



laetus in praesens

Alternative view of segmented documents via Kairos

31st October 2010 | Draft

From Quantitative Easing (QE) to Moral Easing (ME) a stimulus package to avert moral bankruptcy?

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Introduction

Commentary on the release via [WikiLeaks](#) of 400,000 documents regarding the reality on the ground in Iraq -- as reported by troops in the field -- has called into question the moral foundation of the intervention by the coalition forces in their various incarnations and manifestations in the Iraq-Afghanistan area ([Multi-National Force - Iraq](#), [Combined Joint Task Force 7](#), [NATO Training Mission - Iraq](#), [Coalition of the Willing](#), [International Security Assistance Force](#)).

Originally conceived as morally justified to relieve the Iraqi people of a dictatorial regime, heavily engaged in the oppression and torture of its peoples (as with the Taliban in Afghanistan), it appears that the coalition forces have facilitated the emergence of a new Iraqi government operating in a similar manner. The coalition, and especially the USA and the UK, are now recognized to have been complicit in this process -- to the extent of transferring Iraqi citizens into the hands of forces known to indulge in such practices.

The moral justification for the intervention is therefore indeed questionable but worse still is the moral bankruptcy of government authorities complicit in this process and in continuing efforts to deny their responsibility for atrocities they claimed as the moral justification for their intervention. If it proves to be the case that the practices adopted by Iraqi authorities are consistent with their culture, however regrettable, this might have been fruitfully recognized prior to an intervention which has cost so many lives. If it takes a "Saddam" to maintain a degree of order in that country, removing Saddam was not an imaginative strategic response.

The concern now is how to respond to the rapid slide into moral bankruptcy on the part of leading Western governments, most notably the USA and the UK.

Fortunately very recent crises have offered two policies which have been extensively articulated and implemented on highest international authority: quantitative easing and carbon trading.

The question explored here is whether this thinking can be applied to the challenge of moral bankruptcy. Namely, **is there some form of "qualitative easing" -- perhaps best termed "moral easing" -- that might alleviate the trend to moral bankruptcy?** This specific concern follows from earlier explorations ([Global Market in Indulgences: extending the carbon trading model to other value-based challenges](#), 2007; [Sins of Hot Air Emission, Omission, Commission and Promission: the political challenge of responding to global crises](#), 2009).

The argument concludes (in an [Annex](#)) with a discussion of the possibility of [Enabling Moral Currency Circulation](#) through reframing understanding of any "stimulus package" to avert moral bankruptcy.

Slide towards global moral bankruptcy?

Moral bankruptcy: Moral bankruptcy is the state of being devoid of morality and ethics, especially as used in the case of business and political entities. The global challenge to morality has long been recognized (Paul Craig Roberts, *The Collapse of Western Morality, Global Research*, 23 September 2010; Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Moral Bankruptcy: why are we letting Wall Street off so easy?* *Mother Jones*, January/February, 2010).

Moral justification for war: The [secret Iraq war logs](#) released by [WikiLeaks](#) now reveal the extent of previously [unlisted civilian deaths](#), and denial of violent abuses by the military and by security contractors:

- Simon Rogers, *Wikileaks Iraq: data journalism maps every death*, *The Guardian*, 23 October 2010
- Nick Davies, Jonathan Steele and David Leigh, *Iraq war logs: secret files show how US ignored torture*, *The Guardian*, 22 October 2010
- Nick Davies, *Iraq war logs: Secret order that let US ignore abuse*, *The Guardian*, 22 October 2010
- James Meek, *Iraq war logs: How friendly fire from US troops became routine*, *The Guardian*, 22 October 2010
- Emily Dugan, *Torture, killing, children shot - and how the US tried to keep it all quiet*. *The Independent*, 24 October 2010
- Robert Fisk, *The shaming of America*. *The Independent*, 24 October 2010
- Spiegel, *The WikiLeaks Iraq Logs: a protocol of barbarity*. *Spiegel Online*, 25 October 2010
- Gareth Porter. *Torture Orders Were Part of U.S. Sectarian War Strategy*. *IPS News*, 3 November 2010

Typical of the morally repugnant nature of the revelations is information to the effect that non-combatants and those endeavouring to surrender were readily shot:

- David Leigh. *Iraq war logs: Apache crew killed insurgents who tried to surrender*, *The Guardian*, 22 October 2010. Seemingly a US military legal adviser informed the helicopter crew that the Iraqi men were valid targets as they could not surrender to aircraft. (For rules of engagement, see also *Iraq secret war logs: surrender and die*, *Channel 4 News*, 23 October 2010)
- Jonathan Steele, *Iraq war logs: Civilians gunned down at checkpoints*, *The Guardian*, 22 October 2010. Fear of suicide bombers means troops have shot drivers and passengers who were simply too scared or confused to stop. Two-thirds of deaths 2004-09 were civilians and that significantly more ordinary people were killed at checkpoints than enemy fighters (*Iraq war files: death at checkpoint*, *Channel 4 News*, 23 October 2010).

Curiously, if not cynically, the claim is made that release of such information places the lives of coalition forces at risk (Amy Fallon, *Iraq war logs: disclosure condemned by Hillary Clinton and Nato*, *The Guardian*, 22 October 2010). There is no reference to the lives of civilians already terminated in secret in that arena by those forces. Presumably the price is acceptable as notoriously declared by [Madeleine Albright's](#) response, as US Secretary of State, to a query as to whether the death of 500,000 Iraqi children was justified in order to further US policy (*60 Minutes*, 12 May 1996). She indeed indicated: "the price is worth it" -- an attitude that has been the subject of commentary in relation to the 9/11 attacks. For [9/11 conspiracy theories](#), that attitude would be consistent with the argument that the attacks were either intentionally allowed to happen or were a [false flag operation](#) orchestrated by an organization with elements inside the United States government.

As noted by [Simon Jenkins](#) (*A History of Folly -- from the Trojan horse to Afghanistan*, *The Guardian*, 22 October 2010):

By recording failure in meticulous detail, the logs mock the moral basis for so-called wars among the peoples. Like Vietnam's TV images, they leave the Iraq and Afghan conflicts as bloodthirsty killing fields, devoid of rational justification. The war logs are not so much sensational as relentless. Most of the material was known. It is the detail that bears devastating witness. Afghanistan 2001 now enters firmly into the pantheon of folly, from the wooden horse to Napoleon in Moscow to Vietnam. Indeed it bears the added crassness of coming two decades after the Russians committed the exact same folly in the same place.

In 1971 the [Pentagon papers](#) revealed the deception of the Johnson and Nixon governments during the Vietnam war. The papers were credited with collapsing US morale as the war drew to a close. The Afghanistan logs convey a different message. They show George Bush, Tony Blair and their generals to be so dazzled by their massive military (and intellectual) firepower that they thought they were invincible against a tinpot Taliban... Like puppets dancing to manufactured fears and dreams of glory, these leaders have lost their grip on Plato's "sacred golden cord of reason". Until that grip is restored, the folly revealed by the war logs will continue.

In arguing that the allegations via WikiLeaks of allied complicity in torture point to a complete moral failure, an editorial declares (*The final reasons for going to war are being swept away*, *The Observer*, 24 October 2010):

There was no single reason why Britain and the US went to war in Iraq. The motives that inspired George W Bush and Tony Blair have been variously dissected, analysed and psychoanalysed. It is too early for history to have formed a settled view on the war, but the case that it was a monumental error gets ever more compelling. Most of the official justifications for war, on grounds of security from terror and weapons of mass destruction, have been discredited. The only element of moral authority left in the decision might be that Saddam Hussein ran a murderous regime, characterised by torture and extra-judicial killing. It could indeed have been the duty of western powers to intervene against such atrocity. But the western occupiers quickly became complicit in atrocities of their own, as new leaked military documents reveal.

Incitement to non-judicial reaction: Rather than questioning responsibility for the atrocities, curiously media responses in the USA to these revelations are consistent with that same morally defective mindset. As noted by Sam Jones (*WikiLeaks should be declared 'enemy combatants'*, *says Fox News contributor*, *The Guardian*, 26 October 2010):

A *Fox News* contributor and former state department adviser has accused WikiLeaks of conducting "political warfare against the US" and called for those behind the whistleblowing website to be declared "enemy combatants" so they can be subjected to "non-judicial actions".

As a mindset, this argument is reminiscent of that of the Reverend [Pat Robertson](#), speaking to 7 million viewers of the evangelical [Christian Broadcasting Network](#) on 23 August 2005 [\[more\]](#) called for the assassination of the president of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez:

We have the ability to take him out, and I think the time has come to exercise that ability... It's a whole lot easier to have some of the covert operatives do the job and then get it over with. [\[more more more\]](#)

Reverend Robertson, a former US Presidential candidate, is founder of the [Christian Coalition of America](#) -- an upholder of moral standards in the USA -- and a prime supporter of George Bush.

Corruption: The UK is itself seen as an increasingly corrupt country in the eyes of the world, in part because of the scandal caused by MPs' expenses claims, according to the annual report by [Transparency International](#) (*Corruptions Perceptions Index*, 2010). It reveals that Britain has dropped dramatically to 20th in a probity league table of countries perceived to be the cleanest in the world. This ranks the countries of the world according to "the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians". Currently the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, self-acclaimed upholders of the values of the world, rank as follows: UK 20, USA 22, France 25, China 78, Russia 154. Chandrashekar Krishnan, executive director of Transparency International UK, declared, as reported by Rob Evans (*Britain 'seen as more corrupt since MPs' expenses scandal'*, *The Guardian*, 26 October 2010):

This is the leading global index of corruption, and the UK is now seriously at risk of dropping out of the top 20. Yet it should be aspiring to be within the top 10. How else can the UK's calls for better governance in developing countries be taken seriously? A reputation for probity is vital to exercising influence on the international stage and in conducting business successfully.

As noted by Evans, for years the UK has been criticized for failing to prosecute companies which pay bribes to foreign politicians and officials to secure big export orders. Most notoriously the Blair government abruptly halted a major corruption inquiry into Saudi arms deals in 2006.

Moral stimulus package? The vital role of morality and ethics has been recognized in relation to [corporate social responsibility](#) (Craig Mackenzie, *Moral Sanctions: ethical norms as a solution to corporate governance problems*, *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, 1 October 2004). There has been an active focus on [business ethics](#) over the past decade. Progress has notably been evaluated through the:

- [Global Reporting Initiative's](#) guidelines on sustainability reporting
- [SA8000](#) standard of [Social Accountability International](#)

These indicators, and their advocates, seemingly played no significant role in detecting the problematic moral situation involved in the creative miss-selling of [toxic assets](#) which resulted in the [sub-prime mortgage crisis](#) that triggered the financial crisis of 2008-2009. Warning signals do not seem to have emerged from those advocating [socially responsible investment](#).

Unfortunately initiatives by the United Nations to associate the corporate world with ethical values have themselves been recognized as problematic ("*Globalization*": *the UN's 'Safe Haven' for the World's Marginalized -- the Global Compact with Multinational Corporations as the UN's 'Final Solution'*", 2001). The UN Global Compact also had no effective role in remedial response to the financial crisis of 2008-2009. The UN Secretary-General had in fact been involved in problematic ways with those advocating uncritical approaches to globalization from which the financial crisis emerged.

Specifically in reaction to the advocacy of quantitative easing in response to the financial crisis in the USA, various arguments were made for some form of moral stimulus package as an alternative. For example, Paul Mattesich (*Daschle, Geithner and the Need for a 'Moral Stimulus Package'*, *Executive Summary*, 3 February 2009) argued:

More cash will not prevent the recurrence of the problems we now have. Ethical leadership, on the other hand, does offer the prospect both to get us out of this mess and prevent it from occurring again. Our President has the opportunity to stimulate and reinvigorate the moral fiber among decision-makers and leaders in government, nonprofits, and business.

For Alan Keyes (*Moral Renewal: key to ending U.S. debt slavery*, *Loyal to Liberty*, 2010) contends that no solution to the economic crisis faced by America will be found unless the foundational moral crisis from which it springs is addressed. His argument is that: *We don't have money problems. We have moral problems.*

However, in the light of the following argument, it might be asked whether the various approaches to corporate social responsibility serve a function as valuable as regular attendance of individuals at religious worship -- irrespective of its impact on their behaviour outside that context.

Possibilities in the light of strategic precedents

In response to the 2008-2009 financial crisis, the credit crunch and the threat of bankruptcy of major western corporations and banks, economic stimulus packages have been developed and financed by [quantitative easing](#). The term describes a monetary policy used by

central banks to increase the supply of money by increasing the excess reserves of the banking system. A central bank implements quantitative easing by first crediting its own account with money it creates *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing"). The bank then purchases financial assets, including government bonds, from banks and other financial institutions. The purchases give banks the excess reserves required for them to create new money, and thus hopefully induce a stimulation of the economy. Quantitative easing has often been disparaged as "printing money" -- seen to be a characteristic of economies in dire financial straits (Eugenie Foster, *Printing Money: a misleading metaphor for solving the global economic crisis*, *Currency News*, March 2009).

In response to the environmental crisis represented by [greenhouse gases](#) and the threat of [global warming](#), [carbon credits](#) have been developed as a generic term for any tradable certificate or permit representing the right to emit one tonne of carbon dioxide or carbon dioxide equivalent -- understood as contributing to global warming. Such credits, and the associated carbon markets, are a component of national and international attempts to mitigate the growth in concentrations of greenhouse gases. [Carbon trading](#) has developed as a consequence, enabling trading in carbon emissions, effectively allowing the polluter to pay for permission to pollute -- according to the [polluter pays principle](#).

As noted, these two strategies are the best yet devised globally for recent major systemic crises. As responses they may be understood as having systemically common features. Effectively both might be appropriately described as providing a "licence to sin". The question is whether this pattern of response is of any relevance to the threat of moral bankruptcy by two Permanent Members of the UN Security Council -- and potentially by others associated with them in the coalition intervening in Iraq and Afghanistan with a degree of UN complicity.

Moral indulgences ?

The systemic commonalities of quantitative easing and carbon trading become more apparent when seen in light of the historic sale of indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church -- the moral authority of its time. All three constitute a particular approach to managing current difficulties by trading "impropriety" against a hypothetical future variously justified or guaranteed. In Catholic theology, an [indulgence](#) is the full or partial remission of temporal punishment due for sins which have already been forgiven. The indulgence is granted by the Catholic Church after the sinner has confessed and received absolution.

With the permission of the Church, indulgences then also became a way for Catholic rulers to fund expensive projects by keeping a significant portion of the money raised from sale of indulgences in their lands. There was a tendency to forge documents declaring that indulgences had been granted. Indulgences grew to extraordinary magnitude, in terms of longevity and breadth of forgiveness. Historically the abuses were a major catalyst for the [Protestant Reformation](#).

Given the established precedents of quantitative easing and carbon trading, and the pattern they share with the emission of indulgences, **the question is whether the United Nations (or some other body of equivalent moral standing) could ensure emission of "moral indulgences" as part of a moral "stimulus package" to counteract the slide towards moral bankruptcy.** For clearly, as with the financial crisis, there are institutions that are "too big to fail" -- in this case morally rather than financially. As with the financial system, it is vital that credibility and confidence be maintained.

Moral easing or Qualitative easing ?

The term "moral indulgence" is of course suspect because of its problematic historical associations. Both "moral" and "indulgence" are especially problematic at this time because of the worldwide challenges faced by the Roman Catholic Church in dealing with systemic sexual abuse by clergy of those who had unquestioning confidence in their moral authority. However such problematic associations might be considered as perhaps being less morally disastrous than the atrocities in which the coalition forces were variously complicit.

As a public relations exercise, the key to reframing moral indulgences is to be found in the term "printing money" -- long held as characterizing economic incompetence of the highest and most irresponsible order. It suffices to recall the various instances of [hyperinflation](#) and the manner in which bank notes were simply printed to ensure a semblance of a viable economy. A vicious circle is created in which more and more inflation is created with each iteration of the ever increasing money printing cycle. Curiously even the Financial Times had to address the claim of the UK Chancellor that QE was not a policy of "printing money" ([William Buitter, Quantitative easing and qualitative easing: a terminological and taxonomic proposal](#), *FT*, 9 December 2008; [Quantitative and qualitative easing again](#), *FT*, 11 January 2009). In contrast with the exploration here of "morality" as quintessentially qualitative, Buitter offered a definition of qualitative easing within a financial context:

Qualitative easing is a shift in the composition of the assets of the central bank towards less liquid and riskier assets, holding constant the size of the balance sheet (and the official policy rate and the rest of the list of usual suspects). The less liquid and more risky assets can be private securities as well as sovereign or sovereign-guaranteed instruments. All forms of risk, including credit risk (default risk) are included.

For others:

- Philipp Bagus ([Qualitative Easing](#)): While quantitative easing has received much press, qualitative easing has been neglected. Qualitative easing consists in central bank policies that deteriorate the average quality of the assets that it holds (see also: [Qualitative Easing -- the Federal Reserve and Eurosystem's balance sheet policies during the financial crisis: a comparative analysis](#)).
- Asa Humphreys ([From Quantitative to Qualitative Easing](#), *Ekklesia*, 26 Mar 2009): Quantitative Easing is re-evaluating the balance of money in our economy, Qualitative Easing seems more naturally to indicate a re-evaluation of the balance of time in our

society. They are two ends of similar spectra, linked both by necessity and chronology.

Arguably the systemic analogue to hyperinflation is to be found in the degree of [puffery](#) and spin through which high moral claims are made -- as evident with respect to the intervention in Iraq -- at a time when people are decreasingly prepared to buy into that official public relations masquerade. As with hyperinflation, this unwillingness becomes evident in the increasing refusal of people to attach credibility to such "hype" for longer than is required to acquire something with which real value is felt to be associated (*Abuse of Faith in Governance*, 2009). The condition might be recognized as one of escalating "moral inflation" (in contrast to concerns expressed regarding the morality of inflation, notably as articulated by [Ayn Rand](#)).

However, despite such understanding, by simply relabelling "printing money" as "quantitative easing" -- appropriately talked up by interested parties complicit in the financial crisis -- it was made to appear to be a fresh initiative without any associations to deprecated economic practice. The same may be said of carbon trading and its successful dissociation from any memories or associations with the market in indulgences.

There is therefore every possibility of promoting and implementing a policy of "moral easing" in the case of the institutions -- "too big to fail" -- morally complicit in the atrocities in Iraq. As with individual bankers and speculators, whose irresponsible risk-taking is now recognized as having triggered the financial crisis, such moral easing can be deployed to ensure that they retain their positions and moral standing -- and their "honourable" payouts. The strategy could be extended to the academic professionals whose arguments provided rationalizations for the manner of the intervention and denials of evidence of any atrocities -- again as was done in the case of the financial crisis and the questionable pattern of business that preceded it.

Whilst there is currently a strong advantage to adoption of the term "moral easing" in relation to Iraq, there is a disadvantage in that, with respect to a wider variety of circumstances, the subtlety of "morality" and "ethics" is more appropriately understood as a specific instance of a challenged "quality". It is easement with regard to activities degrading the quality of life more generally that is the more fundamental concern -- even extending into the forms of "spiritual pollution" notably highlighted by Islam and China ([Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign](#)), and presumably of relevance to any future dialogue with the Taliban. Hence **"qualitative easing" would then be more appropriate -- a process easing qualitative degradation, notably as is so widely recognized as typical of many forms of development.** However the term has already been extensively appropriated for an economic understanding of quality -- classically impoverished.

There is however also the possibility that quantitative easing is quite appropriately to be understood as part of the process of moral easing -- at least for some.

Ensuring moral authority in practice

Possible moral authorities: Although the essence of the crisis of the financial system in 2008-2009 was recognized to lie in the subtleties of confidence, credibility and trust, the question is where to look for guidance with respect to the subtleties of morality -- especially since these too are intimately related to confidence, credibility and trust. An answer lies in the long-honed practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Church has long used its moral authority to confer moral legitimacy on those who submit to its authority. Tony Blair, as a significant player in the Iraq initiative, has already offered an admirable demonstration of the procedure by immediately converting to Catholicism on leaving office -- presumably through a process involving confession and absolution of any sins associated with his leadership. This is a clear demonstration of how moral easing can work.

The challenge is to identify a moral authority with sufficient standing to implement the strategy credibly. Clearly the United Nations, especially its Security Council, is the ideal candidate. It is unfortunate that its Permanent Members are precisely those most involved in arms manufacture and sale -- ensuring the death of hundreds of thousands every year. However, since it is precisely such governments which successfully took the lead in implementing the sleight of hand of quantitative easing, this is clearly not a problem incapable of being surmounted by public relations spin.

Engendering moral authority: However the point to focus on in relation to quantitative easing (as noted above) is that an appropriate authority, in that case the central bank, implements quantitative easing by first crediting its own account with money it creates *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing"). **Would there be any difficulty in a world of spin for any authority to implement moral easing by first crediting itself with a degree of morality it creates *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing")?** In the West this is surely consistent with the aphorism: *Assume a virtue if you have it not* (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 4).

Enhancing relative moral standing, even moral superiority, can of course notably be achieved by enhancing perception of the moral degradation of an enemy -- hence the case for demonizing WikiLeaks. This process is characteristic of the unfruitful dynamics between the [World Economic Forum](#) and the [World Social Forum](#) (*All Blacks of Davos vs All Greens of Porto Alegre: reframing global strategic discord through polyphony*, 2007). At the time of writing it is absurdly evident in the efforts in the USA of the supporters of the Republican Party -- especially the Christian fundamentalists -- to demonize the politics of the Democrats.

Precedents: Indicators of efforts in this direction are evident, as noted above, in the awarding of accolades and medals to members of coalition forces who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan -- with due pomp and ceremony. Moral easing is also evident in the ability to ensure a degree of legal impunity for those against whom evidence of complicity in atrocities has been accumulated. Especially evident is the classic technique, when atrocities are unquestionably proven, of focusing blame and punishment on those immediately involved rather than those higher up the chain of command who approved, tacitly or otherwise, those atrocities. There will be no Nuremberg Trials for abuse in Iraq -- and that is already an indication of initial deployment of a strategy of moral easing. This is confirmed by the comment of Nobel Laureate [Günter Grass](#) with respect to such trials which:

... rightly sentenced war criminals. But by the same token, the Bush and Cheney administration belongs in front of a war crimes tribunal. That will never happen, so the Nuremberg trials retrospectively become a farce, granting right-wing extremists an argument they wouldn't have had. (Interview by Maya Jaggi, *The Guardian* 30 October 2010)

Immunity and impunity: A degree of international legal authority has long been given to "indulgences" from which the diplomatic corps benefits. This takes the form of the *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations* (1961). This has as a practical consequence that diplomats are regularly ensured of **diplomatic immunity** for a wide variety of acts which are defined as criminal in the case of ordinary citizens. These can range from rape through other forms of assault, including traffic offences, and even the trivial avoidance of payment of parking fines -- occasionally given token scandalized publicity.

All these can usefully be seen as a possible approach to moral easing suitably enshrined in international law. These practices are to a degree extended to the employees of intergovernmental institutions through a wide range of extremely generous allowances -- typically unpublicized "perks". These could be understood as moral easement in relation to their avoidance of taxation and other obligations to which ordinary members of the community are exposed and for which they are conventionally held to have a (moral) obligation -- as taxpayers.

Immunity and impunity are of course typically provided for those with responsibilities of governance -- irrespective of documented abuses.

Compensating for moral qualms: There is a distinct approach to any moral qualms to which institutions and individuals may feel exposed in engaging in activity otherwise considered problematic. Such qualms may be "eased" by appropriate compensation, typically as some form of payment whether financial or otherwise. For those not benefitting from such advantages this may be framed as "corruption" and subject to sanction. Ironically, for those within such a pattern of practice, such compensation may well be (tacitly) "sanctioned" -- and framed as "commissions" to ease the acquisition of contracts and access to services.

The extent of this form of moral easement is unknown, but efforts to indicate its dimensions are made by bodies such as Transparency International. Framed as "corruption", it has been described as a major factor undermining programmes of development. Typically it is acknowledged that the leadership of countries is most likely to benefit from this form of moral easing, although the practices may permeate all levels of society. The intangibility of principled morality and ethics become negotiable as tangibles when a price can be placed on a "qualm".

Moral indulgence in the current practice of moral authorities

The current practice of the Roman Catholic Church offers further guidance to moral easing in the light of the current form taken by the process of granting of indulgences. The description is derived from the extensive *Wikipedia* entry on [indulgence](#).

General grants: There are "four general grants of indulgence", which are meant to encourage the faithful to infuse a Christian spirit into the actions of their daily lives and to strive for perfection of charity. These indulgences are partial, and their worth therefore depends on the fervour with which the person performs the recommended actions:

1. Raising the mind to God with humble trust when performing one's duties and bearing life's difficulty, and adding, at least mentally, some pious invocation.
2. Devoting oneself or one's goods compassionately in a spirit of faith to the service of one's brothers and sisters in need.
3. Freely abstaining in a spirit of penance from something licit and pleasant.
4. Freely giving open witness to one's faith before others in particular circumstances of everyday life.

In envisaging a programme of moral easing, it would seem relatively straightforward to adapt these procedures, *mutatis mutandis*:

1. Raising the mind to "universality" (or "globalization") with humble trust when performing one's duties and bearing life's difficulty, and adding, at least mentally, some moral or ethical invocation. *This might be said to be a characteristic attitude of many in compensating for regrettable failures in their activities in practice*
2. Devoting oneself or one's goods compassionately in a spirit of faith to the service of one's brothers and sisters in need. *Many individuals and institutions are upheld as exemplars of such practices, whether or not they obtain significant tax or other benefits from doing so.*
3. Freely abstaining in a spirit of penance from something licit and pleasant. *Again many can claim to be withholding from inappropriate indulgence, whether dietary or otherwise. This is now a significant practice in seeking to reduce personal ecological footprint -- to the point of becoming a factor in "eco chic".*
4. Freely giving open witness to one's faith before others in particular circumstances of everyday life. *Bearing public witness, notably in the case of being greener, has become the essence of "greenwashing" by polluting industries and corporate charitable donations.*

Particular grants: Among the particular grants in the practice of the Roman Catholic Church, which, on closer inspection, will be seen to be included in one or more of the four general grants, especially the first, its *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum* draws special attention to four activities for which a plenary indulgence can be gained on any day, though only once a day. Again, suitably adapted to moral easing, these might read:

1. Piously reading or listening to ethical declarations (perhaps the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, or some variant) for at least half an hour. *Some corporations, already tend in that direction with the reading/recital of a corporate creed -- possibly enhanced as a morally uplifting corporate song. Otherwise the reading of such texts over a public address system could conform to this requirement, perhaps in public transport.*

2. Celebration of a moral exemplar in a participative thanksgiving process for at least half an hour. *Variants of this process of community celebration of relevance to moral easing are to be found in receptions, even at the highest level, for celebrities honoured for the standards they uphold -- whose merits are assumed to "rub off" to a degree on those sponsoring the event.*
3. Pious exercise of pilgrimage encouraging meditation on scenes of individual and collective suffering. *Well-established precedents are evident in ceremonial visits to war memorials and scenes of massacres (extending unfortunately into disaster tourism).*
4. Recitation or singing of a memorable work embodying collective values. *Precedents exist in collective singing, notably at political gatherings, of well-known liberation songs*

Such approaches have clearly inspired other denominations and religions. It is important to emphasize the influence of such influences on governance, whether now or with respect to the future (*Future Challenge of Faith-based Governance*, 2003; *Patterns of the Past -- Christian Complicity in Global Disorder*, 2003; *Towards Fruitful Patterns of Faith-based Governance*, 2003).

Especially significant in the case of Iraq, throughout the period covered by the WikiLeaks document release, is the fact that at the highest level -- in the White House -- a prayer meeting was regularly held. Such gatherings served as a means for timely moral easing in anticipation of any problematic decisions -- including death, torture and other atrocities. Prayer meetings were presumably occasions, throughout the administration, for affirmation of purpose under divine sanction, as in the example of a religious prayer meeting on 5 February 2002, attended by 25 men -- including three different Special Forces units and CIA paramilitary teams. After a prayer and the invocation of September 11, one of the attendees, speaking for the group, pledged, according to [Bob Woodward](#) (*Bush at War*, 2002): *We will export death and violence to the four corners of the earth in defense of our great nation.* Presumably there are no moral constraints whatsoever on any actions -- provided some such process of moral easing is ensured.

Plenary indulgence: In the case of the Roman Catholic Church, a plenary indulgence may also be gained on some occasions, which are not everyday occurrences. Suitably adapted again, they might include:

- Receiving, even by radio or television, some form of annual blessing given by an ultimate moral authority. *This follows a pattern widely practiced in which national leaders, or heads of state, indicate ultimate moral (if not divine) sanction for their activities, whatever their nature -- a batch process of moral easement.*
- Taking part devoutly in the celebration of a day devoted on a world level to a particular moral purpose. *There are many such "world days" which could then be seen as serving the need for moral easing.*
- Taking part for at least three full days in a retreat focused on moral, charitable or philanthropic purpose. *Again there are many such events, and many events which would be happy to tweak their declared purpose to correspond to such a requirement for moral easing.*
- Taking part in some functions focused on some form of world unity and their concluding celebrations. *Again there are many events which would claim this as a feature of their preoccupation and therefore to be upheld as contributing to moral easing.*

Military chaplains and religious blessing: Of particular significance in the case of the Roman Catholic Church is the plenary indulgence attached to the [Apostolic Blessing](#) that a priest imparts when giving the sacraments to a person in danger of death, and which, if no priest is available, the Church grants to any rightly disposed Christian at the moment of death, on condition that that person was accustomed to say some prayers during life. In this case the Church itself makes up for the three conditions normally required for a plenary indulgence: sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer for the Pope's intentions.

On the ground, the role of [military chaplains](#) may be seen as an institutionalization of moral easing for those actively involved on a daily basis in the killing of others -- or their torture and humiliation. Presumably their services are also used for the moral easing of drone pilots in Nevada killing distant suspects in Afghanistan. An annual [International Military Chiefs of Chaplains Conference](#) is now regularly convened with NATO support. It might even be seen as the ultimate non-denominational moral authority for a moral easing strategy.

It is of course the case that there is a long tradition (dating most notably from the [Inquisition](#)) of the direct (if not hands-on) involvement of members of the priesthood in torture -- framed in the case of the Roman Catholic Church as "putting people to the question". It is difficult to make a moral distinction between that historical involvement in torture and that of present-day military chaplains. There is a conflation of the motivations with respect to "defence of faith" and "national defence".

[John Lasker](#) (*Questions Raised About Role of Military Chaplains*, *truthout*, 12 February 2010) reports that:

Joshua Casteel, a former US Army interrogator at Abu Ghraib turned conscientious objector, says that some in the armed forces refer to chaplains as "*combat multipliers*," in a play on the more official military parlance of "*force multipliers*" for anything that increases a mission's success rate. He says chaplains, who are sworn in as commissioned officers, are sent to war zones to make them "*more tolerable*," and "*in a roundabout way, to make killing easier*." Catholic chaplains of today have "*bowed a knee to the government*," he says, and are disregarding Jesus's principle of "*laying down the sword*."

"*I did not meet a single Catholic chaplain (while in Iraq) who expressed to me any ethical concern about the Iraq War*," says Casteel, a Catholic convert and author of *'Letters from Abu Ghraib'* (Essay Press, 2008). "*Rank always trumps their spiritual mission*."

In those nations with a high level of religious belief and an equally high level of support for intervention in Iraq or Afghanistan -- as with the USA -- it is evident that the local religious community serves a similar role to the military chaplain in sustaining the moral appropriateness of the activities involved, notably those revealed via WikiLeaks. In that sense these may be upheld as part of a widespread process of moral easing. This is of course consistent with the requirement for moral easing in response to those suffering elsewhere as a consequence of foreign policies and exploitative mindsets. **There is clearly a strong local infrastructure for moral easement which can be used to build a stimulus package against any moral bankruptcy that might be associated with the**

perpetuation of atrocities.

Annulment: Although this is most commonly recognized as a legal procedure for declaring a marriage null and void, there is clearly scope for extending its validity to other "contracts" in order to achieve moral easing with respect to a wider set of circumstances. The great advantage of annulment is typically its retroactivity whereby the contract is considered to have been invalid from the beginning -- as though it had never taken place. In the practice of the Roman Catholic Church, annulment can be "facilitated" by making a suitable donation.

Precedents with respect to other "social contracts" are evident in the ability of governments and political parties to renege on pledges, promises and commitments (as discussed below). This process is to be seen with respect to electoral promises -- effectively annulled as though they had never been made. It is evident in the pledges to development aid within the international arena ([Millennium Development Goals](#), G8, G20, etc).

Public relations programmes can now be crafted to edit history in such a way that "bad things" can be readily said "not to have happened". Those arguing the contrary can be subject to prejudicial sanction. In the sense the art of moral easing is cultivation of the reality that things are forgotten as though they had never happened.

In response to strong criticism regarding the evidence justifying the original invasion of Iraq, the basis for faith-based presidential decision-making was the subject of widespread comment (see Austin Cline, *Faith-Based Presidency*, 2004). In a widely cited article on the distinction made between "faith-based" and "reality-based" decision-making at the highest level, Ron Suskind (*Without a Doubt*, *The New York Times*, In The Magazine, 17 October 2004) records an exchange with an aide in the Bush decision-making circle:

The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality -- judiciously, as you will -- we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."

This perception offers a valuable insight into emerging understanding of the nature of historical facts, such as those now emerging regarding intervention in Iraq. History can effectively be "annulled" as confirmed by Gary Younge (*Never mind the truth*, *The Guardian*, 31 May 2004):

Politics has, to an extent, always been about the triumph of symbols over substance and assertion over actuality. But in the case of Iraq this trend seems to have reached its apogee, as though statements by themselves can fashion reality by the force of their own will and judgment. Declaration and proclamation have become everything. The question of whether they bear any relation to the world we actually live in seems like an unpleasant and occasionally embarrassing intrusion. The motto of the day both in Downing Street and the White House seems to be: "To say it is so is to make it so." These people are rewriting history before the ink on the first draft is even dry.

Of particular relevance is the democratic electoral process through which a new government comes to power and is typically able to renege on any commitments made by the previous government, now deemed to have acted totally inappropriately (if not criminally). Democracy might even be seen as an institutionalized form of moral easing -- through which formal obligations and pledges of the past are "laundered".

Moral elevation

What might be seen as an ultimate technique of moral easing is most notably suggested by the practice of the Roman Catholic Church in the canonization process involving the successive stages of:

- **Investigation:** into the virtues of the individual, with an exhaustive search of the candidate's writings, speeches and sermons; a detailed biography is written and eyewitness accounts are gathered. *This is of course a feature of the due diligence performed prior to consideration of any award to a person of exemplary moral standing. Examples include the [Nobel Prize](#) or the [Right Livelihood Award](#)*
- **Declaration 'non cultus':** exhumation and examination of the body to ensure that no superstitious or heretical worship or improper cult has grown up around the servant or his or her tomb, and relics are taken. *The question of whether the person is already dead or has evoked a cult may however be irrelevant to the challenge of moral easing, especially when it may be difficult to distinguish a personality cult from an "improper cult".*
- **Declaration of venerability:** proclamation of the person's heroic moral virtue -- perhaps understood as adaptations of faith, hope and charity, and the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. *Such declarations are a typical feature of public relations and image building -- the standard fare of the professional skills used to promote moral easing, and only too evident in the reframing of quantitative easing. Venerability is a key feature of the [Global Elders](#) group.*
- **Morally blessed:** this involves a statement by the moral authority that it is "worthy of belief" that the person is in heaven, having come to salvation. Termed [beatification](#) in a Catholic religious context, it is capacity to intercede on behalf of individuals who "pray" in his or her name. *This might be seen as the stage at which the person (or the institution) actually receives the award as moral exemplar -- effectively entering moral heaven. In the case of the UK, the person may be [ennobled](#) (by the Monarch) with the right to a seat in the [House of Lords](#). In the case of France, the person may be elected to the [Académie française](#) -- thereafter*

to be recognized as an *Immortel*. Whilst others would not necessarily "pray" to any so elevated, requests to them for assistance in support of any and every project might well be seen (and experienced) as a form of "prayer".

- **Canonization:** again this involves a statement by the moral authority that the person enjoys a "beatific vision". A "day" in the annual calendar may be assigned on which they can be appropriately honoured. *This process is evident in the celebration of anniversaries of moral exemplars. Recognition of the high quality of their "vision" is much sought by leaders in seeking to affirm and protect their historical legacy. To that end buildings and libraries are dedicated in celebration of their memory -- typically of far great dimensions than those now commemorating saints.* Michael Keith Briand (*Practical politics: five principles for a community that works*, 1999, p. 52) notes that *Christopher Lasch maintains that political action on both liberal and conservative ends of the spectrum has come to depend more and more heavily on the mobilization of resentment and the moral canonization of the victim. Significant examples of such victims are provided by some Nobel Peace Prize Laureates (Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi and Liu Xiaobo).*

This approach to moral easing offers a means of focusing attention on individuals (and institutions), thereafter to be seen as exemplars beyond criticism and worthy of imitation in every respect. Moral easing thus becomes a weapon of mass distraction (*Destructive Weapons of Mass Distraction vs Distractive Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 2003).

It is noteworthy within the Roman Catholic Church that from 1983 the critical function performed by the office of the Promoter of the Faith (the "Devil's Advocate") has been eliminated -- resulting in a marked increase in the rate of canonization. This reframes any argument that the person elevated by a process of moral easing need necessarily be a person of high moral standing in fact. It focuses rather on whether they can be so acclaimed with sufficient credibility by public relations spin. In fact the more dubious the moral standing in practice of those so elevated the more effective may be the process of moral easing -- as part of a stimulus package against moral bankruptcy. Again this approach can be seen to have been long adopted in ennoblement to the aristocracy.

Civil awards and ennoblement: There is a nice irony, for example, in the case of the ennoblement of *Lord Mandelson* -- long nicknamed the *Prince of Darkness*, and thereafter the *Dark Lord* -- especially given his association with various *political scandals in the UK*. There are further ironies to controversies associated with attribution of the Nobel Peace Prize, which might otherwise imply a lack of due diligence, but point to the possibilities of a programme of moral easing:

- *Henry Kissinger* (1973): Of that award the distinguished musical satirist *Tom Lehrer* decided that he could no longer perform. "It was at that moment that satire died...There was nothing more to say after that." The *International Campaign Against Impunity* maintains a watch on Kissinger for his alleged role in crimes against humanity (see also *Christopher Hitchens, The Case against Henry Kissinger, Harper's Magazine*, Feb, 2001)
- *Yasser Arafat* (1994): The award was made despite various authorities having explicitly associated him with terrorism
- *Barack Obama* (2009): One telling criticism was that the award had been not for achievement but for the promise thereof and the expectations thereby created. (Michael Binyon, *Absurd decision on Obama makes a mockery of the Nobel peace prize, The Sunday Times*, 9 October 2009)

In this mode it is indeed unfortunate that it proved impossible to elect Tony Blair as President of the *European Council (Urgent Need for Blair as President of Europe: maximizing early collective learning in anticipation of future crises*, 2009).

A more creative approach has been taken by the Republican Tea Party movement with respect to *Ilario Pantano*, likely to be elected to the US Congress (Ed Pilkington, *US veteran who killed unarmed Iraqis wins Tea Party support, The Guardian*, 26 October 2010). The basic facts are undisputed: on 15 April 2004, Ilario Pantano, then a second lieutenant with the US marines, stopped and detained two Iraqi men in a car near Falluja. The Iraqis were unarmed and the car found to be empty of weapons. He fired a total of 60 rounds into their bodies. Murder charges have been dropped. The outcome of this tale illustrates the essential spirit of moral easing -- framing as virtuous, if not heroically virtuous, the actions of those who might otherwise be unjustifiably criticized. In this light it is probable that the Republican Party will assume world leadership in moral easing. Any effort to alleviate the condition of the disadvantaged or the vulnerable needs to be framed as morally suspect -- as with *health care reform in the USA* in 2010. Terminating people with prejudice is then clearly the key to moral stimulus.

Such possibilities point to the great merit of appointing Tony Blair as future UN Secretary-General, especially given his concern for the role of morality (Tony Blair, *Helping African countries recover from war is our moral duty, but African leadership holds the key, Tony Blair Africa Governance Initiative*, 6 July 2009). It is temporarily unfortunate within current practice that the role cannot be attributed to the national of any of the Permanent Members of the Security Council. This could change. With the moral sensitivities of George Bush and Tony Blair, international leadership in ensuring global moral easing is assured.

Military awards: One approach to moral easing, in the case of the military, is the unreserved (automatic) attribution of medals for participation in military campaigns, as in Iraq and Afghanistan. Others are distributed for bravery and "special services":

- USA: *Iraq Campaign Medal*; *Afghanistan Campaign Medal*; *Medal of Honor awards (Afghanistan, Iraq)*; *Distinguished Service Cross*; *Silver Star Medal*; *Bronze Star Medal*; *Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal*
- UK: *George Cross*; *Commander of The Order of The British Empire*; *Officer of The Order of The British Empire*; *Member of The Order of The British Empire*; *Distinguished Service Order*; *Associate Royal Red Cross Medal*; *Conspicuous Gallantry Cross*; *Military Cross*; *Distinguished Flying Cross*; *George Medal*; *Queen's Gallantry Medal (Military honours for serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, BBC News, 2009)* Also the *Iraq Medal* and the *Operational Service Medal (OSM) for Afghanistan*

The attribution of medals for "participation" (such as the *Air Medal* and the *Distinguished Flying Cross*) is raising an as yet unresolved issue within the US Air Force regarding the right of drone pilots (based in Nevada) to receive such medals for their daily involvement in the campaign in Afghanistan. As a question of responsibility it might be extended to bombing from the safety of the air. More intriguing is the extent to which those far away, and up the chain of command (responsible for ordering torture, death and assassination), have a right

to be so honoured for their "participation".

As is appropriate in any programme of moral easing, no distinction appears to be made regarding attribution of medals to those involved in atrocities or torture as part of Military Intelligence (MI) operations. However torture documentaries now [note](#) that Captain [Caroline Wood](#), who led the 519th MI Battalion at Bagram (and won the Bronze Medal in January 2003 for service there), had a posting at Abu Ghraib in July 2003, shortly after the Iraq war began, where she took control of intelligence operations. Later she admitted to Army investigators that while in Bagram, she had incorporated harsh techniques such as stress positions, forced standing, sleep deprivation, and use of dogs because she faced pressure from above to get more intelligence. In Iraq, she contributed directly to the general interrogation rules issued in September 2003 by General Ricardo Sanchez, military commander in Iraq, a list posted on the walls of [Abu Ghraib Prison](#) at the time the infamous photos were shot.

Moral endorsement: From a perspective of moral easing, it is indeed appropriate that there is no sense of the range of atrocities with which recipients were individually associated or for the deaths of how many they were directly or indirectly responsible. The appointment of [Colin Powell](#) -- Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff (1989-1993) during the Gulf War -- as US Secretary of State (2001-2005) was presumably in no way rendered questionable by his association with the notorious [My Lai Massacre](#) (1968) during the Vietnam War.

In his key role in garnering international support for a multi-national coalition for intervention in Iraq, moral easing was clearly fundamental to his address to a session of the United Nations Security Council on 5 February 2003. Citing numerous anonymous Iraqi defectors, Powell asserted that *"there can be no doubt that Saddam Hussein has biological weapons and the capability to rapidly produce more, many more."* Although known to him at the time, it was only in a subsequent report by the [Iraq Survey Group](#) (2004) that the evidence that Powell offered to support the allegation that the Iraqi government possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) was shown to be inaccurate at that time. It is a prime characteristic of moral easing that such conclusions after the fact are irrelevant to the process it enables.

Moral elevation of bankers and corporation directors: The above process of moral elevation is effectively perceptible in the treatment officially accorded to major bankers central to the 2008-2009 financial crisis, individually to be considered in effect too morally distinguished to be discredited.

As with the directors of the major corporations which received quantitative support as bailouts, it is readily evident that it is they who benefitted most from the crisis -- with subsequent remedial action failing to sanction or constrain their practices in any significant way. They remain persons of high moral standing -- possible of higher standing through their survival of a crisis of public confidence in which they were personally implicated.

As noted at the time of writing, remuneration of directors has increased considerably with the benefit of such public support, whilst the countries concerned are currently faced with implementation of controversial austerity measures (Graeme Wearden, [UK boardroom pay leaps 55% in a year](#), *The Guardian*, 28 October 2010; Simon Goodley and Graeme Wearden, [Executive pay and bonuses UK boardroom pay rises 55% in an age of austerity](#), *The Guardian*, 28 October 2010). Long-term incentive plans rose up by 73% over the last year, while FTSE 100 rose by less than 20% over the same period.

This paradoxical situation can best be understood and understood as indicative of the potential of a process of moral easing. Directors consider they have been victimized as principally to blame for the financial crisis and therefore need to be assuaged in terms they can recognize and value -- as with the above-mentioned response to moral qualms in a competitive contractual environment. Experts argue that the new proposals (in response to criticism) to cap bankers' bonuses and restrict cash payments will force banks to relocate outside the City and Europe (Jill Treanor, [European bonus rules 'will prompt exodus of banks'](#), *The Guardian*, 11 October 2010). As repeatedly argued in the case of the UK, their expertise is too valuable to risk their alienation and transfer to other financial centres at the expense of the UK, as noted by the CBI director Richard Lambert (Jill Treanor, [CBI head warns banks over 'toxic' bonuses](#), *The Guardian*, 11 October 2010). A creative policy of moral easing is therefore a vital necessity. Here too presumably, despite the consequences to those of modest income, the above-mentioned phrase of Madeleine Albright is appropriate: *"the price is worth it"*.

The seemingly excessive bailouts and bonuses may also be framed as moral easing in just compensation for the level of [moral hazard](#) to which such bodies are exposed in their daily operations. This is strikingly illustrated by the case of [Jérôme Kerviel](#), a trader on the futures markets, recently sentenced to three years in prison and ordered to pay €4.9bn in damages to Société Générale for taking risks that could have led to the collapse of his former employer, France's second biggest bank (Scheherazade Daneshkhu, [Kerviel found guilty in SocGen scandal](#), *Financial Times*, 5 October 2010). Moral hazard arises because an individual or institution does not take the full consequences and responsibilities of its actions, and therefore has a tendency to act less carefully than it otherwise would, leaving another party to hold some responsibility for the consequences of those actions.

Explanation of the moral stress suffered within the corporate world -- justifying an urgent focus on moral easing -- is helpfully introduced by Robert Skidelsky ([The Moral Vulnerability of Markets](#), *Policy Innovations for a Fairer Globalization*, 2010) in the following terms:

Today, there seems to be no coherent alternative to capitalism, yet antimarket feelings are alive and well, expressed for example in the moralistic backlash against globalization. Because no social system can survive for long without a moral basis, the issues posed by antiglobalization campaigners are urgent -- all the more so in the midst of the current economic crisis. It is hard to deny some moral value to the market. After all, we attach moral value to processes as well as outcomes, as in the phrase "the end does not justify the means." It is morally better to have our goods supplied by free labor than by slaves, and to choose our goods rather than have them chosen for us by the state. The fact that the market system is more efficient at creating wealth and satisfying wants than any other system is an additional bonus.

Moral criticisms of the market focus on its tendency to favor a morally deficient character type, to privilege disagreeable motives, and to promote undesirable outcomes. Capitalism is also held to lack a principle of justice.

Extending diplomatic privileges to corporation directors: Given the increasingly central role of multinational corporations and banks, there is a strong case for ensuring moral easement through recognizing a *de facto* situation through an appropriate international treaty -- analogous to the *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations* (1961). This would validate legally the degree of immunity and impunity from which those involved currently benefit in practice -- thereby negating criticism of "impropriety" or that they are "above the law" (even "outlaws").

As a complement to the recognition of a *Corps Diplomatique* (CD) and a *Corps Consulaire* (CC) by that convention, a *Corps Productif* (CP) and a *Corps Exploitatif* (CE) could provide a morally elevated framework for corporation directors and expatriates. An alternative would be to modify slightly the 1961 treaty to encompass the activities of such non-territorial actors, many of which have resources far beyond those of individual states. Either approach would bring multinational corporations into the moral fold -- as attempted to a degree by the UN *Global Compact* -- creatively reframing what might otherwise be inappropriately perceived as "corruption". A degree of progress in this direction is evident in initiatives within the European Union to enable the establishment of corporations at the European level (Marie-Caroline Caillet, *Proposals for European Regulation on Multinational Corporation Activities*, 2009).

Various precedents for such reframing are offered by the Vatican or *Holy See*, the central governing body of the Catholic Church, recognized as a sovereign entity by international law and with which many governments have diplomatic relations. The fact that, despite widely documented abuses (notably relating to the *Vatican Bank*), it is not included in the above-mentioned annual *Corruption Perceptions Index* -- ordering the countries of the world according to perceptions of "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain" -- is an indication of how the methodology of the Index might be used to enable the moral easing of multinational corporations and their directors.

These measures would offer a degree of moral status to directors of multinational corporations equivalent to that of ambassadors of states. This would normalize the current processes whereby such directors negotiate through the lobbying procedure with governmental and intergovernmental bodies -- potentially allowing them to formalize the "extra-territorial" status of their lobbying offices as embassies. Since many of them represent centres of economic and research excellence, exceeding in capacity the *networks of excellence* enabled by intergovernmental initiatives, it would be appropriate to address them as "Your Excellency", or some equivalent -- thereby reinforcing their moral standing.

With formal recognition by UNICEF of *Goodwill Ambassadors*, perhaps directors could be titled Productive Ambassadors -- or Honorary Productive Ambassadors on retirement. Many governmental, multilateral, nongovernmental, and nonprofit organizations utilize goodwill ambassadors to promote their programs and reach out to others with programmes that are based on good relations that are usually secular and apolitical. Some states, like Haiti, issue credentials that include diplomatic immunity for their goodwill ambassadors.

Moral aristocracy and chivalry: Additionally, rather than opting for some form of "canonization" process as a part of moral easing, the practical approach -- illustrated by election to public office -- would seem to be to take inspiration from past approaches to ennoblement in order to develop a **moral aristocracy** of adequate complexity.

The history of the nobility offers a plethora of models of degrees of *nobility* to which people might aspire -- of which traces are still evident in the UK with the motivating career aspiration to receipt of "*gongs*". A degree of morality has been successfully associated with nobility despite very extensive evidence to the contrary. Again religious hierarchies, notably the Catholic, have been able to associate a range of "reverential" titles with morality (even holiness) -- despite sexual abuses by title holders who continue to retain their titles unsanctioned. The directors of some intergovernmental institutions may currently be addressed as "His Excellency"-- in accordance with current practice within the diplomatic corps -- and despite instances of well-documented evidence of their corrupt practices.

The possibility of such a moral aristocracy may have a useful tragi-comic dimension of popular appeal, only too well illustrated by the *history of Haiti* -- the poorest country of the Americas. Under King Henry, it briefly benefitted from freedom from foreign control and saw the establishment of education and economic programs aimed at sustainable improvement for all Haitians (see recently rediscovered *Declaration of Independence*, 1804). At his coronation he founded Haiti's first Order of Chivalry and a peerage, creating Princes, Dukes, Counts, Barons and Chevaliers.

Some of these titles, such as the Duke of Marmalade and Count of Limonade, caused ridicule within certain quarters in Europe and America -- although now featured in *The Armorial of Haiti* (see review: *The Duke of Marmalade and Count of Limonade invite you to help their unhappy island*, 2010). However, these were territorial designations based on actual place names in Haiti. No more or, no less reason for merriment than existing European titles of distinction -- such as the *Prince of Orange* or a *Duke of Bouillon [soup]*. More might even be made regarding colonial outsourcing of conversion of "oranges" into "marmalade".

Rather than a simple *Who's Who* of morality, what is required for effective moral easing is some moral analogue to the recognition offered annually by the *Almanach de Gotha*. Having welcomed his nickname of "Prince of Darkness", Lord Mandelson is clearly indicating a viable path to be followed.

The approach offers the possibility of attributing a range of titles corresponding to acclaimed degrees of morality with the opportunity of individuals to "move up the ladder" of probity. An earlier argument was made for such recognition through collective entities (*Wanted: Enemies of the Earth and Greenwar International*, 1992).

Of particular interest is how titles of moral ennoblement might be conferred. In the past this has been a right reserved for royalty. Those ennobled could accumulate multiple titles, inextricably entangled with their land titles. This pattern was extended in honouring the leadership of such nobility in military campaigns. The pattern has been borrowed and extended by religious hierarchies, most notably that of the Roman Catholic Church. It is also evident in military hierarchies with the (often embarrassing) accumulation of medals on the

chests of those entitled to wear them. The pattern has also been adopted in the academic world -- notably with the awarding of prizes and degrees. In all these cases, a "CV" effectively becomes a "Chart of Valour" -- an exemplification of morality. Any number of titles can be accumulated.

With respect to the conferring of titles, foundations notably take on that role without constraint. Matching Lord Mandelson's ennoblement (and his recognition as the "Prince of Darkness"), Henry Kissinger has been effectively ennobled as a "Prince of Peace", as a Nobel Laureate. As a vital exercise in moral easing, such a title could be appropriately conferred on all those who engaged in the noble cause of liberating Iraq:

- George Bush, Lord of Peace ?
- Richard Cheney, Prince of Peace ?
- Donald Rumsfeld, Prince of Peace ?
- Colin Powell, Prince of Truth ?

Conferring titles could be a role for the United Nations -- given the precedent of the extensive [list of UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors](#) -- or a private foundation could undertake this function, perhaps with greater imaginative flair than the Nobel Foundation or the Right Livelihood Foundation. The conferring of titles is of course well established in following the tradition of [orders of chivalry](#) created by a state or monarch, with "[self-styled orders](#)" now emerging as membership organisations.

The Roman Catholic Church has various [Papal Orders of Chivalry](#). Unconfirmed reports have indicated that the most distinguished, the [Supreme Order of Christ](#), was to be awarded by the Pope to Tony Blair (*Tony Blair In Line For Knighthood from the Pope*, *People.co.uk*, 29 August 2010). Such reports also indicate his membership in the [Sovereign Military Order of Malta](#). Blair was indeed awarded the prestigious [Liberty Medal](#) for his role in "bringing liberty to people around the world" (*Tony Blair (the man many call a war criminal) awarded a medal by Bill Clinton for his 'resolution of conflicts' around the world*, *Mail Online*, 14 September 2010). Past recipients have included Nelson Mandela, Kofi Annan, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Jimmy Carter. Colin Powell received the medal immediately prior to his above-mentioned testimony before the UN Security Council in 2003.

As an existing opportunity for moral easing, an order or order of merit is already recognized as a visible honour, awarded by a government, dynastic house or international organization to an individual, usually in recognition of distinguished service to a nation or to humanity. The distinction between orders and decorations is held to be somewhat vague, except that most historic orders imply membership in a group. It is of course the case that many people whose moral status might be elevated through such a process already have access to a range of titles through secret societies such as the Freemasons -- where they are appropriately distinguished by aprons covering their nether regions, rather than by heraldic shields.

Relevant to the feasibility of a strategy of moral easing is recognition that chivalric orders are normally required to have a *fons honorum* ("fount of honour") provided by the founder and current principal patron in order for it to be considered a true chivalric order and to be able to confer titles. Whether as a fount of honour or morality, again there is sufficient precedent for engendering such a fountain *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing"). The role of honour, so important in the self-appreciation of the military, merits appropriate recognition in relation to moral easing (*Honour Essential to Psycho-social Integrity*, 2005).

Of further relevance to any moral stimulus, Kwame Anthony Appiah (*The Honor Code: how moral revolutions happen*, 2010) argues that the moral revolutions he reviews as a historian did not come about as a result of a specifically moral argument or an appeal to rationality, humanity or sympathy. Rather a shift had to occur in which people began to feel that their honour was compromised by practices deemed questionable. Reformers had to mobilize contempt and shame, the sense of being dishonoured -- even by belonging to a society in which such things took place. The account of Robert Fisk (*The shaming of America*, *The Independent*, 24 October) provides one example. However the question now is whether moral easing would inhibit such a process -- notably if successful in reframing the Iraq atrocities. Clearly focusing military propaganda on heroic action of individuals in Iraq, avoids any need to confront the reality of their actions or of the undocumented numbers of Americans physically, mentally, or morally wounded by the process of doing so. The morally crippled are conveniently invisible.

If the Duke of Marmalade, as conferred by a reigning sovereign, is to be considered risible, what of the *fons honorum* of the Nobel Foundation -- created by the will of [Alfred Nobel](#), manufacturer of cannon and other armaments, and inventor of dynamite?

Pledging, promises and commitments

A key process in moral easing is the commitment to a better future, especially under conditions of urgency and despair. The formulation of such a commitment, with the due pomp and ceremony of a "pledge", offers the appearance of a moral guarantee of its fulfillment -- but with the great advantage that there is no legal obligation to do so whatsoever. With respect to moral elevation, it is consistent with the process indicated above of (self) accreditation with a degree of morality -- created *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing").

The making of such a commitment has the further advantage of considerably enhancing the moral authority of those making it -- potentially at zero future cost. For example, in a democratic society -- provided the commitment is promised for a date beyond the next election -- there is every possibility that any newly formed government will be able to renege (gracefully) on the commitment as having been inappropriately made by the preceding government.

The mention above of Haiti provides a relevant example at the time of writing. The country, the poorest in the western hemisphere, suffered from a major [earthquake disaster on 12 January 2010](#). The government reported that an estimated 230,000 people had died, 300,000 had been injured and 1,000,000 made homeless. Many countries responded to appeals for humanitarian aid, pledging funds and dispatching rescue and medical teams, engineers and support personnel. The very extensive *Wikipedia* description of relief efforts, including funds pledged, notes that as of July 2010:

Between 23 major charities, \$1.1 billion had been collected for Haiti for relief efforts, but only two percent of the money had been released. According to a CBS report, \$3.1 billion had been pledged for humanitarian aid and was used to pay for field hospitals, plastic tarps, bandages, and food, plus salaries, transportation and upkeep of relief workers. By May 2010, enough aid had been raised internationally to give each displaced family a check for \$37,000.

However as summarized, in the light of a CNN investigation, on a blog ([Most countries fail to deliver on Haiti aid pledges](#), 14 July 2010):

Six months after a devastating earthquake struck Haiti, most governments that promised money to help rebuild the country have not delivered any funds at all, a CNN investigation has found. Donors promised \$5.3 billion at an aid conference in March, about two months after the earthquake - but less than 2 percent of that money has been handed over so far. Only four countries have paid anything at all: Brazil, Norway, Estonia and Australia.

As reported by Jonathan Katz and Martha Mendoza ([Haiti Still Waiting For Pledged U.S. Aid](#), *The Huffington Post*, 29 September 2010):

Not a cent of the \$1.15 billion the U.S. promised for rebuilding has arrived.... Nor is Haiti getting much from other donors. Some 50 other nations and organizations pledged a total of \$8.75 billion for reconstruction, but just \$686 million of that has reached Haiti so far - less than 15 percent of the total promised for 2010-11.

It is in such a context that perhaps the most striking form of moral easing becomes evident through the disproportionately high level of resources allocated within a country to one or more people in any extreme danger -- able to be successfully dramatized by the media. As with the hunt for an escaped criminal, a missing person, notably a child, can trigger the allocation of very extensive police and other resources, potentially drawing on the local community. The incident provides the occasion for repeated impassioned appeals (as discussed below). A well-documented case is that of the disappearance of [Madeleine McCann](#). National and international attention, and the quality of support elicited, completely obscure the relative lack of attention to the condition of the many in equally tragic circumstances -- whether in the same country or in more distant countries. Collective identification with isolated cases, however sincere and appropriate the support volunteered, successfully eases moral concerns regarding those not receiving such attention. The judicious focus on such cases is then a highly effective distraction from the condition of others.

Another excellent example of successful moral easing is that noted by Larry Elliott ([G8 summit communique drops Gleneagles pledge on aid to Africa](#), *The Guardian*, 4 June 2010):

The west's seven richest countries are planning to abandon a pledge to double aid to the poorest countries in Africa by this year, the *Guardian* has learned. A leaked draft communique for this month's Canadian-hosted Muskoka summit contains no mention of the commitment made at the [2005 Gleneagles Summit](#) to provide an extra \$25bn (£17bn) a year for Africa as part of a \$50bn increase in financial assistance.

Perhaps the most successful example is the UN [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs), to which all 192 United Nations member states and at least 23 international organizations have pledged to achieve by the year 2015. They derive from earlier international development targets, and were officially established at the [Millennium Summit](#) in 2000, where all world leaders present adopted the [United Nations Millennium Declaration](#), by which its eight goals were promoted. After 10 years, the successful lack of progress was the focus of an EU statement ([Getting the Millennium Development Goals back on track: a twelve points EU action plan](#), Brussels, 21 April 2010).

These examples provide a practical indication of the potential of moral easing (ME) -- recalling that it is at the moment of commitment that the moral authority of those engaged in the pledging process is enhanced -- "*ex nihilo*". One of the great advantages in a ME-based society is that whatever the moral disaster, everyone is blameless in practice, however much each may vigorously claim others to be blameworthy.

Declarations, Appeals and Calls for global action

A striking form of moral easing is the declaration, especially when it takes the form of an assertion that some condition is "unacceptable" and that "something should be done about it". This is an approach much favoured by heads of state and institutions claiming moral authority. Its main advantage is that it implies the need for further action without any commitment to enabling it. At the same time it offers a clear indication of a highly moral position being taken by the highest authority, thereby providing a degree of easement for others in the expectation that something appropriate may thereafter be done. It is a palliative measure.

Following a declaration, one of the simplest forms of moral easing is the appeal, typically framed as a call for action. An appeal has the great advantage of:

- positioning the person or institution making the appeal at a focus of explicating moral concern, recognizing the urgent need for action
- easing the consciences of those appreciative of the appeal that there is attention to their concern
- avoiding any firm promise or pledge whose inadequacies might be subsequent cause for criticism
- possibly gathering contributions for the use of which little strict accountability is expected

- placing any responsibility for its inadequacies on those who have failed to respond to the appeal

Such appeals are frequently made, most notably by the leaders of international institutions and by the Pope. What is most interesting is the lack of learning from the process, or even the desire for such learning (*Collective Learning from Calls for Global Action*, 1981). From this it may be concluded that the appeal process serves a function of moral easing in its own right, even if only as a token.

At the time of writing, the Conference of the Parties to the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) (COP-10) concluded in Nagoya with a declaration proclaimed widely as a great success: "historic", a "landmark", and "a much-needed morale booster". In a commentary on that declaration, George Monbiot notes the problem that none of the journalists making such claims had actually seen the declaration (*We've been comed: the deal to save the natural world never happened*, *The Guardian*, 2 November 2010). Their claims were based on a 3-page press release that Monbiot argues was virtually content free.

In 2002, the signatories to the convention agreed something similar: a splendid-sounding declaration which imposed no legal commitments. They announced that they would 'achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss'. Mission accomplished, the press proclaimed, and everyone went home to congratulate themselves. Earlier this year, the UN admitted that the 2002 agreement was fruitless: 'the pressures on biodiversity remain constant or increase in intensity'.

As such it may be understood as a creative attempt at moral easing. The problematic distinction emphasized here between the tangible (quantitative) and the intangible (qualitative) is emphasized in Monbiot's conclusion as follows:

I understand that if something can't be measured, governments and businesses don't value it.... As soon as something is measurable it becomes negotiable. Subject the natural world to cost-benefit analysis and accountants and statisticians will decide which parts of it we can do without.... When [governments] meet to consider the gradual collapse of the natural world, they send their office cleaners and defer the hard choices for another ten years, while the media doesn't even notice that they have failed to produce a written agreement.

Metaphoric confusion in diagnosis: constipation or diarrhoea ?

As noted above there is a curious relationship between tangible monetary tokens -- such as the dollar -- and the intangible confidence and trust which they represent. This was strikingly evident during the 2008-2009 financial crisis. The entangled relationship is evident in understandings of the intangibles of credibility and creditworthiness. Issues of morality and ethics are then fundamental to the trust which enables engagement in the transactions vital to the health of society. The widespread use of metaphors derived from bodily health to describe the health of the economic system has been separately explored (*Relevance of therapeutic metaphors to economics*, 2009).

Quantitative easing for financial constipation? In the depths of the financial crisis, with the dire absence of liquidity vital to financial transactions, "quantitative easing" was promoted as offering the key to unblocking the situation. A useful commentary on the significance of that term (and other such euphemisms) is provided by Gary North (*Bernanke To Light the Fuse on Monetary Inflation Bomb* *Economics*, *The Market Oracle*, 6 October 2010):

The first time I heard it, I had a mental image of a man suffering from an extreme case of diarrhea. I am sure that the person who came up with the phrase "quantitative easing" did not intend that it should have any such mental effect on the listeners. The reason why the phrase produced that response in my mind is simple to explain. Over half a century ago, there was a conference on inflation that was sponsored by a nonprofit research organization. One of the attendees was United States Senator Wallace Bennett. His son, Bob Bennett, recently lost the Republican Party's re-nomination for Senator. Unlike his son, Wallace Bennett was an astute businessman who understood economic theory. He provided the finest description of price controls that I have ever heard. He said that price controls are the equivalent of using adhesive tape to control diarrhea.

The phrase "quantitative easing" is a euphemism for monetary inflation. We are told that the Federal Reserve System or some other central bank may soon adopt a policy of quantitative easing. Whoever says this does not want to use the words "monetary inflation." Why not? Because, when people hear the words "monetary inflation," they think that this sounds bad. They think that it means that the government or the central bank is about to indulge itself by expanding the money supply. This is exactly what it does mean.

As noted above, the response to such inflation can potentially lead to hyperinflation -- matched, in the corresponding case of morality, with the challenges to credibility evoked by the "hype" associated with "talking up" confidence and the use of spin in justifying questionable strategic responses (*Credibility Crunch engendered by Hope-mongering*, 2008). Emission of "hot air" is then a matter of concern (*Sins of Hot Air Emission, Omission, Commission and Promission: the political challenge of responding to global crises*, 2009). Curiously commentators are equally free with the associated metaphors of economic flatulence, financial flatulence and moral flatulence (cf. Malcolm Smith, *Financial Flatulence*, *Australian CPA*, 74, 2004, 1). Emissions held to be "hot air" are readily framed as flatulence even though they may be valued as sustaining strategic initiatives (*Strategic Inflation of Expectations and Inconsequential Drift*, 2009).

However, given the challenging absence of financial liquidity, the association to [diarrhoea](#) is arguably inappropriate when the implication is rather one of [constipation](#) (see *Constipated cash*, *Radio Scilly*, 28 October 2010). This is variously recognized:

- Jim Willie (*Crisis Redux: road to perdition*, *Financial Sense: uncommon news and views for the wise investor*, 7 July 2010): ... *If only the USGovt had decided to address the dire need to liquidate impaired assets instead of warehousing them, which happens by the way, to produce irreconcilable bank system constipation within the loan processing system... Banks are running naked and*

insolvent and constipated, hardly a pretty image.

- Ray Choy (*Bond Market Insights: life after quantitative easing*, *The Edge*, 2 November 2009): *However, in all practicality, governments around the world were perhaps unwillingly and unwittingly coerced into solving problems created by over-enthusiastic investment banks, and the best way to solve the credit market crisis was to tackle the root of the problem itself -- constipated financial markets -- and consequently, the tool of QE was born.*

"Moral diarrhoea" or "Moral constipation"?: The question is whether there is similar current confusion in relation to any potential of "moral easing". Is the diagnosis one of "moral diarrhoea" or of "moral constipation"? The metaphorical confusion in relation to the financial markets then offers two alternative interpretations in relation to morality:

- as "moral diarrhoea": In this sense, "moral easing" as a corrective measure would seek either:
 - to introduce (or reinforce) ethical norms to constrain laxity -- an approach, long attempted, which the above argument frames as inadequate to the challenge, or
 - to reframe laxity as a desirable condition (as with obesity) to be appropriately honoured -- as suggested by the above argument.
- as "moral constipation": In this sense, "moral easing" as a corrective measure would recognize society to be currently morally "uptight" and calling for what might be described in that context as "moral laxatives" to increase the fluidity of outcome of collective initiatives. A current concrete example is the November 2010 vote in California (*Marijuana legalization will be on California ballot*, Reuters, 25 March 2010). Clearly vigorous debates regarding gay marriage, ordination of women, and the like, arise from this understanding. This diagnosis is itself controversial as variously argued:
 - Paul Taylor (*Social porn: the grubbier the better*, *The Guardian*, 25 April 2007): *Moral laxity is translated into moral laxatives with the conspicuous consumption/defecation of such programmes as MTV's Cribs and our own Channel 5's Celebrity Detox Camp.*
 - Peter Hitchens (*Free to be Slaves: the real point of the drugs debate*, 2 November 2009): *It is a pity that no-one seems capable of inventing a sort of morality-nappy (for transatlantic readers "morality-diaper") to protect society... from being confronted... with the various forms of personal incontinence which abuse of alcohol and other moral laxatives seem to provoke in persons presumed to be already house-trained.*

Bipolar disorder?: These examples tend to trivialize the possibility of moral easing in response to the condition revealed by WikiLeaks. However they do point to a more fruitful interpretation, namely that society suffers from a form of strategic "bipolar disorder" characterized by:

- "moral constipation", understood as the "uptightness" (notably appreciated by religious constituencies) in the formal articulation of strategic initiatives, especially those proposed for public approval -- as in the case of the intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan. Systemically, "moral constipation" might also be recognized as a characteristic response to emergency relief and to the withholding of development aid to the marginalized (as in the current example of Haiti).
- "moral diarrhoea", understood as the "moral laxity" in the implementation in practice ("under the table" and "behind the scenes") of any such strategic initiative -- as with the US military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, and that relating to interrogation practices (*Global Strategic Implications of the Unsaid: from myth-making towards a wisdom society*, 2003). The practices revealed by WikiLeaks in Iraq, and the worldwide sexual abuse of children by Catholic clergy, are consistent in this respect. More generally, a diagnosis of "moral incontinence" might be appropriate with regard to promotion of the cult of consumerism, whether individually or as exemplified by the expansionist military-industrial complex. Perhaps to be recognized as enabling unprecedented budgetary deficits?

For a society so completely focused on "consumption", it is curious the extent to which analysis of the outcomes -- whether economic or moral -- is so completely framed by metaphors with "anal" associations, especially at a time when recycling has become a strategic challenge.

Enabling moral currency circulation

The argument concludes (in an [Annex](#)) with a discussion of the possibility of *Enabling Moral Currency Circulation* through reframing understanding of any "stimulus package" to avert moral bankruptcy. The Annex is structured as follows:

[Oversimplistic metaphorical borrowings](#)

[Monetary tokens](#)

[Debasing moral currency](#)

[Moral deficits](#)

[Moral debt and indebtedness](#)

[Wealth and health: sustaining cycles](#)

[Symbolizing the dynamics of currency](#)

[An alchemical marriage?](#)

[Requisite complexity beyond the plane](#)

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