



laetus in praesens

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Collective Mea Culpa? You Must be Joking !

Them is to blame, Not us !

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Published on the occasion of allegedly major mistakes regarding the [European bailout of Greece](#) and the agreement concerning the [nuclear programme of Iran](#)

Introduction

Challenging and controversial as it is in practice, confession of error by individuals is well-recognized in a variety of settings. The process has been encouraged in religion (*mea culpa*), as a feature of political ideology ([self-criticism](#)), in psychotherapy, and in education. It is accepted that errors made by individual scientists in the course of experiment (or the interpretation of results) should be formally reported -- perhaps in anticipation of assessment by others. A form of self-criticism is acknowledged to a degree with respect to strategic decisions by leaders of a group, whether military or business -- most notably in the event of failure.

Such acknowledgement of error is far less evident with respect to acknowledgement by a collective. Like individuals, groups are extremely articulate with respect to the errors of others. This is the essence of political debate in which opposing parties systematically identify errors in each other's proposals, policies and initiatives -- vigorously denying the slightest error in their own. This may well be evident even in the event of failure of a party to be re-elected -- possibly by blaming misunderstanding by the electorate or the misleading strategy of the winning party.

The importance attached by Catholicism to regular [confession](#) can thus be curiously contrasted with the "confession" in which the Catholic Church seemingly fails to engage as a collective. This is to be contrasted in turn with the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) issued by the Holy See. It was made up of citations from earlier papal documents, presented as a list of propositions by others condemned as false. Similarly, despite encouraging self-criticism, Communist regimes did not have any process for collective self-criticism. As with Catholicism, Communism focused the blame for any error on individuals -- even including leaders in the latter case (leading to their elimination). Seemingly the collective cannot be seen to be in error in its own eyes -- irrespective of recognition of such errors by others, then defensively to be condemned in consequence.

The question here is how this pattern plays out globally. Is the United Nations as such capable of confessing to error? How about the World Bank or the IMF? Do regional organizations have that capability: the European Commission, the OECD, the Organization of American States, NATO, etc? Are individual countries (governments?) similarly challenged? And what of that mysterious entity the "international community"? What of bodies that hold their own influence in the highest esteem: the World Economic Forum, the Club of Rome, the Bilderberg Group, or Freemasonry? The issue is whether there is a capacity to formally articulate: *we made a mistake* or *were at fault*. Is there any record of resolutions or declarations taking that form? Where are these collected as an aid to collective memory and societal learning?

Curiously it would appear that collectives frequently employ "we" in declaring their understanding and recommendations (for others), but are much challenged in the case of any misunderstanding on their own part -- whenever it becomes evident. Science offers an interesting

case in this respect, as with technological development. What examples are there of science acknowledging error -- in contrast with the error by individual scientists as a feature of the scientific method in advancing human knowledge? The errors of science as a whole only become evident through a [paradigm shift](#) -- a [scientific revolution](#) -- through which adherence to views of the past are simply deprecated as misguided and naive. This corresponds in some measure to the process of [political revolution](#) and systemic change. However it is then apparent that there has been no collective "we" to acknowledge error consciously. There is a transformation to a new modality which, given the absence of an effective "we", may be considered equally unconscious in the light of the arguments of [John Ralston Saul](#) (*The Unconscious Civilization*, 1995). The dynamics are reminiscent of those of [bird flocking](#).

These examples point to the fact that collectives tend to lack a "we" capacity except in the sense of the fuzzy coherence by which they frame their identity to contrast advantageously with others. This form of identity lacks self-referential capacity except in the sense of flag-waving and habitual discourse articulating "our values". Recognition of error is an existential challenge to that sense of identity. How does a swarm of insects recognize "error" -- despite current interest in [swarm intelligence](#)? Notably inspired by [crowdsourcing](#), are progressive movements any more self-aware?

It is under these circumstances that efforts are desperately made to elicit coherence, consensus and political will in response to threats such as climate change, fundamentalism, or alternatives promoted in reaction to the failure of mainstream strategies. This is the context which frames the track record of interdisciplinary, interfaith and intercultural discourse -- pathetic in relation to the challenge of the times. The context is primarily characterized by the blame game -- and the inability to apply any methodology to its analysis, given that everyone tends to be part of the problem, and to fail to acknowledge that: *If one cannot understand how one is part of the problem, one cannot understand the nature of the solution required.*

The challenge is currently highlighted by the reaction to agreements resulting from long and painful international negotiations. The agreements were immediately labelled as fundamentally mistaken by parties considered highly blameworthy by many -- parties not known for any memorable admission of error. If global consensus is required on controversial issues, both the process of collective apology and the blame game merit more fruitful analysis. Understood as an epidemic, blame invites exploration inspired by the emerging pattern insights of mathematical virology.

The following presentation is heavily focused on clustering sets of web resources such that the named clusters provide a context for remarks regarding the possibility and nature of any "collective *mea culpa*", to whom it might be addressed, and the consideration of subsequent action. In this respect, the argument notably explores the challenge of transcending the contrasting cultural preoccupations with the dynamics of shame/honour, guilt/innocence and fear/safety. These appear fundamental to the process of societal learning in the light of mistake recognition.

Varieties of blameworthy collective error?

It is useful to review a variety of errors and mistakes as recognized in different domains in order to highlight the degree to which these tend to be framed as the responsibility of a key individual (or a leadership group) or the fault of no one in particular. Especially relevant is the extent to which these are primarily recognized from an historical perspective, and typically by "outsiders" whose judgement (and interpretation of "facts") may be considered questionable and a focus of rebuttal, if not simply ignored as ill-informed opinion. Of related interest is the extent to which the "errors" are to be recognized as "problems", namely a subset of the variety of problems profiled in a section of the online [Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential](#).

The sources quoted, and the manner of their clustering, is intended to be indicative only, rather than comprehensive. Omissions, whether apparent or otherwise, may be equally instructive.

- **Errors from an historical perspective (including errors of historical interpretation) :**

- Stephen Weir:
 - *History's Worst Decisions and the People Who Made Them* (2009)
 - *History's Greatest Lies: the startling truths behind world events our history books got wrong* (2009)
- Ian Whitelaw: *History's Biggest Blunders -- and the people who made them* (2012)
- Geoffrey Regan: *Historical Blunders* (2002)

- **Errors in terms of legal principles and human rights:**

- [hard cases make bad law](#): This is a legal maxim by which it is implied that extreme cases are a poor basis for a general law that would cover a wider range of less extreme cases. In other words, a general law is better drafted for the average circumstance as this will be more common.
- [miscarriage of justice](#): Namely the conviction and punishment of a person for a crime they did not commit. This is recognized as especially problematic in the case of capital punishment, necessarily irreversible
- [unjust law](#): an unjust law would be one that takes away an individual's or a group's freedom, causes harm or basically just causes chaos. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust
- [illegality](#): Not authorized by law; Illicit ; unlawful; contrary to law. Sometimes this term means merely that which lacks authority of or support from law; but more frequently it imports a violation.
- [just war theory](#): through which particular acts of war are framed as morally justifiable, irrespective of the number of resulting deaths and the extent of collateral damage.

Error may be recognized in terms of: arbitrary arrest, detention and execution; forms of enslavement and bondage; enforced resettlement (notably of indigenous peoples); inhumane forms of punishment (death penalty, amputation, etc); and illegal

experimentation of humans. Concern may focus on action "above the law". An especially subtle form of error may be recognized as encroachment (*Varieties of Encroachment*, 2004)

Of relevance to this argument are references to indictments and convictions having been politically motivated -- possibly recognized as vindictive justice. Of particular interest is the ongoing debate regarding the legality of processes undertaken by the USA (most notably through the CIA, and with the degree of complicity of various allies) held to be justified by security preoccupations. Concerns have focused on rendition, torture, incarceration without charges or trial, and targeted assassination. The debate has extended to include the legality of surveillance.

- **Errors deriving from colonial policies (especially in relation to indigenous peoples):** There is of course a considerable body of literature on the problematic processes historically associated with [colonialism](#) (and [imperialism](#)) and now extended into processes recognized as [neo-colonialism](#) or [neo-imperialism](#). Less well-recognized are the past and continuing processes relating to indigenous peoples concerning which there is a distinct body of literature, notably indicative (as in the case of the colonialism) of the unfortunate complicity of religious authorities.
- **Massacres as instances of major error:** There is extensive literature on the range of [massacres](#) perpetrated throughout history, whether or not these are acknowledged to be [genocidal massacres](#) or instances of [ethnic cleansing](#) (*List of events named massacres*). Such events are an extension of those associated with the previous points. Of relevance with respect to ethnic cleansing are collective policies of [involuntary euthanasia](#). Recognition of "massacre" may extend to that of non-human species as being erroneous.
- **Contradictions within socio-political initiatives understood as erroneous:**
 - communism
 - [Contradictions of Communism](#). (Report by the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws to the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eighty-sixth Congress, first session. 1959).
 - Richard Sakwa: *The Soviet collapse: contradictions and neo-modernisation* *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 4, 2013, 1, pp. 65-77
 - Nina Khrushcheva: *Cultural Contradictions of Post-Communism: Why Liberal Reforms Did Not Succeed in Russia* (Council on Foreign Relations):
 - capitalism
 - David Harvey: *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*. Profile Books, 2014
 - Richard Kossally: *Contradictions in Capitalism* *Workers World*, 13 February 2012
 - Richard Peet: *Contradictions of Finance Capitalism* *Monthly Review*, 1 December 2011
 - Gary Young: *The Fundamental Contradiction of Capitalist Production* *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 5, 1976, 2, pp. 196-234
 - Daniel Bell: *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 6, 1972, 1/2,
 - István Mészáros: *The Contradictions of Capitalism* *Pink Scare*, 9 June 2012
 - liberalism:
 - John Hawkins: *20 Hypocrisies of Liberalism* *TrueNews*
 - James Hitchcock: *The Contradictions of Multi-Generational Liberalism* *Crisis Magazine*, 21 October 2014
 - Pedro Schwartz: *Overcoming the Contradictions of Liberal Democracy: Sociobiology and Social Engineering* *Library of Economics and Liberty*, 4 November 2013
 - Brandon Vallorani: *Top 10 Liberal Hypocrisies* *Patriot Update*, 3 December 2011
 - conservatism
 - R. G. Price: *The Contradictions Inherent in American Conservatism* *RationalRevolution.net*, 24 February 2004
 - Lawrence Wittner: *Conservative Contradictions* *Counterpunch*, 7 January 2015
 - George F. Will: *The Cultural Contradictions of Conservatism* *National Affairs*, Spring 1996
 - Brian R. Farmer: *Contradictions in Conservatism* 2006
 - James Alexander: *The Contradictions of Conservatism* *Government and Opposition*, October 2013;
 - socialism
 - Michael A. Lebowitz: *The Contradictions of "Real Socialism": the Conductor and the Conducted* *Monthly Review*, 13 July 2015
 - Mao Tse-tung: *Contradictions Under Socialism* *People's Daily* 5 April 1956
 - colonialism and imperialism:
 - Abha Sur: *Contradictions of Colonialism*. *Science as Culture* 14, 2005, 93-96
 - Anthony Mustacich: *Imperialism, The Cold War, and the Contradictions of Decolonization*, *Global Research*, 12 May 2013
 - Sara Flounders: *The Contradictions of U.S. Imperialism* *Workers World*, 2 December 2008
 - Victor G. Kiernan: *Imperialism and Its Contradictions* Routledge, 1995
 - environmentalism
 - Daniel Somers Smith: *Place-based Environmentalism and Global Warming: conceptual contradictions of american environmentalism* *Ethics and International Affairs*, 15, 2001, 2, pp. 117-134
 - Paul Suff: *Full of Contradictions: once you've hit your target, should you stop there or go further?* *The Environmentalist*, 2 July 2015

- green revolution
 - Harry Cleaver: *The Contradictions of the Green Revolution*
- development
 - Philip McMichael: *Contemporary Contradictions of the Global Development Project: geopolitics, global ecology and the 'development climate'* *Third World Quarterly*, 30, 2009, 1, pp. 247-262
- **Errors of science:** The approach of science may be considered fundamentally in error, most notably with respect to the evolution/creationism debate and varieties of experimentation (vivisection, stem cell research, genetic engineering etc). The social irresponsibility of science may be seen as fundamentally problematic, as with the complicity in weapons research. Although scientists may want their research to be valuable to society, there is disagreement about what is valuable (Andreas Abildlund, *Mapping Social Responsibility in Science*, *ScienceNordic*, 16 April 2014)
 - Clara Moskowitz: *Oops! The 5 Greatest Scientific Blunders*. *LiveScience*, 16 May 2013
 - Judith Newman: *20 of the Greatest Blunders in Science in the Last 20 Years: what were they thinking?* *Discover*, 1 October 2000
- **Perception of error between disciplines:** Typically these take the form of deprecation of the methods and preoccupations of one discipline by another (or by those with a practical focus), thereby undermining progress in integrative interdisciplinary initiatives (Alan D. Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: postmodern intellectuals' abuse of science*, 1998). The extent and nature of such error has been highlighted by the **Sokal Affair** and the associated debate. However they may define themselves as disciplines, it includes consideration of complementary therapies and religion as inherently erroneous, if not deluded (Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 2006). The mutual deprecation between modes of knowing highlights the absence of an adequate systematic approach to knowledge as may be variously explored (*Knowledge Processes Neglected by Science: insights from the crisis of science and belief*, 2012; *Requisite Meta-reflection on Engagement in Systemic Change?* 2015).
- **Errors within a religious framework (including contradictions):** Typically these take the form of critical analysis of one religion by another, thereby undermining progress in interfaith dialogue.
 - Abrahamic religions
 - *Contradictions in the Bible Unam Sanctam Catholicam*
 - *The Errors Found in Various Church Denominations (various Protestant, Catholic, etc)*. *Bible.explore*
 - Christianity
 - *Contradictions in Roman Catholicism Jude 1:3*, 2 September 2011
 - Hans Küng: *Crisis in the Catholic Church: the Pope's contradictions* *Spiegel Online*, 26 March 2005
 - Simon Basketter: *The Contradictions of Catholicism laid bare* *Socialist Worker*, 21 March 2013
 - Keith Piper: *Errors of the Roman Catholic Church*.
 - *Top 10 Shameful Moments in Catholic History*. *Listverse*, 8 June 2011
 - Bob Stanley: *33 Multifarious Errors of Protestantism*. *The Catholic Treasure Chest*, 20 August 2002
 - *The Errors of Protestantism*. *Protestant.errors.com*.
 - *Catholic Errors from A to Z*. *The Ex-Catholic Journal*
 - John Wijngaards: *Mistakes by the Teaching Authority in Rome*. *Womenpriests.org*
 - Maureen Fiedler and Linda Rabben (Eds.): *Rome Has Spoken: a guide to forgotten papal statements, and how they have changed through the centuries*. 1998.
 - Judaism:
 - *Contradictions within the Torah, Torah Philosophy*, 21 January 2007
 - *Torah Authorship and Contradictions*, *JewishAnswers.org*
 - Ben Russell and Spencer Grussing: *An internal critique of Modern Judaism*, *Answers of Hope*, 22 March 2014
 - Islam
 - *Contradictions in the Qur'an* (*WikiIslam*); Ahmed Eldakroury, *Wiki-Islam Debunked*
 - *Contradictions in the Qur'an* (*Answering-Islam.org*)
 - *Historical Errors of the Qur'an* (*Answering-Islam.org*)
 - *Detailed rebuttals to the so called "Errors" in the Noble Quran* (*Answering-Christianity.org*)
 - Syed Kamran Mirza: *Samples of Quranic Contradictions and Flaws* *Islam Watch*, 12 March 2007

In a *WikiIslam* profile on *Scientific Errors in the Qur'an*, it is argued that since Muslims believe that the Qur'an contains a message from an all-powerful, all-knowing, infallible being. If this is true then it should not contain any errors, mistakes, or information that contradicts known facts about the universe. If even one error exists in the text of Islam's holy book then the claims of divine authorship and infallibility are not true. The arguments made have been rebutted (*Rebuttal to Answering-Islams: "Scientific Errors of the Qur'an"*, *Answering-Christianity.org*). Similar arguments are made with respect to papal teachings, especially those with the authority of **papal infallibility**
- **Errors of governance:** There is no lack of reference to errors of this kind, as indicated by the following:
 - Ellis Carter: *Top 10 Non-profit Governance Mistakes (From a Lawyer's Perspective)*.
 - Bill Fawcett: *10 of the Greatest Leadership Mistakes in History*. *The Blog*, 2 November 2012
 - Richard D. Lieberman and Jason D. Morgan: *The 100 Worst Mistakes in Government Contracting*. NCMA, 2008
 - Dan Marchese: *15 Worst Political Decisions in American History*. *RantPolitical*, 4 April 2015

They may be usefully distinguished in terms of their implications as:

- misleadership:
 - Nilimesh Mukharjee: *10 Cringeworthy Mistakes of American Presidents ListVerse*, 1 January 2013
 - Gordon Gora: *10 Deadly Mistakes Made By US Presidents ListVerse*, 5 June 2015
 - *What's the biggest mistake a president has ever made? Quora*, 4 December 2014
 - *What's the biggest mistake that a U.S. President has ever made? Quora*, 6 December 2014
- ineffectual regulatory oversight
- policy errors and mistakes
- mismanagement and incompetence
- systemic neglect: Of greater relevance to this argument are those errors which can be understood as systemic, informed by a mindset engendering the policies of individual agencies and the practices of their agents.

Specific examples are offered by the governance of international agencies and "systems":

- **agency "scandals"**, for example :
 - United Nations: *Corruption at the heart of the United Nations, The Economist*, 9 August 2005; *The U.N. sex-for-food scandal, The Washington Times*, 9 May 2006
 - UNICEF: *How UNICEF Harms Third World Children And Misleads About Their Deaths*, 21 January 2013; *Unicef staff "misappropriate" more than \$1m, The Independent*, 27 May 1995
 - Statistical Office of the European Communities: *Eurostat scandal*
- **public indebtedness**: It is appropriate to recognize the level of **government debt** as evidence of a massive error in governance (*Global Debt Now \$200 Trillion! GoldCore*, 14 May 2015; John W. Schoen, *Global debt up by \$57 trillion since crisis, CNBC*, 6 February 2015). The strategy for alleviating the phenomenon, **quantitative easing**, "printing money", has previously been seen to be an erroneous characteristic of economies in dire financial straits (Eugenie Foster, *Printing Money: a misleading metaphor for solving the global economic crisis, Currency News*, March 2009).
- **financial system**: Errors tend to be recognized in references containing the phrase "we messed up". Other examples include:
 - **Greek crisis**: As summarized by Jeffrey D. Sachs (*Down and Out in Athens and Brussels. Project Syndicate*, 11 July 2015):

The Greek catastrophe commands the world's attention for two reasons. First, we are deeply distressed to watch an economy collapse before our eyes, with bread lines and bank queues not seen since the Great Depression. Second, we are appalled by the failure of countless leaders and institutions - national politicians, the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Central Bank - to avert a slow-motion train wreck that has played out over many years....The fact that the Greek debt overhang was acknowledged only after negotiations had collapsed exposes the deep systemic failures that have brought Greece and Europe to this point. We see a European system of crisis management that is fraught with ineptitude, extreme politicization, gamesmanship, and unprofessionalism. I certainly do not mean to excuse Greek clientelism, corruption, and mismanagement as ultimate causes of the country's predicament. Yet the failure of the European institutions is more alarming. Unless the EU can now save Greece, it will not be able to save itself.

- **financial markets**: As summarized by Andrew Sheng (*The Regulatory Reform of Global Financial Markets: an Asian regulator's perspective, Global Policy*, 1, 2010, 2):
All financial crises are failures of markets and governance. The current global financial crisis is no exception. In the emerging markets, where financial markets are generally heavily regulated with government ownership, the crisis can be blamed largely on mistakes of governance at the corporate, regulatory and policy levels. In the developed financial markets, which are more mature, the regulatory philosophy hitherto has been that the market knows best, but the current crisis demonstrated that the existing policy and regulatory framework failed to prevent market excesses which brought massive damage not only to the financial sector, but also to the real economy. This crisis shattered many myths and preconceptions that well-regulated markets could be shielded from financial instability and that the fast-growing Asian economies could be decoupled from the developed western markets.
- **banking system**: As reviewed by a former editor of the *Financial Times*, Richard Lambert (*Held to account: will the banks survive these charges? The Telegraph*, 28 July 2002):
First it was the investment analysts. Then it was the accountants. And now it is the turn of the bankers to wriggle in the spotlight as the US seeks to identify the villains behind Wall Street's sensational corporate heists... The outcome could change the architecture of global finance...And will the banks avoid the pitfalls in the next frenzied bull market? Probably not. I am reminded of a meeting I had with a Goldman Sachs senior partner after its involvement in the Robert Maxwell debacle came to light. Asked why Goldman had dealings with a rogue like Maxwell, he paused, drew breath and said: "Because we fucked up".

According to David Smith (*The Age of Instability: the global financial crisis and what comes next*, 2010):

People will have different views on where to attach most of the blame. It would be hard, however, not to pin the

lion's share on bankers, regulators and the rating agencies. Some, however, were willing to accept their share. *It was our fault; we messed up* a senior central banker said to me about a year after the Lehman collapse. It was our job to set the rules for global capitalism and we did not set them properly (p. 221).

- **Errors of foreign policy, diplomacy, and security:** These may be framed as "diplomatic errors" and "foreign policy mistakes", as increasingly recognized in the USA and UK with respect to the disastrous intervention in Iraq, and now subject to investigations as with the [Iraq Inquiry](#). Historically this can be recognized in the practices of imperialism and colonialism, now reframed in terms of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism.
 - Robert W. Merry: *Mistakes Were Made: America's five biggest foreign-policy fiascoes*. *The National Interest*, 2 September 2014
 - Adam Hudson: *The Iraq war was not a mistake: it was a crime* *Free Your Mind*, 19 March 2013
 - Michael Kinsley: *Nostra Culpa: Pundits and politicians have admitted to being wrong about Iraq. Shouldn't the American public do the same?* *Time*, 2 August 2007
 - *Iran nuclear deal "a bad mistake" - Israel's Netanyahu*, *BBC News*, 14 July 2015; *Iran Deal Denounced by Netanyahu as "Historic Mistake"*, *The New York Times*, 14 July 2015
 - *The IMF Says The Greek Deal Is Not Viable*, *Forbes*, 17 July 2015; *IMF's Lagarde: Greek plan not viable*, *Financial Times*, 17 July 2015
- **Military errors:** (*What Have We Learned: lessons from Afghanistan and Iraq; Pick Your Battles: ending America's era of permanent war?*, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2014; *Transforming the Unsustainable Cost of General Education: strategic insights from Afghanistan*, 2009). In commenting on the views of a panel of experts (*What Have We Learned: lessons from Afghanistan and Iraq; Pick Your Battles: ending America's era of permanent war?*, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2014), Marc Jampole notes that *Foreign Affairs* writers all learn the same thing from recent wars -- unfortunately, it's how to fight future wars (*OpEdge*, 4 November 2014). This judgement applies to other commentaries (Paul D. Wolfowitz, *Lessons Learned: The Iraq Invasion*, *World Affairs*, May/June 2013; Stephen M. Walt, *Top 10 Lessons of the Iraq War*, *Foreign Policy*, 20 March 2012; Patrick Devenny, *Legal Advice from the Taliban*, *Foreign Policy*, 29 May 2009).
 - Luther Avery: *Top 10 Worst Military Blunders in History*. *Akorra.com*, 3 March 2010
 - George Dvorsky: *The 8 Worst Mistakes Made by the Allies During World War II*. *io9*, 27 November 2013
 - Stephan Wilkinson: *The Worst Battlefield Blunders: five battles that ended badly*. *HistoryNet*, 27 September 2007
 - Geoffrey Regan:
 - *Great Military Blunders: history's worst battlefield decisions from ancient times to the present day*. Andre Deutsch, 2012
 - *Great Naval Blunders: history's worst sea battle decisions from ancient times to the present day*. Andre Deutsch, 2012
 - *Great Military Disasters: a historical survey of military incompetence*. M Evans, 1988
- **Errors of collective strategy:** Distinct from those of government, these include those of corporate initiatives, whether for-profit or non-profit:
 - Sam Becker: *7 biggest business blunders ever committed*. *USA Today*, 20 December 2014
 - Melanie Lindner: *The Top 10 Business Blunders*. *Forbes*, 10 March 2010
 - Carrie Kirby: *11 of History's Biggest Corporate Blunders*. *LearnVest*, 25 March 2013
 - Peter Roesler: *8 of the Biggest Business Mistakes in History*. *Inc*, 20 April 2015
- **Errors of technological and engineering design engineering disaster:** These flaws are most evident in the case of mining, dam, bridge and factory disasters
 - Jennifer L. DeLeo: *The 20 Biggest Tech Disasters*. *PC Mag*, 20 October 2008
 - Christopher Null: *The Worst: Stupid Engineering Mistakes*. *Wired*, June 2006
 - Darren Orf: *9 of the Biggest Mess Ups in Tech History*. *Gizmodo*, 26 October 2014
 - David Pegg: *25 Biggest And Most Embarrassing Mistakes Ever Made*. *List25.com*, 2014
 - Thomas Claburn: *11 Epic Technology Disasters*. *Network Computing*, 28 October 2010
 - Eric Scigliano: *10 Technology Disasters*. *MIT Technology Review*, 1 June 2002
 - Listverse: *Top 10 Worst Engineering Disasters*. *Listverse*, 4 December 2007
 - Nick Mokey: *Epic Fail: The Top 10 Most Terrifying Technology Disasters*. *Digital Trends*, 27 October 2009
 - Rafay Farooq: *Top 15 Worst Dam Disasters Ever*. *Chillopedia*, 28 Jun 2013
 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *All Mining Disasters: 1839 to Present*
 - Bridget Johnson: *World's Worst Mining Disasters*. *About,news*,
- **Corruption as a form of error:**
 - systemic corruption
 - corruption of the judiciary
 - corruption in business
 - political corruption -- systemic vs individual politicians
- **Errors recognized as engendered by inherent evil**

Cultural determinants in response to error: guilt, shame and fear

Guilt-innocence versus shame-honour: The argument to this point has focused on recognition of error and the possibility of some form of collective acknowledgement of error -- a collective *mea culpa*. However, before exploring the latter in more detail, it is especially relevant in a multicultural global society to recognize how the dynamics of any recognition may play out in cultures emphasizing either [guilt](#) or [shame](#). These are distinguished by cultural anthropology as contrasting dynamics in social control -- enabling cultures to be framed as [guilt societies](#) or [shame societies](#). Shame cultures are typically based on the concepts of pride and honour, emphasizing appearance, as opposed to the emphasis on individual conscience in guilt cultures. The terms were popularized by [Ruth Benedict](#) (*The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 1954) following the articulation by [E. R. Dodds](#) (*The Greeks and the Irrational*, 1951). Judeo-Christian cultures are recognized as "guilt cultures" in contrast to the "shame cultures" of the East.

In relation to this argument, the shame-guilt distinction is helpfully clarified by [J. S. Atherton](#) (*Shame-Culture and Guilt-Culture*, Doceo, 15 July 2015) using the following tables.

Shame culture versus Guilt culture (as summarized by J. S. Atherton)					
Guilt-culture		Other people believe:		Shame-culture	
I believe	I didn't do it	I did it	I believe	I didn't do it	I did it
I didn't do it	No problem	I protest my innocence and fight the accusation	I didn't do it	No problem	I am shamed and dishonoured by their belief
I did it	I am expected to feel guilty regardless	I am guilty and am punished	I did it	No-one knows, so I am not shamed	I am guilty and am punished

Fear-safety: A "fear culture" is also recognized by [Eugene Nida](#), stating: *We have to reckon with three different types of reactions to transgressions of religiously sanctioned codes: fear, shame, and guilt* (*Customs and Cultures: anthropology for Christian Missions*, 1954, p. 150). This is notably of relevance with respect to arguments regarding an emerging [climate of fear](#) ([Geoffrey R. Skoll](#), *Constructing an American Fear Culture: from Red Scares to Terrorism; Globalization of American Fear Culture: the Empire in the 21st Century*). Presumably "fear" now increasingly trumps any sense of "guilt", with all that that has already implied in terms of questionable legal responses to security threats.

Catholicism as an example: With respect to any acknowledgement of error in the form of a collective *mea culpa* (as discussed below) of particular value are the arguments compiled by James Heft, Reuven Firestone and Omid Safi (*Learned Ignorance: intellectual humility among Jews, Christians and Muslims*, 2011). In an insightful section on *Two Popes: regrets or apologies?*, by [Michael McGarry](#) (*Apology, Regret and Intellectual Humility and the Conditioning of Interfaith Dialogue*) he analyzes the follow up to the recognition by John Paul II in 1994 of the church's need to "purify her memory":

... [the Church] cannot cross the threshold of the new millennium without encouraging her children to purify themselves, through repentance, of past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency and slowness to act. Acknowledging the weaknesses of the past is an act of honesty and courage which helps us to strengthen our faith, which alerts us to face today's temptations and challenges, and prepares us to meet them. (p. 212)

McGarry continues:

The promise of 1994 took shape in a twofold movement. First, in late 1999, the... Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith... both explained the Papal intentions and sought to neutralize curial fears that such admissions would harm the Church's proclamation of the Christian faith. The second movement...in March 12, 2000, with the *Universal Prayer of Confession of Sins and Asking for Forgiveness* during which Pope John Paul II expressed regrets for some Church members' sins towards a variety of communities. The world's eyes watched closely for the Litany of Sins. Who would be mentioned? Which sins would make the list?... A week later, during the Papal visit to Israel, they listened carefully.... to see whether he would go further than the... Litany by actually apologizing for the Church's role during the *Shoah*. He did not.... Pope John Paul II did not and would not apologize. (p. 212-213)

As described by [Tony Karon](#) (*Catholics Divided by Vatican's Mea Culpa Time*, 10 March 2000):

Is the church itself above sin? That question forms the theological fulcrum of conflict within the Catholic Church over the mass of penitence to be delivered Sunday by Pope John Paul II....

The mass, based on the document *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past* [1999] is expected to be an entirely unprecedented action by a remarkable pontiff, urging the faithful and the clergy to honestly face up to those moments in its history when, he believes, the church was not true to its own teachings. The Holocaust may be the most commonly discussed of these moments, but the church's collective *mea culpa* is expected to cover everything from the Crusades and the Inquisition to its attitude toward Christians of other denominations. Not that each of these sins and infractions will receive detailed treatment: *Given the number of sins committed in the course of 20 centuries, [reference to them] must necessarily be rather summary*, explained Vatican official Bishop Piero Marini....

The phrasing of the church's apology, however, has been the subject of fierce debate inside the Catholic hierarchy. *Even when they released the 'Memory and Reconciliation' document, the Vatican made clear that there were different camps inside the church, some of whom felt the church was going too far in its apology and others who believe it hadn't gone far enough*, says Van Biema. The central point of contention is whether responsibility for sins rests with the church itself, or simply with its errant children. *Although this pope has gone a lot further than any in history toward acknowledging corporate responsibility on the part of the church, he's pushing against significant opposition, and the outcome will still be regarded as insufficient in some quarters.*

Rather than "*mea culpa*", another commentator used the collective form (Robert A. Sirico, *The Pope's Nostra Culpa*, *The Wall Street Journal*, 15 March 2000).

With respect to the second Pope, Benedict XVI, McGarry continues with regard to the notorious references in the [Regensburg lecture](#) (2006) with regard to Muslims, who considered it insulting to the Prophet:

... the absence of apology in this Vatican response. In effect, speaking for the Pop, Berone said, *You didn't understand me, this is what I meant, and since this is what I meant, there is no need for an apology.* With varying degrees of insistence, calls for a papal apology from many sectors of the Muslim world continued... For example, the Kuwaiti leader of the Islamic National Party... contended the Pope must declare that *he is sorry for the wrong done to the prophet and to Islam, which preaches peace, tolerance, justice and equality....* Unlike what was actually said, a genuine apology would sound like, *I am wrong, I shouldn't have said that. I personally do not agree with what I quoted, and I am sorry that I said it.* The official replies sounded more like, *I am sorry you were offended by what I said. You didn't correctly interpret what I said, and what I quoted is not my personal opinion anyway.* (p. 213-214)

Cultural constraints on offering an apology: In reflecting on this interaction, McGarry comments:

Were those demanding an apology really asking for *only* an apology? Or was there something else going on that kept the Pope from issuing a real apology?" I propose that, among other things, a cultural miscommunication was occurring here that (1) prevented the Pope from apologizing and, (2) precluded Arab Muslims from understanding and/or accepting the Papal talk and the papal explanation....

Informed by the above-mentioned arguments of cultural anthropology, the further point is made:

One may observe -- oversimplistically -- that the Western post-Enlightenment world is an economic, results-oriented, individualistic culture. One takes responsibility for one's conduct, and accepting blame or praise reflects only on the individual.. Life is lived for the future, and life is a problem to which there is always a solution.... In the Middle East, other values shape the consciousness and frame daily life. Anthropologists claim that the Middle East (and many other parts of the world) partake in an honor-shame culture... in Arabic, there really is no exact equivalent for the Western word *apology* as a public acknowledgement and expression of sorrow for doing something wrong with a resolve not to do it again.... So, **the pope couldn't apologize, with a Western intention, if he understood that such an apology would be heard as an admission that Christianity was wrong** (p. 214-217) [*emphasis added*]

Citing an informant, [Kenneth Bailey](#), McGarry adds:

I have often heard Middle Easterners discuss the question of publicly admitting mistakes. Their response is: *if the Prime Minister admits he has made a mistake he is not fit to be Prime Minister* (the point being that admitting mistakes is shameful and if the PM shames himself in public he is not fit to hold office).

From this perspective:

In other words, whereas some apologies in the West may communicate strength, honesty, sincerity, and integrity, they may be perceived in the East as weakness, shame, and inadequacy... So in the West, a sincere apology may cast only a solitary shadow; in the East, it will probably cast a collective shadow... For [the Pope] to apologize, to admit a wrong, a mistake, then, would not be seen as the voice of an individual, but as the voice of the collective. (p. 217)

McGarry concludes by citing the Pope's subsequent reflection on the Regensburg Affair:

In a world marked by relativism and too often excluding transcendence and universality of reason, we are in great need of an authentic dialogue between religions and between cultures, capable of assisting us, in a spirit of fruitful co-operation, to overcome all the tensions together (p. 218)

The challenges are further complicated by the recent declaration of Pope Francis:

In order to ask forgiveness from God, we must follow the teaching of the "Our Father": we must repent sincerely for our sins, knowing that God always forgives, and just as willingly forgive others.... *Asking forgiveness is another thing: it's not the same as simply saying, 'excuse me'. Did I make a mistake? 'Sorry, I made a mistake. But, 'I have sinned!' - that is different: the one has nothing to do with the other. Sin is not a simple mistake. Sin is idolatry: it is to worship the idol, the idol of pride, vanity,*

money, 'my self', my own 'well-being'. So many idols do we have: and for this, Azariah does not apologize: he asks forgiveness. Forgiveness must be asked sincerely, whole-heartedly - and forgiveness must be given whole-heartedly to those, who have injured us. (*Pope Francis, to receive pardon, we must give pardon Vatican Radio*, 10 March 2015)

With respect to any collective *mea culpa*, the fundamental difficulty is then that **the leader of any collective cannot afford to apologize in a global context without calling into question the integrity and validity of the belief system and strategy of which that leader is the prime embodiment and defender**. The competence of the leader would of course also be called into question by any such procedure -- notably for errors made on that leader's "watch".

Whereas Cardinal [John Newman](#) is famed for his defensive *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), the probability that such a template might be used for a collective *mea culpa* remains low. How indeed is humanity to apologize for its lifestyle, and to whom? A tentative indication of the possibility has seemingly been indicated at the opening of the environment summit of the UN General Assembly in 1997, at which its president, Razali Ismail of Malaysia declared:

We as a species -- as a planet -- are teetering on the edge, living unsustainably and perpetuating inequity, and may soon pass the point of no return (*Earth Summit opens with collective "mea culpa"*. *The Augusta Chronicle*, 24 June 1997)

On behalf of collectives, explicit use has been made of "*nostra culpa*" as the more appropriate form -- transcending the above dilemmas, but through the arts:

- poetry: Margaret Sackville, *Nostra Culpa*.
- song: Affiance, *Lyrics to Nostra Culpa*
- opera: Asawin Suebsaeng, *Here Is a Song About the Twitter Feud Between Paul Krugman and the President of Estonia*, *Mother Jones*, 8 April 2013; *Nostra Culpa: Austerity vs. Stimulus -- debate on Twitter inspires music by Eugene Birman and libretto by Scott Diel*; *Estonia's Austerity Opera: Setting economics to music*, *BBC News*, 23 May 2014; *Nostra Culpa: the world's first financial opera*

Response to collective error as recognized and reframed

There is an obvious tendency of collectives to deny the possibility of any errors of significance. The errors cited by others are thus typically denied as characterized by misinformation or arising from questionable motivation. The challenge is seen as one of how to avoid admission of error and to avoid any consequence that may imply, notably resulting in forms of media bias, necessarily perceived as erroneous by critics (*Biased coverage of controversy by news media*, 2014)

Collective assumption of error-free innocence: Most notably in the case of religion, there is a sense in which the collective enterprise, as the embodiment of a flawless belief system, is inherently innocent -- if not as "white as snow". Being right by definition, every alternative perspective must then necessarily be held to be at fault. Phrases appropriate to this belief include "can do no wrong" and "faultless".

Whilst most obvious in the case of religions, the pattern is also evident in science (and its various disciplines), in corporate enterprises, and in government. Questioning core assumptions in the light of purported error may be subject to the severest sanction -- as in the case of the "unbelievers" and heretics of religion. The pattern can be speculatively explored in terms of a set of rules (*Evil Rules: Guidelines for Engaging in Armageddon Now*, 2015). Science also makes the interesting distinction of "**not even wrong**".

In practice, when potentially questionable initiatives are undertaken in the name of a collective, these may be carefully conceived in terms of **plausible deniability**. This is the ability for persons (typically senior officials in a formal or informal chain of command) to deny knowledge of and responsibility for any damnable actions committed by others (usually subordinates in an organizational hierarchy) because of a lack of evidence that can confirm their participation, even if they were personally involved in or at least willfully ignorant of the actions. Deliberate use of "**negative campaigning**" or "**dirty tricks**" may be undertaken with the aid of such distancing devices. Their very existence may be used to claim that purported error derives from biased reporting as separately reviewed (*Vital Collective Learning from Biased Media Coverage: acquiring vigilance to deceptive strategies used in mugging the world*, 2014).

Processes of error recognition: For those collectives based firmly on the assumption that they are necessarily error-free, it follows that no resources would be allocated to the detection of fundamental errors of significance. Any error-detection process then tends to be focused on the detection of anomalies, especially those evident in behaviour reflective of any form of **backsliding**, namely failure in wholehearted adherence to the belief system in terms of which the collective is defined.

Obvious examples include political commissars and religious police, or their functional equivalents. In the case of religion, the detection of **heresy** has been a major preoccupation historically. In the case of both religious and political collectives, detection of tendencies to **schism** continue to be a concern. Peer review systems may constitute an equivalent in academia, for example. Error detection may take the form of financial auditing, or of quality control in manufacturing and service industries -- extending to the extreme requirements of **Six Sigma** techniques.

Reframing errors as a feature of due process: Any "errors" recognized or acknowledged by collectives may well be reframed as incidental and readily addressed, namely unrelated to errors of significance challenging the fundamental belief on which the collective is based. The concern is therefore to ensure that fundamental errors can be reframed as "technicalities". Examples of collective errors excused in this way include:

- learning errors
- human errors

- methodological errors
- procedural errors
- administrative errors
- interpretation / translation errors
- experimental errors
- statistical errors / data errors
- data input errors

Of particular interest are those errors framed as due to "human nature" or to "lack of resources" -- namely beyond the responsibility of the collective. Even more challenging are those attributed to "evil" influences -- now curiously echoed in the framing of so-called [wicked problems](#). The latter are characterized by their transboundary nature, thus readily claimed to be beyond the mandate of any particular collective.

As emphasized by the examples cited earlier, the detection of errors is typically the activity of "outsiders" -- readily disregarded as incompetent or having particular biases, especially if they are [apostates](#). Ironically it could then be argued that [critical thinking](#) regarding any collective is effectively "[outsourced](#)" by that collective. Error detection is then left to [whistleblowers](#) who defy any security measures by which the collective seeks to protect itself from acknowledgement of error.

Tardiness in recognizing collective error (whether deliberate or inadvertent): Delay may be used as a device for avoiding immediate recognition of error. This is remarkably exemplified by the 400 year delay in acknowledgement of error in the case of the [Galileo Affair](#) regarding the heliocentric motion of the Sun. The current case of climate change offers another example. The delay in recognition of the error in cultivating continuing population growth, with its consequences in many domains, may be considered to be the most striking in the eyes of history.

The argument is made otherwise through the delay in [declassification](#) of those archives not already shredded. Arguments advanced include protection of the privacy of named individuals and the embarrassment to potentially responsible parties -- framed as the "public interest". In the UK the delay is 30 years; in the USA it is from 25 to 50 years. The recognition of error consequent on the activities of *Wikileaks* and Edward Snowden highlight issues as to how "public interest" is defined or reframed.

Quashing reports, archival shredding and tampering with evidence: Understood otherwise, it is clearly a matter of generations before responsible parties and their descendents are dead -- leaving the recognition of error to historians (as indicated by citations above). With respect to critical errors threatening a collective, a culture, a civilization, or humanity as a whole, such delay could well be recognized as a crime against humanity. As the policy of a collective, any failure "to keep the eye on the ball" recalls the remark of [Arnold Toynbee](#): *Civilizations die from suicide, not by murder*.

Collective appeal to divine injunctions and mandates as providing unquestionable justification: This is variously understood in terms of the [Mandate of Heaven](#), the [Divine Right of Kings](#), fulfillment of the [Divine Mandate](#), [Chosen People](#) (exemplified by the [Jews as the chosen people](#) and by the beliefs of various Christian religions).

Reframing to focus on detail (and avoid systemic implications): The previous instances point to a tendency to avoid systemic error recognition by systematically narrowing the focus of concern. This may be as a technicality of due process, through framing (or reframing) the mandate of a collective, or through delay. With respect to mandate this may be recognized in territorial terms as [gerrymandering](#) constituency boundaries -- a pattern replicated by the disciplines, and operating agencies, potentially to be termed "cognitive gerrymandering"

Avoiding systemic recognition thus involves a process of drilling down to identify how responsibility for error may best be isolated and the entity with which it can be most innocuously associated. Within the collective a first level is association of error with an unrepresentative extreme (as in the case of fundamentalism of any form). A subsequent level is a named collective, whether formally or informally organized. There is then the possibility of focusing on the collective leadership of that collective. The further possibility is identifying the leader of the collective as the source of error. More problematic is the identification of units within the collective -- which can be claimed to be "rogue sections" -- to which questionable tasks may have been delegated (under the guise of plausible deniability). Finally particular individuals can be isolated as the nexus of responsibility -- as exemplified in many case of clerical sexual abuse of parishioners.

Cultivation of uncertainty regarding collective error and responsibility for it: The above points indicate considerable scope for obscuring the existence of error and identifying responsibility for it.

Especially interesting are the possibilities in the interplay between collective responsibility and individual responsibility, where the individual is held to be representative of the collective as a leader. In the light of the quality of thinking associated with the [uncertainty principle](#) of physics, this suggests the possibility of an analogue in which focus on the collective renders uncertain the responsibility of the individual, and focus on the individual renders uncertain the responsibility of the collective ([Garrison Sposito, Does a generalized Heisenberg Principle operate in the social sciences ? Inquiry, 12, 1969, 3, pp. 356-361](#)).

The issue is further complexified by the nature of the "existence" of any collective of which the "[international community](#)" is a prime example. The argument can be extended to the absence of "concrete proof" regarding the existence of the United States or the United Nations. Curiously, whilst all three are recognized as having the capacity to act through allocation of resources, none exhibits the capacity to acknowledge formally having made a mistake.

It is striking to note that whilst declarations are freely made in the name of science, physics, Islam, Christianity, conservatism, socialism, or the like, it is fairly clear that none of these are embodied in such a way that error could be recognized by that collective initiative. This is obvious in the case of the religions -- despite the (periodic) existence of the [Parliament of the World's Religions](#), from which Catholicism has (periodically) excluded itself despite vigorously claiming leadership in interfaith discourse.

A more intriguing case is offered by science and its organization through the complex [International Council of Scientific Unions](#). The

issue is how the coherence of science as a collective initiative is then to be understood, as discussed separately within a context of "meta-science" (*Metascience Enabling Upgrades to the Scientific Process*, 2014). Again, however, this understanding of "science" excludes that of other disciplines which claim to be scientific -- replicating the pattern to be observed with respect to religions. It is relatively unimaginable that such bodies should acknowledge fundamental error in "science" -- presumably in anticipation of a paradigm shift. *** genetic/epigenetic

Use of statistical and accounting procedures to recognize collective error (or to avoid its recognition): There is widespread recognition of the [misuse of statistics](#), namely when a statistical argument deliberately asserts a falsehood for the gain of the perpetrator. *Wikipedia* describes the following types of misuse -- which may be variously present in biased media presentations.

- [Discarding unfavorable data](#)
- [Loaded questions](#)
- [Overgeneralization](#)
- [Biased samples](#)
- [False causality](#)
- [Proof of the null hypothesis](#)
- [Data dredging](#)
- [Data manipulation](#)
- [Misreporting or misunderstanding of estimated error](#)
- [Confusing statistical significance with practical significance](#)

Use of legal procedures to recognize collective error (or to avoid its recognition)

Denial and cover-up of collective error: It is within this context that a more systematic approach to degrees (or stages) of avoidance of recognition of collective error. These can be organized into a remarkable [typology of cover-ups](#) in the relevant *Wikipedia* entry -- based on analysis of a number of typical cases.

Denial and cover-up of collective error	
<p>Initial response to allegation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Flat denial -- Convince the media to bury the story -- Preemptively distribute false information -- Claim that the "problem" is minimal -- Claim faulty memory -- Claim the accusations are half-truths -- Claim the critic has no proof -- Attack the critic's motive -- Attack the critic's character <p>Withhold or tamper with evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Prevent the discovery of evidence -- Destroy or alter the evidence -- Make discovery of evidence difficult -- Create misleading names of individuals and companies to hide funding -- Lie or commit perjury -- Block or delay investigations -- Issue restraining orders -- Claim executive privilege <p>Delayed response to allegation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Deny a restricted definition of wrongdoing (e.g. torture) -- Limited hang out (i.e., confess to minor charges) -- Use biased evidence as a defense -- Claim that the critic's evidence is biased -- Select a biased blue ribbon commission or "independent" inquiry <p>Intimidate participants, witnesses or whistleblowers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Bribe or buy out the critic -- Generally intimidate the critic by following him or her, killing pets, etc. -- Blackmail: hire private investigators and threaten to reveal past wrongdoing ("dirt") 	<p>Intimidate participants, witnesses or whistleblowers (cont.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Death threats of the critic or his or her family -- Threaten the critic with loss of job or future employment in industry -- Transfer the critic to an inferior job or location -- Intimidate the critic with lawsuits or SLAPP suits -- Murder; assassination <p>Publicity management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Bribe the press -- Secretly plant stories in the press -- Retaliate against hostile media -- Threaten the press with loss of access -- Attack the motives of the press -- Place defensive advertisements -- Buy out the news source <p>Damage control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Claim no knowledge of wrongdoing -- Scapegoats: blame an underling for unauthorized action -- Fire the person(s) in charge <p>Win court cases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Hire the best lawyers -- Hire scientists and expert witnesses who will support your story -- Delay with legal maneuvers -- Influence or control the judges <p>Reward cover-up participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Hush money -- Little or no punishment -- Pardon or commute sentences -- Promote employees as a reward for cover-up -- Reemploy the employee after dust clears

Blame game: it's them not us !

As indicated by [Eleanor Clift](#): *The blame game is a derogatory term for accountability and we've had failures on the part of government and our leaders at the local level, at the state level and at the presidential level.* The challenge is that everyone is "wrong" and "irresponsible" in the eyes of someone else, and of many belief systems -- philosophies, therapies, political ideologies, religions, and the like. This is necessarily the case amongst such systems themselves. As noted in this respect by [Nicholas Rescher](#) (*The Strife of Systems: an essay on the grounds and implications of philosophical diversity*, 1985):

For centuries, most philosophers who have reflected on the matter have been intimidated by the strife of systems. But the time has come to put this behind us -- not the strife, that is, which is ineliminable, but the felt need to somehow end it rather than simply accept it and take it in stride.

With respect to accountability and responsibility, the challenge for governance can be expressed succinctly (*Responsibility for Global Governance Who? Where? When? How? Why? Which? What?* 2008).

Transactional analysis: Before considering the nature of the response to acknowledged collective error, it is appropriate to consider the dynamics associated with unacknowledged error. This has been caricatured as the "blame game". This is a primary dynamic characteristic of the cover-up devices noted above whether undertaken consciously or unconsciously and inadvertently. It is a natural defense mechanism with which all are familiar. At the individual level, The Blame Game is specifically recognized in **transactional analysis** as an attempt to shift responsibility from one person or group to another. As clarified by **Kevin Everett FitzMaurice** (*The Secret of Maturity*, 2012):

The real problem with emotional responsibility is that it ends our favourite emotional game: the *Blame Game*. We play the Blame Game by hating, persecuting, or blaming others for our feelings, while also reacting to our feelings with a helpless, hopeless, or victim attitude. (Optionally, we can play the Blame Game with our conscience, our body, places, things, events, even God.) Emotional responsibility ends the Blame Game because it portrays us as responsible: We have control over all our experiences, both inside and outside of our bodies, that result in our feelings. (p. 16)

Us and Them: The process follows naturally from the archetypal distinction between us and them, notably embodied in some foreign policy declarations as *you're either with us or against us*. relating to engagement in the war on terrorism, as discussed separately (*Us and Them: relating to challenging others patterns in the shadow dance between "good" and "evil"*, 2009) . A number of examples are offered in the *Wikipedia* profile. Essentially the dynamic involves cultivation of the fundamental belief that "them" are necessarily wrong, and "we" are necessarily right. The "we" that then blames "them" is then understood to be error-free.

It follows that "us" are the "good guys" (namely the forces of light and reason) and "them" are the "bad guys" (namely the forces of darkness and irrationality). This pattern of course echoes children's games rehearsing dramatisations of "*Cops and Robbers*" or "*Cowboys and Indians*" (however questionable the latter may now be framed). The pattern brackets the blameworthy and justifies their defeat and extermination, whether in imagination or in reality. The game is played with greater insight by children who typically swap roles to explore the advantages and disadvantages of both.

Targetting the blameworthy recalls the skills of identifying the key log by which a **log jam** can be released in a river -- itself curiously echoed in the game of **pick-up sticks**. The blame game extends to include a process of blaming critics asserting error as being themselves blameworthy. Strangely the purveyors of news, especially including the progressive and alternative media, are distinguished by their focus on blame and the blameworthy. Blameworthiness is increasingly newsworthiness.

Analyses of the blame game tend to reflect use of the term as a caricature (Ben Dattner, *The Blame Game: how the hidden rules of credit and blame determine our success or failure*, 2012; Neil E. Farber, *The Blame Game: the Complete Guide to Blaming: how to play and how to quit*, 2010). This is also the case with respect to the possibility of transcending it (Carl Alasko, *Beyond Blame: freeing yourself from the most toxic form of emotional bullsh*t*, 2011; Jeffrey A. Kottler, *Beyond Blame: a new way of resolving conflicts in relationships*, 1996).

Given their mutual deprecation as erroneous or misguided, it could be argued that the many exclusive modes of knowing (whether sciences or religions), merit exploration as a "frozen" pattern of errors. Ironically this is most striking in the case of the Abrahamic religions because of their claim to a common root. The blame game in which they engage could even be explored as a shadowy variant of the insightful study by **James Carse** (*Finite and Infinite Games: a vision of life as play and possibility*, 2013).

Blameworthy: As implied by the procedures noted above, it is interesting to note who it typically proves convenient to blame with respect to collective error. In the case of the United Nations, it is typically the "member states" who are upheld as a constraint on the evolution and action of the organization -- although an earlier focus was on multinational corporations. This reflects a pattern obvious in any international organization where the members are considered to be not adequately responsive. The pattern is especially obvious in the interaction between opposing political parties, each framing the other as being to blame. More generally the pattern of blaming is evident between groups identifying themselves primarily with the World Economic Forum in contrast to those identifying themselves with the World Social Forum.

In the classic declaration of the United States, it is the **Axis of Evil** which is to blame -- now refined as a checklist of rogues states, terrorist states and terrorist groups. The implication is that the USA is an integral feature of a variously referenced Axis of Good -- complemented by an Axis of Weasels according to Mark Humphrys (*The New Power Blocs of the World*). Efforts to transcend binary distinctions have been made in ethical games (Jonathan Melenson, *The Axis of Good and Evil*, 2011).

Commentators have been astonished at the reversal of appreciation of the previous identification of the USA with the Good in favour of others previously identified as problematic, if not worse ("*Axis of Good*" versus "*Coalition of murderers*"? *National Journal*, 2003). Debate regarding the Greek crisis has seen the "international community" as problematic, if not specifically evil -- as Greek citizens endeavour to frame those at fault for not aiding them appropriately.

Disassociation from culpability: Within this context (and consistent with earlier points), it is surprising to note the manner in which the Pope and the Vatican have endeavoured to distance themselves from the clergy accused of sexual abuse of parishioners. Irrespective of the compassionate framing, it is the perpetrators who are to blame and not the system which engendered them and enabled their activity (over decades in some cases). The pattern extends to the practices of individual Catholic institutions responsible for the highly questionable sequestration of children only recently acknowledged. Again it is the degree of independence of those bodies which enables them to be considered blameworthy -- but not the system of which they were considered to be a part.

In the enthusiasm for democracy as a political panacea, it is useful to ask whether this is a form of disguised institutionalization of the

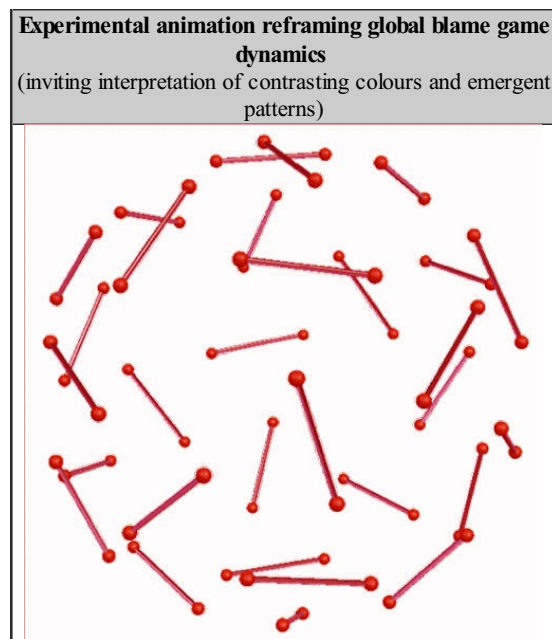
blame game. Democracy is then the process of electing the (relatively) innocent who are thereby empowered to lay the blame for any ills on their predecessors -- whilst coopting anything deemed positive in the name of those who achieve a majority. It can then be seen as a slate-cleaning procedure through which the blameworthy accounts are set to zero. The problematic aspects of the governments of the past can then be ignored and forgotten.

Towards an imaginative reframing of blame game dynamics through animation

Although there are numerous images depicting the blame game most focus only on aspects of finger-pointing between two individuals. This is surprising in that the blame game can readily be understood as a feature of a network society enabled by social media. Although relatively little effort is made to analyze and depict social networks, despite the insights of [social network analysis](#), much connectivity is of course registered in the individual and collective profiles held by such media -- notably Facebook and LinkedIn. Typically however, as with Twitter, these focus only on "following" with its implications for an "appreciation-game".

Missing is the connectivity associated with deprecation and blame, as evident in traces on the web of "Arsebook", indicated to be "an anti-social network that connects you with the people you hate". Such connectivity would hold the finger-pointing of the blame game. As with the current capacity to provide maps of social networks, this connectivity could provide a complementary "shadow map" which would enable the ambiguity of the "appreciation-blame game" to be better understood in systemic terms -- especially that relating to collectivities. Rather than being limited to "following" links, this would include "deprecating" links or "blaming" links. In opinion survey and political terms these effectively correspond to negative appreciation and what may well remain dangerously unsaid (*Global Strategic Implications of the "Unsaid"*, 2003).

The following animation is an experiment in imagining how "blame-game" dynamics might be depicted in relation to "appreciation-game" dynamics. The purpose of the animation is to highlight the emergence of underlying patterns in the complementary networks which might offer insights into a higher order level of coherence transcending the dynamics of mutual blame and appreciation. It follows from previous arguments (*Polyhedral Empowerment of Networks through Symmetry: psycho-social implications for organization and global governance*, 2008).



Using alternative colours, rather than directional arrows, the animation includes a sense of rings of mutual appreciation and deprecation. The animation suggests the possibility that, once recognized, vicious cycles of blame might be fruitfully "encycled" in relation to the so-called [wicked problems](#) evoking blame -- most notably for the inadequacy of remedial action.

In the quest for new metaphors through which to reframe the blame game, there is a case for considering the errors and problems by which it is engendered as being planetary "diseases" (*Cognitive Implications of Lifestyle Diseases of Rich and Poor*, 2010). The blame game could then be understood as a form of planetary epidemic -- even a [pandemic](#). This metaphor draws attention to the strange correspondence **between the icosahedral ordering of both psychosocial mega-problems and of the micro-problems constituted by viruses**.

Inspired by [biomimicry](#), this suggests the value of exploring virology as offering a "pattern language" with regard to [antigens](#) and [antibodies](#) as these might apply to the operation of possible "viral antigens" that could be developed to constrain wicked problems, as discussed separately (*Encycling Wickidity in the Light of Polyhedral Viruses and their Mutation*, 2015). Curiously, as noted there, the emerging discipline of mathematical virology may offer a new approach to exploring the problematic network dynamics of the blame game.

Collective acknowledgement of error

Diffuse recognition of error: This can be observed in the collective response to strategies which have clearly "gone wrong" in various ways. However the recognition lacks focus and is the subject of much debate. Whether in the case of political, financial, military,

technical, or relief "disasters", this is limited to recognition notably expressed in the expletives of "fuck up" or "screw up" -- as with Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. The debate includes extensive blame game dynamics -- exemplified by bluster and denial by those at the nexus of responsibility. The case of Afghanistan offers an example:

- Ben Cosman: *Americans Think the Afghanistan War Was a Mistake, Just Like All the Other Wars Since 1950*, *The Wire*, 19 February 2014
- Luke Johnson: *Americans Split On Whether Afghanistan War Was A Mistake*, *The Huffington Post*, 19 February 2014
- Peter Beaumont: *Same old mistakes in new Afghan war*, *The Observer*, 18 October 2009

Recognition of error focused on technicalities and procedural failures : Beyond the technicalities associated with due process (as noted above), the nature of the error may be explored in reports with little specific attribution of responsibility. This is evident in the case of the Yugoslav crisis (and Srebrenica), the WMD intelligence failure, and the Rwanda massacre. Whether or not the reports are confidential, examples of the acknowledgement include:

- But the defiance of the Security Council is really defiance of the international community as a whole. We must ask ourselves whether the latest chapter in this horror story will finally convince us that we made a mistake in preventing the Bosnians from defending themselves, because we ourselves were incapable of defending them (Daniel L. Bethlehem and Marc Weller (*The 'Yugoslav' Crisis in International Law: General Issues, Part 1* University of Cambridge Research Centre for International Law, 1997, p. 395)
- The international community has "made a mistake" with the intensity of its focus on the global HIV-Aids epidemic and lost ground on family planning issues as a result, according to the head of the United Nations population agency. (Suzanne Goldenberg, *Focus on HIV-Aids cost family planning a decade*, says UN population chief, *The Guardian*, 24 October 2011)
- After the war General McPeak would only say that 'time will tell what kind of factory that factory was. There is no doubt that we made some mistakes about what we bombed, although a former Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lieutenant-General Perrots, was prepared to go further when pointing out that the giant milk vats had been mistaken for devices for mixing chemical and biological compounds. 'We made a mistake,' he said. ((Philip M. Taylor *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War*, 1992, p. 115-116)
- So our invasion of Iraq was a result of accepting disinformation as being true. It was our first major mistake. Our second mistake is not admitting we made a mistake in accepting unverified intelligence as being "solid intelligence." Instead we have tried to insert a second reason for our invasion of Iraq because we thought Saddam Hussein was a supporter of the terrorists responsible for the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001 (Tom Nichols: *Bad intelligence led to Iraq war mistake*, *Gainesville Times*, 2 February 2008)
- Nicole Winfield: *World Hunger: United Nations Blames Flawed Methodology for Error in Food Insecurity Report*. *The Huffington Post*, 9 October 2012
- *NATO blames technical error for killing Libyan civilians*, *Euronews*, 20 June 2011

Remarkably some focus on what are effectively trivia:

- Gianluca Mezzofiore *United Nations admits fault in Eritrea/North Korea plagiarism embarrassment* *International Business Times*, 1 July 2015
- Matthew Russell Lee (*UN Admits Error in Publishing Staff's Signatures and ID Numbers, No Accountability Yet* *Inner City Press*, 19 October 2008) indicating that current UN's lack of accountability and lack of respect for personal privacy, including of its staff members, were demonstrated by a comedy of errors last week, culminating in a rare UN admission that "we made a mistake." Curiously the page in question has a note indicating that [Update 6/30/2011 - link to the page has been removed at the request of the UN: can provide the page if requested by email.]

Formal apology for collective error (and associated debate): This corresponds to the process of **confession** as practiced in some religions and intentional communities and to the process of **self-criticism**, most notably cultivated in Communist regimes in the form of public **struggle sessions**. Catholicism is especially attentive to distinguishing the type of sin for which confession is made (see *A List of Mortal and Venial Sins*). **Confessions of guilt** from accused persons may also be sought in legal procedures in which a distinction may be made between **judicial, official and unofficial confessions**. In the latter context, there is typically particular concern with the various types of **false confessions**. With the advent of social media, a new approach to "confession" has emerged (Katie Notopoulos, *The 16 Types Of Confessions You Find On Whisper*, *BuzzFeed News*, 27 December 2013).

The question of relevance to this argument is the nature of any formal apology by a collective, especially since this can typically only be done on behalf of that collective by a person recognized to represent it. Nicholas Tavuchis offers an example of indigenous congregations of Canada to whom an apology was made by the United Church in 1986:

Aside from its disarming effect, the symbolic and practical significance of this kind of initiatory act in remedial negotiations between the Many, especially when one group is more powerful than the other, rests in its ability to alter the terms of discourse. More to the point a collective *mea culpa*, publicly uttered in response to its own call, simultaneously bespeaks recognition and commitment to a normative domain beyond that of immediate self-interest and effectively shifts the moral burden onto the offended party by focusing upon the issue of forgiveness. (*Mea Culpa: a sociology of apology and reconciliation*, 1991,p. 113)

Rather than "collective *mea culpa*", striking use of the more appropriate "*nostra culpa*" was made in unexpected reference to an internal assessment by the US Republican Party (*Nostra Culpa: self-criticism becomes a fine art*, *The Economist*, 23 March 2013).

Examples of apologies made by leaders of a collective: A distinction can be made between the admission of error by the leader of a collective and that made on behalf of collective as illustrated by the following:

- Leaders of countries:

- *'We made a mistake': Israeli president to Ethiopians after thousands-strong protest* RT, 4 May 2015
- Michael Busler: *Can President Obama say, "I made a mistake"?* *Communities Digital News*, 3 June 2015
- Scott Challen: *7 Times U.S. Presidents Have Admitted They Were Wrong in History* *News.mic*, 9 November 2013
- John Dickerson: *Make Mistakes. Admit Them. Try Again: President Obama knows what mistakes he made in 2013. Why is he so afraid to own up to them?* *Slate*, 20 December 2013
- *Full Comment Forum: George Bush, president who made mistakes, or presidential mistake?* *National Post*, 12 November 2010
- Adam Withnall: *Vladimir Putin says he has never made a mistake because God wanted him to be perfect* *The Independent*, 10 June 2015
- Fiona Govan *Spain's Mariano Rajoy corruption scandal: I made a mistake* *The Telegraph*, 1 August 2013
- Jackie Ashley: *Blair's admission of error is really a declaration of war*, *The Guardian*, 27 March 2006
- Religious leaders: :
 - *Pope Francis, to receive pardon, we must give pardon* *Vatican Radio*, 10 March 2015
 - *Pope sorry for offending Muslims*, *BBC News*, 17 September 2006
 - Rabbi Menachem. *I'm Done Apologizing for Israel*. *The Huffington Post*, 21 July 2014
 - *Menasseh Ben Israel's Apology for the Jews*. *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, 3, 1845, 2
- Corporation CEOs:
 - Jack Linshi: *Reddit CEO Ellen Pao: 'We Screwed Up'*, *Time*, 6 July 2015; *'We screwed up,' Reddit CEO says in apology to community*, *Polygon*, 6 July 2015
 - Zach Noble: *'We Deeply Regret the Errors': Fox News makes a huge correction about Islam in Europe* *The Blaze*, 18 January 2015; *Fox News apologises for Baltimore police shooting report: 'We screwed up'*, *The Guardian*, 4 May 2015
 - Jeff Bercovici: *The Atlantic On That Scientology Advertorial: 'We Screwed Up'*, *Forbes*, 15 January 2013
 - Simon Black: *'We messed up badly here': Lenovo admits to putting tracking software on your PC*, *SovereignMan*, 20 February 2015
- Military leadership:
 - *U.S. military in Iraq admit airstrike error*, *Reuters*, 5 February 2007
 - [NB: the absence of other indications is seemingly indicative of the difficulty of military leadership to admit to error, as separately explored (*Transforming the Unsustainable Cost of General Education: strategic insights from Afghanistan*, 2009)]

Of some relevance is the Canadian website which offers a collective apology to the world for its own government:

Sorry, World: We messed up. We know you look to us as one of the last great strongholds of common sense in a swirling sea of crazy on this big ol' crazy planet of ours. Decriminalized marijuana, same-sex marriage, our peace keeping force, universal health care, education, our stance on environment, human rights, and religious freedom made us look pretty darn awesome. Now we're realizing that those things that made us awesome are being taken away from us, and it's not just us Canadians who are paying the price. Turns out some of us thought it would be a grand idea to put this fucking guy in charge.

A similar point can be made otherwise (*Urgent Need for Blair as President of Europe: maximizing early collective learning in anticipation of future crises*, 2009).

Examples of apologies made on behalf of a collective: These include:

- Indigenous peoples:
 - Australia:
 - *Sorry Day and the Stolen Generations*
 - *'Sorry' apology to Stolen Generations* (2008)
 - Kevin Rudd: *Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples*. Parliament of Australia, 13 February 2008
 - Bolivia:
 - *Pope Francis Apologizes to Indigenous Peoples for 'Grave Sins' of Colonialism* *Indian Country*, 10 July 2015
 - Canada:
 - DeNeen L. Brown *Canadian Government Apologizes For Abuse of Indigenous People* *The Washington Post*, 12 June 2008
 - *Prime Minister Stephen Harper's statement of apology* *CBC News*. 11 June 2008
 - Theresa Braine *Pope Francis Apology Prompts Calls for Direct Address to School Survivors in Canada* *Indian Country*, 11 July 2015
 - USA: Bureau of Indian Affairs:
 - Rebecca Tsosie: *The BIA's Apology to Native Americans: an essay on collective memory and collective conscience*.
 - Christopher Buck *Kevin Gover's Apology for the Bureau of Indian Affairs* *Wicazo Sa Review* 21, 2006, 1, pp. 97-126
 - Matt Kelley *Indian Affairs Head Makes Apology* *The Washington Post*, 8 September 2000
- Ireland (Bloody Sunday)
 - *Bloody Sunday: PM David Cameron's full statement*. *BBC News*, 15 June 2010
- Colonialism:
 - Levi Buyinza: *Colonial powers should apologise to Africa* *The Observer*, 22 April 2015
 - Vineet Thakur: *Apology For Colonialism! Impossible?* *Countercurrents.org*, 16 December 2009
 - French:

- [Hollande acknowledges colonial-era Cameroon massacres but critics want apology](#) Cameroon Online, July 2015
 - [France recognises Algeria colonial suffering President Francois Hollande tells Algeria's parliament French rule in North African country was "brutal and unfair"](#). *Al Jazeera*, 20 Dec 2012
 - [Hollande says no apology for Algerian colonial past](#) *France24*, 20 December 2012
 - David A. Bell: [Francois Hollande's Apology Tour -- and What Americans Should Learn From It](#) *New Republic*, 19 October 2012
 - Camille Pecastaing: [The Politics of Apology: Hollande and Algeria](#) *World Affairs*, March/April 2013
 - Netherlands:
 - [Netherlands apologizes formally to Indonesia for colonial killings](#) *DW*, 12 September 2013
 - UK:
 - [Britain's Imperial Apology](#) *World Policy*, 6 June 2013
 - [Britain issues unprecedented apology to colonial-era Kenyans](#) *The Christian Science Monitor*, 6 June 2013
 - Malavika Vyawahare and Sruthi Gottipati: [Should British Politicians Apologize for Colonialism?](#) *The New York Times*, 20 February 2013
 - Owen Jones: [William Hague is wrong... we must own up to our brutal colonial past](#), *The Independent*, 3 September 2012
 - Neil Sears: [Michael Palin: Britons should stop apologising for their colonial past and be proud of our Empire's achievements](#) *Daily Mail*, 2 October 2009
 - [Britain Apologizes For Colonial-Era Torture of Kenyan Rebels](#) *NPR*, 9 June 2013
 - [Colonial sins return to haunt former world powers](#) *NBC News*, 1 October 2012
 - USA:
 - Pete Pichoske: [U.S. acknowledges wrong in 1893 Hawaii overthrow: Clinton issues a formal apology 100 years after the fact](#) *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 23 November 1993
 - [New Zealand: No apology for past colonialism in Samoa](#) *Cultural Survival*
 - Belgian:
 - Simona L. Astrego and Laurent Licata: ["Should a country's leaders apologize for its past misdeeds?" An analysis of the effects of both public apologies from a Belgian official and perception of Congolese victims" continued suffering on Belgians" representations of colonial action, support for reparation, and attitudes towards the Congolese](#) 2010
- Massacres:
 - Armenia:
 - [Armenians call for German apology on genocide issue](#) *DW*, 3 April 2015
 - Germany:
 - [Herero Massacre: General's Descendants Apologize for 'Germany's First Genocide'](#) *Spiegel Online*, 8 October 2007
 - Vanessa Fredericks: [The Politics of Apology: the Katyn Massacre and the Aporia of Forgiveness](#)
 - India
 - Nicholas Watt: [David Cameron defends lack of apology for British massacre at Amritsar](#) *The Guardian*, 20 February 2013
 - Sumit Ganguly and Jennifer Lind: [Why Cameron Didn't Apologize to India](#) *The Diplomat*, 5 March 2013
 - Indonesia:
 - [Indonesia Apology Urged Over Massacre of a Million Citizens in 1965](#) *Global Voices*, 26 January 2014
 - Ireland:
 - [Apology due for 1904 massacre](#) *The Irish Times*, 14 August 2004
 - Israel:
 - Shlomi Eldar: [Kafir Qasim still waiting for Israeli apology](#) *Al Monitor*, October 2014
 - Dahlia Scheindlin: [Israeli president's apology offers a rare hope for coexistence](#) 972, 27 October 2014
 - Yoav Stern: [President Peres apologizes for Kafir Qasem massacre of 1956](#) *Haaretz*, 21 December 2007
 - Japan:
 - Victor Huang: [Should Japan apologise to China for the Nanking Massacre?](#) *Quora*
 - [Chinese group demands apology for Nanjing Massacre](#) *China Daily*, 28 December 2014
 - Netherlands:
 - [Dutch apologize for massacre](#) *The Jakarta Post*, 13 September 2013
 - Poland:
 - [Polish President Defends Holocaust Massacre Apology](#) *Forward* 22 May 2015
 - Serbia:
 - Damien McElroy: [Serbian president in historic Srebrenica massacre apology](#) *The Telegraph*, 25 April 2013
 - Turkey
 - [HDP leader urges 'state apology' for Dersim massacre](#) *Daily News*, 18 November 2014
 - Ruwayda Mustafah: [Why Did Erdogan Apologise For The Dersim Massacre?](#) *The Huffington Post*, 29 November 2011
 - USA:
 - Megan Verlee: [150 Years Later: a formal apology for the Sand Creek massacre.](#) 15 December 2014
 - Jack Healy: [Apology, but No Explanation, for Massacre of Afghans](#) *The New York Times*, 22 August 2013
 - Ernie Suggs: [Calley apologizes for My Lai massacre](#) *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* 21 August 2008

Remorse and repentance: Considerable importance is attached in the individual case to the quality and sincerity of the [remorse](#) associated with the acknowledgement of error. This extends into consideration of [repentance](#), namely the modification of the pattern of behaviour which had engendered it (Amitai Etzioni, *Repentance: a comparative perspective*, 2000).

The question is the nature of "collective remorse" and of "collective repentance" and how these might be experienced, recognized and expressed. To a greater extent than in the individual case there can be extensive debate on how genuine this could be in the collective case. Whilst identifying to a degree with the apology for an error, to what extent is engagement with collective remorse and repentance to be considered meaningful and sincere?

Assumption of responsibility, atonement and reparation for collective error: As in the previous remark, considerable importance is attached in the individual case to the assumption of responsibility for error, to processes of [atonement](#), and to appropriate reparation.

Again, with respect to the collective case, the question is the form of "collective assumption of responsibility", of "collective atonement", and of "collective reparations". However, in contrast to the intangibles of remorse and repentance, these processes may well take tangible form. A degree of collective atonement is variously summarized in the *Wikipedia* from several perspectives. More concrete is the form taken by reparations, which may or well be imposed by treaty terminating a conflict. Examples that can be usefully distinguished include:

- [war reparations](#), noted by *Wikipedia* under the following headings:
 - [World War I reparations](#), made from Germany due to the signing of the Treaty of Versailles
 - [Reparations Agreement between Israel and West Germany](#), Holocaust reparations
- colonialism, extensively documented at [Colonialism Reparation](#) (with indication of apologies)
- slave trade: [Reparations for slavery](#) (proposed) to provide compensation for the Transatlantic Slave Trade, to assist the descendants of enslaved peoples and the communities affected.
 - Theodore R. Johnson: *How to Apologize for Slavery*, *The Atlantic*, 6 August 2014; *Africans Have Apologized for Slavery, So Why Won't the US?* *The Root*, 17 June 2014
 - Chris McGreal: *Britain blocks EU apology for slave trade*, *The Guardian*, 3 September 2001
 - *UK slave trade apology 'needed'*, *BBC News*, 25 March 2007
 - Philip Sherwell: *Caribbean states demand reparations from European powers for slave trade*, *The Telegraph*, 11 March 2014

Collective societal learning through recognition of error?

"Lifelong learning" in a "Learning society"?: There has been considerable recognition of the importance of individual learning, notably given a global focus through UNESCO's (*Learning to Be: the world of education today and tomorrow*, 1972) and more recently through UNESCO's (*Global Perspectives on Recognising Non-formal and Informal Learning: why recognition matters*, 2015). A framework for this focus is now provided by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Missing from this emphasis is any concern with collective learning -- other than as providing an enabling context for individual learning. Curiously the 1972 study is declared to have been the result of the "collective effort of the International Commission on the Development of Education". There is no reference to "collective learning" -- which might well have been evident in that processes of that Commission.

Subsequently UNESCO, together with OECD, has promoted the notion of a [learning society](#) as an educational philosophy. Learning societies are understood to be broader in context, drawing on elements of systems to facilitate the ability for [lifelong learning](#) in the individual. If lifelong learning is about the ability of the individual, then this is enabled through a learning society.

Societal learning: Little attention is devoted to societal learning in its own right. This point is effectively reinforced by the focus of an early report to the Club of Rome (James W Botkin, Mahdi Elmandjra and Mircea Malitza, *No Limits to Learning; bridging the human gap*, 1979) which was the subject of a detailed critique from a collective perspective (*Societal Learning and the Erosion of Collective Memory*, 1980). This notably included sections on:

- [Nature of collective memory](#)
- [Nature of social learning: the collective user](#)
- [Limits to societal learning](#)
 - a. [Quantitative limit](#)
 - b. [Limit to connectedness](#)
 - c. [Limit to collective comprehension span](#)
 - d. [Limit to depth of collective comprehension](#)
 - e. [Pro-logical limitations](#)
 - f. [Collective attention span limit](#)
 - g. [Collective memory limit](#)
- [Future approaches to collective memory](#)
 - a. [Patterns of subjects](#)
 - b. [Modeling the international documentation system](#)
 - c. [Associative networks](#)
 - d. [Packaging complex patterns of information](#)
 - e. [Shared symbols](#)

As expressed by Kenneth Boulding:

One of the most striking phenomena of the human learning process is the extent to which it seems to be self-limiting. Far beyond the physiological capacity of the human nervous system, we learn not to learn. We paint ourselves into a tiny corner of the vast ballroom of the human nervous system. The role of threat and fear in this process is extremely important to evaluate.... Unfortunately, the dynamics of the threat system in all its forms tend to follow the pattern of the arms race and hence constantly to expand far beyond the optimum into highly pathological states, whether this is in the international system or in the human learning process (*Ecodynamics: a new theory of social evolution*, 1978, p. 157)

This self-limiting phenomenon is increasingly evident, despite the connectivity of the internet (*Dynamically Gated Conceptual Communities: emergent patterns of isolation within knowledge society*, 2005; Ethan Zuckerman, *Rewire: Digital Cosmopolitans in the Age of Connection*, 2013). The associated cultivation of blindspots as a consequence of selective learning has been variously highlighted (*33 reasons why we can't think clearly about climate change*, *New Scientist*, 8 July 2015; Paul B. Farrell, *10 reasons you don't hear the Doomsday Clock ticking*, *MarketWatch*, 2 February 2015; Alan Greenspan, *Never Saw It Coming: why the financial crisis took economists by surprise*, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2013; Karen A. Cerulo, *Never Saw It Coming: cultural challenges to envisioning the worst*, 2006)

Understood in terms of erosion of collective memory, the issue can be explored in the light of concerns with the ability of the younger generations to engage with dramatic learning moments of the past -- and the need for their commemoration. It can also be explored in terms of the media complicity in **dumbing down**, as notably highlighted by Henry A. Giroux (*The Violence of Organized Forgetting: thinking beyond America's disimagination machine*, 2014). Dumbing down is a deliberate diminution of the intellectual level of education, literature, cinema, news, and culture (Ray Williams, *Anti-Intellectualism and the "Dumbing Down" of America*, *Psychology Today*, 7 July 2014).

More recent studies have focused on the role of societal learning in relation to transformational change (Steve Waddell, *Societal Learning and Change: how governments, business and civil society are creating solutions to complex multi-stakeholder problems*, 2005; C. Pahl-Wostl, et al., *How Multilevel Societal Learning Processes Facilitate Transformative Change: a comparative case study analysis on flood management*. *Ecology and Society*, 2013).

The problematic confusion of "collective learning", "societal learning" and "social learning" with individual learning obscures preoccupations made with respect to learning by organizations, communities, and networks of groups -- if not by nations and cultures. As more appropriately clarified by Will Allen (who lists relevant resources):

The concept of social (or collaborative) learning refers to learning processes among a group of people who seek to improve a common situation and take action collectively. This understanding effectively extends experiential learning into collective learning. This is a form of governance, in the sense that governance relates to how society manages to allocate resources and coordinate or control activity in society or the economy.... It is also **adaptive management or 'learning-by-doing'**. (*Social learning, governance and practice change*, 2015)

As noted by Steve Wadell (*Societal Learning: creating big-systems change*, *Systems Thinker*, 2001/2002):

Societal learning almost always involves the collaboration of the three organizational "sectors": government, business, and civil society organizations (labor, community-based, religious, and nongovernmental entities). These sectors represent the three key systems of our society: political (government), economic (business), and social (civil society).... Although related to individual, group, and organizational learning, societal learning is particularly challenging to achieve. Why? First, it necessarily involves changes in how different complex institutions from different sectors operate, both separately and in tandem... Second, this kind of learning can take place on a local or regional level, but it also happens with global-scale projects....

Given their ambitious goals, societal learning initiatives must go well beyond simply coordinating organizations and resources -- often referred to as **single-loop learning or first-order change** because it occurs within current structures and assumptions. Societal learning requires a shift in mental models and the development of new structures and processes, known as **double-loop learning or second-order change**.

Like organizational learning, societal learning deals with exploring the deep, underlying structures that drive behavior, surfacing the basic assumptions we hold that limit our options, and developing innovative approaches to persistent problems... This kind of shift in thinking can spur complex synergies and powerful innovations.... Such collaborations can even produce the more rarefied triple-loop learning, which involves rethinking the way we actually think about an issue. Through their work on change initiatives, many poor people and wealthy people, businesspeople and bureaucrats, social activists and conservatives have come to fundamentally change how they regard one another.... In systems thinking terms, the challenge of those involved in societal learning is to understand and address numerous large and complex feedback loops. In development and change management terms, the challenge is to transform learning at a project and intellectual level into broad, sustainable systemwide change.

Bluntly and succinctly stated, the issue is how does "we" learn collectively in engaging with "them". More pointedly it might be given focus by asking **what record there is of collective learning by:**

- the "international community", most notably as supportive of the programmes of the IMF?
- the **Washington Consensus**, raising the question as to whether any consensus precludes collective learning?
- intergovernmental organizations, most notably the United Nations, its Specialized Agencies, and various regional bodies (EU, OAS, ASEAN, etc)?
- international nongovernmental organizations, with their particular long-standing commitment to social change?
- multinational corporations, given their claims to be supportive of global change?
- various systems, most notably the financial system, especially following the 2008 financial crisis?
- national governments, most notably the USA following the events of the past decades?
- religions, most notably the Abrahamic religions with their particular claims to be eternally without blemish?
- Twitter, particularly with respect to trending communications in terms of a popular thematic hashtag?

The case of the USA raises the question of the challenges of **grouptink** as a problematic phase in collective learning, notably as it was

evident in the evaluation of evidence for WMD and the efforts to learn from the recognized failures (*Groupthink: the Search for Archaeoraptor as a Metaphoric Tale -- missing the link between "freedom fighters" and "terrorists"*, 2002). More intriguing is the collective learning capacity of the military coalitions engaged in asymmetric warfare, as a consequence of repetitive erroneous strategic assessments (*Transforming the Unsustainable Cost of General Education: strategic insights from Afghanistan*, 2009).

Perfection of religion rendering learning superfluous? The Abrahamic religions offer an especially interesting case given their various vigorously defended claims to unquestionable perfection. As a consequence is any collective learning process conceivable -- triggered by the recognition of error? There is then a curious contrast between the questionable perfectibility of such collectivities and that of individuals informed by their insights (John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man*, 2000). Are the Abrahamic religions to be considered perfectible despite their claims? More specifically, given the perfection which it claims, is the Vatican capable of learning in the light of the challenges it currently faces? The theme of perfection contrasts stangely with the imperfection acclaimed by Buddhism (Rob Preece, *The Wisdom of Imperfection: the challenge of individuation in Buddhist life*, 2010).

Governance as a non-learning process? The [Worldwide Governance Indicators \(WGI\)](#) project reports aggregate individual governance indicators for 215 economies over the period 1996-2013, for six dimensions of governance: voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, control of corruption. The indicators are produced by Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay and Massimo Mastruzzi (*The Worldwide Governance Indicators: methodology and analytical issues*, 2010) of the Brookings Institution and the World Bank. Any indication of collective learning in the light of recognition of error can only be considered implicit, if not completely absent. How do those institutions recognize their own learning -- if any? Is sustainable governance then to be understood as fundamentally a non-learning process?.

"Embracing error": It is therefore appropriate to note the argument of [Donald N. Michael](#) (*On Learning to Plan and Planning to Learn: the social psychology of changing toward future-responsive societal learning*, , 1973) with respect to the requirement to embrace error in the process of strategic learning:

More bluntly, future-responsive soc

ietal 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

In a learning society should non-learners be blamed -- or rather allowed to benefit from the experience they engender?

Failure to admit error as indicator of incapacity to learn? Studies have recognized that the capacity of individuals to admit error enabled more effective learning (Hunter Maats and Katie O'Brien, *Teaching Students to Embrace Mistakes*, *Edutopia*, 20 March 2014; Richard Curwin, *It's a Mistake Not to Use Mistakes as Part of the Learning Process*, *Edutopia*, 28 October 2014; Alina Tugend, *The Role of Mistakes in the Classroom*, *Edutopia*, 6 September 2011).

Significant insights in this respect include:

- Albert Einstein: *Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.*
- Mahatma Gandhi: *Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes.*
- Rita Mae Brown: *Good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment.*
- George Bernard Shaw: *Success does not consist in never making mistakes but in never making the same one a second time.*

To the extent that this might apply in the collective case, the question may be framed from the perspective of:

- issues: which problematic issues engendered by collectives remain acknowledged as errors, whether or not apologies or reparations have been considered? The case of colonialism and the slave trade offer striking examples
- countries: which countries have (not) formally admitted to having made a mistake?
- religions: which religions have (not) formally admitted to having made a mistake?
- disciplines: which disciplines have (not) formally admitted to having made a mistake?
- political movements: which political movement have (not) formally admitted to having made a mistake?
- international agencies: which international agencies have (not) formally admitted to having made a mistake?
- multinational corporations: which international agencies have (not) formally admitted to having made a mistake?

Responses to such questions can be considered in terms of the quality of confession sought in the individual case, including the distinction in that context between [venial sins](#) and [mortal sins](#) (or their equivalents). In that respect an interesting contrast can be made between the following:

- **"venial sin"?** examination of the reports of UN Secretaries-General over an extensive period detected only one single reference to the phrase "I made a mistake" -- by [Dag Hammarskjöld](#) in 1960:
 - Mr. President, I apologize to the Council, but I made a mistake on one of the points on which I wished to give information. I said that we had requested a military medical unit from Poland. This was not the case. We requested one ordnance company, to establish a base ordnance depot at Leopoldville, and five detachments for brigades... (Andrew W. Cordier and Wilder Foote, *Public Papers of the Secretaries General of the United Nations: Volume 5*, Columbia University Press, 2013, p. 151)
- **"mortal sin"?** as Secretary-General, [Kofi Annan](#) is renowned for his assertion -- a confession? an apology? -- that the UN-sanctioned invasion of Iraq was "illegal" (*Iraq war was illegal and breached UN charter, says Annan*, *The Guardian*, 16 September 2004). This may be understood to have had many consequences for the subsequent sidelining of the United Nations

and its Secretary-General, as well as the degree to which it has been subject to illegal electronic surveillance (*Alleged Breach of UN Treaty Obligations by US*, 2010).


In the earlier role of Kofi Annan in the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations he was directly associated with the failure of the international community to intervene in the massacres in Srebrenica (1992-93) and in Rwanda (1994) in order to protect civilian populations. With respect to the latter, it has been controversially claimed that Annan was overly passive in his response to the imminent genocide (Roméo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, 2003). As with the case of Adolf Eichmann, this raises the highly controversial question of the potential "error" associated with obedience to orders, as discussed separately (*Obedience to orders in enabling humanitarian disaster*, 2011). In the "eyes of history", when is it appropriate to "take the bullet" -- the career bullet from superiors -- in order to save lives?


Collective reform: As a consequence of a degree of recognition of error, or a vulnerability to error, much is made of the need for collective reform. The term is recognized to have originated with an early need for Parliamentary Reform. Whether the tendency to error is usefully articulated, it is therefore of interest to see reform as a form of collective *mea culpa* "by subterfuge". This may be used to frame the question of the errors associated with collective reform in the following cases, whether or not the arguments have been accepted and implemented to any degree:

- religions, most notably the Abrahamic religions have been characterized by reform movements, possibly giving rise to schisms in which the term "reform" features -- although the schismatic movements are readily framed as heretical and "in error":
 - **Islam:** *Reforming Islam: where change comes from*, *The Economist*, 7 January 2015; Timothy Abraham, *The Impossibility of Reforming Islam, Answering Islam*; Muqtedar Khan, *Contemplating Islamic Reform*, *The Huffinton Post*, 6 June 2015; John Lloyd, *An Islamic Reformation is the world's best chance for peace*, *The Jerusalem Post*, 4 April 2015; Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Why Islam Needs a Reformation*, *The Wall Street Journal*, 20 March 2015; Mehdi Hasan, *Why Islam doesn't need a reformation Mehdi Hasan*, *The Guardian*, 17 May 2015; Theo Hobson, *Why calling for an 'Islamic Reformation' is lazy and historically illiterate*, *The Spectator*, 7 February 2015; Nick Danforth, *Islam Will Not Have Its Own 'Reformation'*, *Foreign Policy*, 2 January 2015
 - **Christianity:** Tony Warren, *What is Reformed Christianity? The Mountain Retreat*; Ruth Gledhill, *Reform in Rome: will Pope Francis get his way? Church*, 07 November 2014; Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: its impact on Christian thought and action in the age of the Fathers*, 1959; Christopher M. Bellitto, *Renewing Christianity: 2,000 years of church reform*, *KnowYouKnow*
 - **Judaism:** *What is Reform Judaism*, *ReformJudaism.org*; *Reform Judaism: The Tenets of Reform Judaism*, *Jewish Virtual Library*
- disciplines, are recognized as being subject to "scientific revolutions" which may be anticipated by calls for reform -- as in arguments for [Science 2.0](#)
- **land reform**, namely changing of laws, regulations or customs regarding land ownership
- **monetary reform**, namely any system of supplying money and financing the economy that is different from the current system
- **electoral reform**, namely any change in electoral systems to improve how public desires are expressed in election results.
- political reform, namely improving the laws and constitutions in accordance with expectations of the public, as promoted by the [Campaign for Political Reforms: a global initiative for political reforms](#).
- international institutions:
 - **United Nations reform** is a process responding to some degree to the many calls for reform of the United Nations (UN) since the 1990s. There is seemingly little clarity or consensus about what reform might mean in practice (*UN Security Council Enlargement and U.S. Interests*, *Council on Foreign Relations*, December 2010; *United Nations Corruption and the Need for Reform*, *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, March 2013)
 - European Union reform as promoted by the [Centre for European Reform](#)
 - Commonwealth reform as articulated by a Group of Eminent Persons (*A Commonwealth of the People: time for urgent reform*, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2011; *Commonwealth reform package endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government*, *Gov.uk*, 19 December 2012).
 - Organization of American States, as articulated in the *Organization of American States Revitalization and Reform Act of 2013*

In considering the various understanding of collective reform, it is interesting to compare the process with the increasingly familiar one of software reform -- namely the [upgrades](#) to existing software or the production of alternatives. Typically these occur with some frequency with a detailed indication of the "bugs" corrected (or as yet uncorrected) and the improvements to performance. A historical checklist is often offered regarding such upgrades. No such approach is taken to what might be termed collective groupware, as argued separately with respect to conference organization (*Embodying Strategic Self-reference in a World Futures Conference: transcending the wicked problem engendered by projecting negativity elsewhere*, 2015).

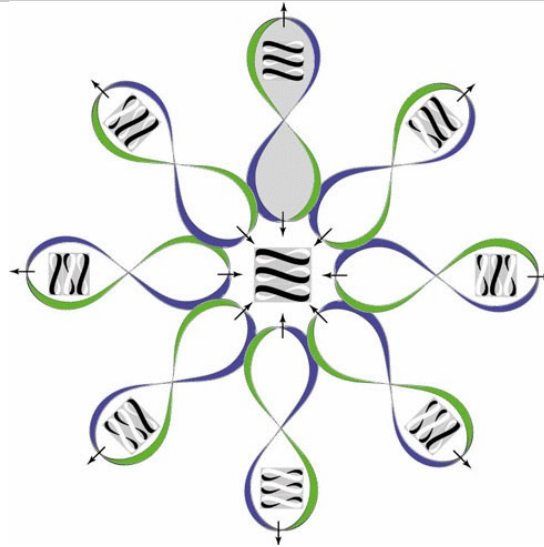
Reframing the psychocultural dynamics of "apology": Reference to "reform", and any "recognition of error", tends to ignore the cultural constraints (indicated earlier) regarding the nature and viability of collective engagement with any collective apology. Further discussion could benefit from and enriched reframing of the relations between the dimensions of shame/honour, guilt/innocence, and fear/safety, using the classical encoding system elaborated within Chinese culture. This could take the form of a trigram of alternating lines reflecting the extremes typically perceived as "positive" and "negative". The [Möbius strip](#) can be fruitfully used to explore the paradoxical existential experience of that alternation.

Animation of societal learning complex using a trigram of Möbius strips	
Yin/Yang alternation	Possible attribution
	shame/honour dynamic

	guilt/innocence dynamic
	fear/safety dynamic

This speculative possibility can be taken further using the traditional configuration of the 8 contrasting positive/negative combinations forming the so-called *BaGua mirror* as suggested by the animation below. Understood otherwise, positive can be associated with gain and negative with loss. Framed as winning or losing, however, [Kenneth Boulding](#) indicates: *Disappointment forces a learning process of some kind upon us; success does not* (*Ecodynamics: a new theory of societal evolution*, 1978, p. 133). For [Bram Stoker](#): *We learn from failure, not from success!*

**Speculative animation of the dynamics of collective *mea culpa*
in terms of the *BaGua* mirror as a global configuration**



Given the extensive articulation of profit and loss from a financial perspective -- namely values in their most tangible form -- are there more general insights to be derived with respect to a "triple bottom line" of relevance to intangible values with which the pattern of shame/honour, guilt/innocence and fear/safety might be associated (*Investing Attention Essential to Viable Growth Radical self-reflexive reappropriation of financial skills and insights*, 2014; *Spherical Accounting: using geometry to embody developmental integrity*, 2004; *Psychosocial Implication in Gamma Animation: epimemetics for a Brave New World*, 2013).

With any form of *mea culpa* understood as process of begging for givenness, other animations of the above dynamic are presented separately (*Mapping the cognitive dynamics of the begging moment*, 2015).

Conclusion

Cultivation of ignorance in a global society? The references cited above make it clear that both admission of collective error and any form of collective apology are distinguished by their rarity. Presumably, as such, that should be highly valued as a basis for societal learning. This does not appear to be the case. Collectivities typically lay claim to a form of perfection which precludes any need to value collective learning -- other than what was distinguished by the early report to the Club of Rome (1979) as [maintenance learning](#), namely the reparations of minor technical anomalies -- in contrast to [innovative learning](#).

The condition, notably in the case of religions, could be caricatured as *we have always been right*, and *we know we are right*, and *we will always be right*. There is seemingly little learning from the bloody conflicts they engender -- despite token enthusiasm for interfaith discourse, presumably also to be understood as a non-learning environment regarding matters of existential significance. The pattern is repeated between disciplines. It is evident in the attitudes of major international institutions claiming global significance. Basically, aside from tokenism, the pattern is characterized by zero humility. The issue of how a collective can believe it is right, when others consider it to be wrong, is not addressed -- except through their deprecation as misguided, even dangerously so.

From this it may be readily inferred that every collectivity is considered pathological from the perspective of some other group. Each tends to prescribe remedial processes for others -- typical through the promotion of "our way" as being the only healthy way for society as a whole. The extent of blame game dynamics through failure to follow such prescriptions could ironically be recognized as characterizing the pathology of a sick global system.

Future processes? The above arguments reinforce points made with respect to:

- who to confess to -- a statutory meeting, the press? An acknowledged initiative of significance in this respect is the instigation of [truth and reconciliation commissions](#) tasked with discovering and revealing past wrongdoing by a government (or by non-state actors), in the hope of resolving conflict left over from the past. These could be understood as a form of collective confessional.
- how to confess -- given the cultural constraints on apology (detailed above)?

- who is empowered to recognize collective error and to articulate any form of apology -- given the problematic attitudes to whistleblowers?
- where to accumulate confessions such as to enable and enhance collective memory, as well as the associated societal learning -- a *WikiConfession*, a *WikiApology*? -- perhaps distinguishing (as with multilateral treaties) between incidents awaiting apology and those for which apologies have been made and endorsed?
- the possibility of a repentance / atonement / reparations database (as with that on [Colonialism Reparation](#))
- the continuity of apology beyond the electoral term of the person or body making it, namely not just mistakes acknowledged by "my government" but "my country" (as with treaties)
- a database offering a historical record of those held to be responsible, or suspected of being responsible, and of how they were indicted or avoided conviction -- if only with the framing "not proven" -- analogous to initiatives to establish a database of government (electoral) promises and commitments?
- the capacity of institutions such as the United Nations to add to the standard pattern of formulation of resolutions, paragraphs to the effect of "Recognizing the error...", "Acknowledging the mistake..." or "Apologizing for the error..."

Civilizational maturity -- from a galactic perspective? Given human pride in self-awareness (as assessed by the [mirror self-recognition test](#)) in contrast to the limited capacity of the very young (and old) and animals, it is appropriate to ask how the maturity of a collective or a civilization is to be assessed.

Ironically a preliminary requirement in the [twelve-step programme](#) of guiding principles outlining a course of action for tackling personal problems (including alcoholism, drug addiction and compulsion) is admission that one cannot control one's behaviour in that regard. It is possible that the tendency to collective error could be inspired by such a twelve-step programme. Similarly characteristic is the question in job interviews requiring an identification of the failings of the interviewee -- in that person's own words. People valued for their executive qualities may be assessed on their capacity to learn from failure and to recover from it. These pointers reinforce the argument made above that only the mature are capable of admitting error.

It is in this sense that it is appropriate to ask hypothetical questions regarding the nature of any galactic equivalent to the mirror test and to any interview regarding acceptance into the galactic community, as discussed separately ([Self-reflective Embodiment of Transdisciplinary Integration \(SETI\): the universal criterion of species maturity?](#) 2008). At what future time will humanity be able to appreciate that the blame game in which it so enthusiastically indulges is effectively a "comedy of errors" -- or rather a "tragi-comedy of errors", given the associated bloodshed in the case of Abrahamic religions, each considering the other to be at fault despite their common inspiration? Why the lack of capacity to render those dynamics into operative form, as suggested by [Nostra Culpa: the world's first financial opera](#) and related possibilities ([A Singable Earth Charter, EU Constitution or Global Ethic](#), 2006)?

Will the capacity of humanity to laugh at itself -- and at the games it plays -- be recognized by extraterrestrials as concrete proof essential to recognition of its maturity? ([Humour and Play-Fullness: essential integrative processes in governance, religion and transdisciplinarity](#), 2005; James Carse, [Finite and Infinite Games: a vision of life as play and possibility](#), 2013).

Value of collective apology: The process of collective *mea culpa* is analyzed by Josh Boughton ([Exploring the Collective Mea Culpa: reconciliation between nations and populations](#). *Southampton Student Law Review*, 1, 2011). His primary case studies are the apology of Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd for the [Stolen Generations](#), and that of David Cameron for [Bloody Sunday](#), as a new opportunity to examine the question of whether apologies issued on behalf of groups can support the process of reconciliation after mass atrocity and conflict.

Boughton is explicitly guided by the sense of a moral apology defined by Kathleen Gill ([The Moral Functions of an Apology](#), *The Philosophical Forum*, 31, 2000, 1) as requiring the following elements: (1) An acknowledgment that the incident in question did in fact occur; (2) An acknowledgment that the incident was inappropriate in some way; (3) An acknowledgment of responsibility for the act; (4) The expression of an attitude of regret and a feeling of remorse; and (5) The expression of an intention to refrain from similar acts in the future.

There is no doubting that when issued by an appropriate individual, collective apologies can be extremely effective: the reactions in Australia and Northern Ireland demonstrate this. Despite the differing environments, it is possible to reach a similar conclusion in relation to both apologies; an apology is not the end. Rather, it is the beginning of a long journey towards reconciliation. Throughout this analysis, Kathleen Gill's requirements for a moral apology have provided us with a guide as to what is required for a successful apology. However, we have also recognised that even when these five ingredients are present, an apology itself can never be enough....

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