equivalent.

Of particular concern is the exploitation of the suffering as a means of soliciting philanthropic donations (*When the Suffering of Children is "Cute"*, *Philanthropic Antinatalism*, 22 July 2013)

Children, we would all agree, are cute. We may not be able to define what cute is, but, like pornography, we know it when we see it. This is why it's particularly problematic when people, apparently normal people who aren't at all deranged, have intuitions about what constitute cuteness that seem to contradict the most basic moral framework that they themselves claim to hold.

Especially relevant to this argument regarding indifference to suffering is the incidence of begging in the forecourts of churches and mosques. This is particularly significant in relation to the position of the Catholic Church regarding poverty and indifference to suffering -- most notably on the steps of St Peters in Rome. Kelly Johnson (*The Fear of Beggars: Stewardship and Poverty in Christian Ethics*, 2007) asks why Christian ethics so rarely tackle the real-life question of whether to give to beggars. Examining both classical economics and Christian stewardship ethics as reactions to medieval debates about the role of mendicants in the church and in wider society, Johnson reveals modern anxiety about dependence and humility as well as the importance of Christian attempts to rethink property relations in ways that integrate those qualities.

Self-reflexivity? It is in the light of the related level of doublespeak that the Pope's recent declaration (as cited above) merits the most careful attention:

The culture of comfort...makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others...In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn't affect me; it doesn't concern me; it's none of my business. (*Comfort makes us indifferent to suffering of migrants*, *Pope says*, *Catholic News Agency*, 8 July 2013)

The points are all necessarily well made. But to whom are his appeals addressed? He has already been much appreciated for his frugality. From this should one conclude that a form of blackmail is in process to persuade others to act similarly? *Cui Bono?* Would that be sufficient? Is it even remotely realistic?

Neglecting future suffering: If it neither sufficient nor realistic, given the encouragement by religions to procreate without constraint or consideration of available resources, is this simply postponing the challenge -- possibly into a period in which it will be even more difficult to address? Given the Pope's call to reassess personal strategies with respect to suffering of others, should the Catholic Church reconsider its position on ensuring the birth of children with every probability of suffering? From this perspective, but unconsciously, are his various arguments addressed primarily to the Catholic Church and to his role in it? Through his "teaching" on that occasion, is he essentially trying to inform that over which he has a mandate -- and to "teach himself"?

Can his specific criticism of the failure to take responsibility for the immigrants arriving in Lampedusa be understood as an (unconscious) criticism of the failure of the Catholic Church to think through the process whereby ever more immigrants seek to engage in that perilous process? Is his criticism of the complacency of those who fail to address the **short-term** issue in effect a criticism of the complacency of the Catholic Church with regard to the "derivative thinking" it deploys in considering the matter with respect to the **long-term**?

Exploiting suffering systematically? Without considering the much debated position of Christian churches regarding the controversial issue of abortion, what of their position regarding ensuring the continued suffering of those in chronic pain, whatever their desire for early release through **euthanasia**? How is it possible for religions to be so typically complicit (if not enthusiastic) in the process of killing others through military action -- yet so indifferent to the suffering with which the process may be associated, especially if those killed are of a competing religion? And yet when suffering individuals seek release through assisted euthanasia, religions are the first to present arguments against this -- which they fail to present with regard to the slaughter of others?

Are religions in the strange position of exploiting suffering systematically in order to advance their own agendas? Is it the case that personal experience of suffering obliges individuals to reframe their indifference to the suffering of others? Does this justify the ethical and moral blackmail -- if only as a means of engendering resources from those with guilty consciences?

Transcendent justification for indifference to the suffering of others?

The above argument suggests the need to consider more realistically the case in favour of indifference to the suffering of others -- as a condition with which it is necessary to come to terms, now and in the probable future.

Acceptance of inevitability of suffering: Elements of the justification include:

- absence of self-imposed constraints on consumption and procreation accompanied by increasing recognition that consumption of planetary resources is in overshoot mode ([carrying capacity](#); [over-consumption](#); [overpopulation](#)). This implies that inadequate resources, and the inability to deliver them to where they are needed, will increase the level of malnourishment, starvation and related conditions -- leading to increased mortality of many, especially amongst the young.
- as with the individual challenge of obesity, humanity is proving unable to engender a healthy lifestyle for itself and will be increasingly exposed to the equivalent of fatal "lifestyle diseases"
- effectively unquestionable commitment to [natalism](#) and [fecundism](#), encouraged (tacitly or explicitly) by religions, namely competitive multiplication of the numbers to be exposed to suffering and early mortality
- increasing recognition of the ungovernability of global society in the light of the ideals of "[life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness](#)" and the impossibility of achieving democratic consensus on sustainable strategies to limit suffering, necessitating increasing reliance on strategies implying a degree of suffering (*Ungovernability of Sustainable Global Democracy?* 2011; *The Consensus Delusion*, 2011)
- increasing commitment to allocation of resources to military equipment, necessarily designed to cause suffering and fatality
- increasingly violent social unrest (as a consequence of suffering), the need to repress it with violence (ignoring that suffering), together with the obligation to incarcerate increasing numbers of perpetrators (under conditions in which their suffering is a matter of relative indifference)

Psychic numbing: The justification becomes evident individually in the need to cultivate "[psychic numbing](#)" as a defence against being unduly affected by the suffering of others. Specifically in:

- the need to cause suffering in order to survive (and thrive), whether this is limited to animals required for food, or extends to ensuring the social inequality whereby others are malnourished, starve, or suffer otherwise, in the competition for resources
- the need to ignore a high proportion of those soliciting aid to mitigate their own suffering -- if only to conserve adequate resources to mitigate one's own.
- the need to limit severely personal exposure to the suffering of others, whether elsewhere or in one's immediate vicinity

As with "just war theory", there is clearly a case for recognizing the effective elaboration of a "just suffering theory" through which indifference to the suffering of others is rendered morally and ethically acceptable. The habituation of society and oneself to suffering is clearly greatly facilitated by simulations of violence through the media (movies, games, etc) and the portrayals of violence elsewhere. These anticipate conditions which may well prevail in urban environments of the future, and are already characteristic of no-go areas.

Governance of society is then greatly facilitated if it is accepted that military strikes should be conducted wherever it is deemed to be appropriate -- as a form of retributive justice through which it may be claimed that the highest human values are effectively upheld.

There is a profound irony to the manner in which the trinity of different forms of doublespeak complement each other. It could be argued that the retributive justice sought through political doublespeak is engendered by religious doublespeak negligent of its own longer-term consequences -- curiously supported by legal doublespeak. "Syria", "Afghanistan" and "Iraq" are a consequence of ill-considered forms of faith-based governance -- with "Iran" to follow, appropriately entangled with "Israel". The suffering engendered is the price of such negligence, sustained by unexamined self-righteous assumptions regarding occupancy of the moral high ground. In effect the suffering is a global systemic corrective for indifference.

Theological enabling of suffering: Especially helpful to a transcendent justification for indifference to the suffering of others is the ambiguity of religions in this regard. This is most evident in their contribution to the exacerbation of the suffering on theological grounds -- "be fruitful and multiply" (*Genesis 1:28*). Religions have proven to be unable to engender modes of governance capable of managing the consequences of increasing population numbers -- or to enable more fruitful relations between each other (and amongst the divisions of each of them). It is only too evident that existent patterns of relationship engender suffering and death.

Reframing need for human sacrifice? Under the circumstances, the complacency of religions effectively constitutes a renewed commitment to the supposedly long abandoned practice of [human sacrifice](#) (*Contemporary reformalization of ritual "human sacrifice"*, 2006). This reinforces the conviction of authorities that any such sacrifice is "[worth it](#)", as so explicitly articulated by [Madeleine Albright](#) in commenting on the death of 500,000 children in Iraq as a result of US-imposed sanctions. The curious implication of the Catholic Church in the Iraq intervention and its massive slaughter is especially evident in the lack of remorse expressed by Tony Blair -- as a subsequent convert to Catholicism and a promoter of faith-based governance thereafter.

Reframing indifference? One approach has been framed on the *Information Philosopher* website as [Liberty of Indifference](#).

Whilst the [Abrahamic religions](#) offer themselves the luxury of transferring any consequences in practice to a transcendent deity, the unfruitfulness of theological discourse in this regard is usefully illustrated by a controversy between the Catholic Church and Buddhism. This arose from the negative appreciation of Buddhism, offered in an assessment of other religions, by [Pope John Paul II](#) (*Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 1994). It evoked several [critical responses](#) ([Thinley Norbu Rinpoche](#), *Welcoming Flowers from across the Cleansed Threshold of Hope: An Answer to the Pope's Criticism of Buddhism*, 1997; [Bhikkhu Bodhi](#), *Toward a Threshold of Understanding*, 1998).

The critical concern of Buddhists, of relevance to the "indifference to the suffering of others", is framed as follows:

The Pontiff describes [Nibbana](#) as "a state of perfect indifference with regard to the world," adding that in Buddhism salvation

means "above all, to free oneself from evil by becoming indifferent to the world, which is the source of evil" (p.86). By such statements he represents Buddhism to his readers as a quietistic doctrine of withdrawal which can address the momentous problems that face humanity today only by politely turning its back on them. This is hardly a satisfactory depiction of Early Buddhism, in which transcendence of the world is stressed, let alone of Mahayana Buddhism, in which the bodhisattva's compassionate activity on behalf of the world becomes the guiding ideal.

The Pali word that the Pope interprets as "indifference" is presumably *upekkha*. The real meaning of this word is equanimity, not indifference in the sense of unconcern for others. As a spiritual virtue, *upekkha* means equanimity in the face of the fluctuations of worldly fortune. It is evenness of mind, unshakeable freedom of mind, a state of inner equipoise that cannot be upset by gain and loss, honor and dishonor, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. *Upekkha* is freedom from all points of self-reference; it is indifference only to the demands of the ego-self with its craving for pleasure and position, not to the well-being of one's fellow human beings.

Any understanding of the insights involved is challenged by the value variously attributed to [suffering](#) (John A. Hardon, *The Value of Suffering in the Life of Christian Perfection, Real Presence Eucharistic Education and Adoration Association*). Suffering is framed by Christian theology as vital to acquisition of insight. This could render suspect any policies promoted by religion which exacerbate and prolong suffering, as mentioned above. The Buddhist tradition emphasizes as of primordial importance the developing of insight into the nature of *dukkha* (suffering), the conditions that cause it, and how it can be overcome. Related insights are cultivated in Islam, as noted by [Beth Davies-Stofka](#) (*Suffering and the Problem of Evil*):

... suffering tests belief... But suffering also reveals the hidden self to God. Suffering is built into the fabric of existence so that God may see who is truly righteous. In other words, God not only allows the various agonies and struggles of life, but has a purpose for them. Suffering opens up the soul and reveals it to God. God uses suffering to look within humans and test their characters, and correct the unbelievers.

In quest of subtler insight: Given the fundamental role that Abrahamic religions play in both engendering suffering and endeavouring to reframe its implications, there is clearly a case for reviewing the subtle nature of the "transcendental" perspective through which individuals are increasingly obliged to engage with that suffering -- however the implication of subtle "human values" is stressed. The extent of doublespeak and doublethink suggests the need for greater vigilance in such explorations -- to the extent that they enable insight on whose credibility individuals can rely. Engaging in "[competitive theology](#)" to achieve the moral or ethical high ground is unworthy of the dignity of religions seeking universal credibility.

Given the respect in which mathematics is held by most religions -- effectively the relational science *par excellence* -- there is a case for exploring the manner in which the subtleties of mathematics can inform the subtleties of theology, as separately argued ([Mathematical Theology: Future Science of Confidence in Belief -- Self-reflexive Global Reframing to Enable Faith-based Governance](#), 2011).

[NB: [References](#) included in first part]



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