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26 November 2018 | Draft

Global Governance as a Riddle But is a solution the answer to the question?

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Produced on the occasion of the 13th Annual Meeting of the Group of Twenty (G20), in Buenos Aires (2018)

Introduction

Given the current condition of global civilization, and the capacity of global governance to respond to it, there is a case for exploring the challenge of global governance in terms of a riddle. There is of course a long history to framing the response to dilemmas through the use of a [riddle](#) of some form -- potentially to be understood as a [puzzle](#) to be solved.

Wikipedia suggests that two types of riddle are to be distinguished. Enigmas are problems generally expressed in metaphorical or allegorical language that require ingenuity and careful thinking for their solution. By contrast, conundra are questions relying for their effects on punning in either the question or the answer. Riddling is recognized in many cultures -- some riddles being shared across cultures. Curiously however, riddles have in the past few decades ceased to be part of oral tradition, being replaced by other oral-literary forms, and by other tests of wit such as quizzes. (Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj, *Riddles: Perspectives on the Use, Function, and Change in a Folklore Genre*, *Studia Fennica, Folkloristica*, 2001).

With respect to the challenge of governance, the [Gordian Knot](#) faced by Alexander the Great. is perhaps to be understood as an archetypal riddle. It continues to be cited with respect to issues of governance (*Mapping grossness: Gordian knot of governance as a Discordian mandala?* 2016). Commenting on a session of the World Economic Forum, [John Jullens](#) argues that: *It's as if the global economy is being strangled by a gigantic Gordian knot from which it cannot untangle itself* (*The Gordian Knot of Global Economic Growth, Strategy-Business*, 15 October 2013). "Cutting it" may not however be consistent with the ingenuity otherwise associated with riddles.

In legend, framing a challenge in the form of a riddle to be solved is characteristic of archetypal evil figures -- sorcerers and witches -- to be solved if some form of release is to be achieved. This can be construed as a form of blackmail, variously elaborated in contemporary literature, including the challenge for his life to [Bilbo Baggins](#) by [Gollum](#) (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 1937) and those evoked by the Harry Potter books (Shira Wolosky, *The Riddles of Harry Potter: secret passages and interpretive quests*, 2010).

Curiously this attitude is now reflected in the framing by the policy sciences of so-called [wicked problems](#). These are difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize. The projection of wickedness is of course part of the challenge, as discussed separately (*Transcending the wicked problem engendered by projecting negativity elsewhere*, 2015). Curiously, with respect to the theme of this argument it, a particular sense of riddle can be understood as

associated with the wickedness of problems. To be *riddled with something* is to be full of or pervaded by something undesirable. Governance in many contexts is readily described as riddled with conflict of interest and corruption (Gajendra Haldea, *A Many Layered Circus: riddled with conflict of interest, ILandFS exposes the underbelly of our governance*, *The Times of India*, 12 October 2018; F. Mita Paramita, *Why your view of the world is riddled with holes*, World Economic Forum, 21 January 2016).

Public discourse has now rendered a healthy approach to riddles even more problematic. Whereas the solution of Alexander the Great is readily understood as "radical", imagining any "radical solution" is now only too easily conflated with the characteristics of "radicals" and "radicalization" -- and therefore much to be deprecated. It is completely unclear how to distinguish radicalism meriting appreciation from that meriting deprecation -- especially given the nature of those who espouse either (*Radicalisation versus Demonisation? Enabling radical initiatives under conditions of strategic stalemate*, 2015; *Radical Innovators Beware -- in the arts, sciences and philosophy Terrifying implications of radical new deraidicalisation initiative in France*, 2016). This could be understood as a riddle in its own right, with the capacity to engage with riddles now severely inhibited -- if not criminalized, or demeaned in the form of quizzes.

Also puzzling in its own right is what is to be understood by a "solution" to a riddle of fundamental significance. Clearly some form of release is sought, as implied by any riddle framed by a sorcerer. Curiously in this respect is the function of the United Nations in generating a vast number of "resolutions" -- in response to problematic situations. Is a resolution a solution? This raises the question as to whether solutions or resolutions engender more questions than they answer. Or taking the argument further, what then is the nature of the "answer" to a riddle, and how is it to be recognized given the subtle ingenuity that may be required to elaborate it?

Even more challenging is the question as to whether society really wants an answer or a solution of any fundamental nature -- a sustainable solution. Is it possible that it is not so much in the finality of the solution that new insight is to be found but rather in the engagement with solving the riddle -- the process rather than the outcome? This is perhaps exemplified by the current enthusiasm for quizzes, with any answers quickly forgotten. The dynamics can be framed diagrammatically (*Sustaining the Quest for Sustainable Answers*, 2003).

Does this help to explain the fundamental worldwide preoccupation with competition in many domains. It is then not so much the winning of a particular game that is sustainably meaningful. Rather it is the ability to keep on playing, as argued by James Carse (*Finite and Infinite Games*, 1987) -- or of observing the game with the vicarious pleasure in triumph over the other. The tragedy is that many ongoing bloody conflicts can then be recognized -- and appreciated -- in these terms. *Schadenfreude*? Is engagement with them by spectators through the media significantly different from the engagement with football, basketball, or other games, echoing the investment of Imperial Rome in "bread and circuses" as a response to the riddle of governance through avoidance?

Evocation of a court jester?

The traditional role of a [court jester](#), over centuries and across cultures, has been extensively studied (Beatrice K. Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World*, 2001; Sandra Billington, *A Social History of the Fool*, 1984). Other than the obvious function of entertainment, far less evident is the psychosocial function associated with that role and the various rules it challenges and questions -- often dangerously so. Court jesters can be recognized as both posing and constituting riddles to be solved -- effectively embodying them in their person.

It could be said that global governance is specifically lacking in that function -- focused as it is on business-as-usual at all costs. This is despite a high degree of tragic surrealism which governance is totally incapable of encompassing. For this reason, a case can however be made that global society has evoked a court jester at its highest level -- one that is far more than the continuing source of entertainment, so assiduously cultivated by the media.

The current function of Donald Trump in society can be seen in this light (Anthony J Pickles, *The Anthropology of Trump: what to do when the court jester takes charge*, *The Conversation*, 23 August 2017; Paul Callahan, *If people just saw Trump as the court jester, how would this affect the public perception of POTUS?* *Quora*, 16 September 2018; Joseph Grosso, *The King and the Court Jester: Jordan Peterson and Donald Trump*, *CounterPunch*, 9 February 2018; Mike Knaak, *Trump is a court jester of epic proportions*, *NewsLeaders*, 9 March 2018).

A distinction is made between overlapping categories of fool as a stock character in creative works and folklore: simpleton fool, clever fool, and serendipitous fool. One archetypal symbolic focus is the [Fool in the Tarot card](#), also recognized as the Jester. Ironically, as a card game, there it may be treated either as the lowest or the highest [trump](#). Less surprising, Donald Trump is the primary focus of a board game which does not however include that function (*Trump: The Game*, 2004).

Like it or not, there is no lack of reference to the leader of the free world as a fool or buffoon (Matt Matuska, *Is Donald Trump a fool or a genius?* *Quora*, 10 February 2017; Peter Savodnik, *How Russia Mercilessly Played Trump for a Fool*, *Vanity Fair*, 20 July 2017; Roger Cohen, *Tethered to a Raging Buffoon Called Trump*, *The New York Times*, 13 April 2018). That personalisation distracts from the more challenging recognition that a democratically predominant proportion of the American people see themselves as well reflected in their leader -- however foolish he may be variously deemed to be (Dana Milbank, *This is what happens when a stable genius leads a stupid country*, *The Washington Post*, 19 November 2018)

In an extremely divided country, is this a collective instance of [multiple personality disorder](#) which a jester is called upon to embody? Although [now contested](#), how does the much-cited insight of Abraham Lincoln then apply: *You can fool all of the people some of the time and some of the people all the time, but you can not fool all the people all the time?* Is there an unexplored need for the people of any dominant culture to fool themselves through their leader? Other examples are evident at this time (Nesrine Malik, *As a calculating buffoon, Boris Johnson fits perfectly into the post-Brexit Tory party*, *New Statesman*, 10 July 2018; Rania Ramli, *Why Boris Johnson is far from a harmless buffoon*, *Progress*, 13 August 2018; *Beppe Grillo, The clown prince of Italian politics*, *CNN*, 24 February 2013).

How strange that in any democracy, adherents of each party would readily tend to characterize their opponents as "foolish"? What does this imply for the governability of global civilization, as may be argued (*Ungovernability of Sustainable Global Democracy?* 2011).

Framing Donald Trump as a jester is consistent with the comparison made between his role and that of the Norse trickster deity [Loki](#) ([Corey Pein](#), *Donald Trump, Trickster God*, *The Baffler*, 4 March 2016; [Rod Dreher](#), *Trump the Trickster*, *The American Conservative*, 8 March 2016; [Morgan Roberts](#) (*Loki the Trickster*, 1 February 2014). This contrasts with the more widely cited comparison of Trump with [Narcissus](#) of Greek mythology, as discussed separately (*Identity in question via Trump: Narcissus vs Loki?* 2017).

Such framings offer greater insight than through deprecating a fool as simply mad as has been a recent trend (Michael J. Brenner, *How to Manage Trump: modeling madness at the G-20: imitation is the highest form of flattery*. *The Globalist*, 30 November 2018). It is unfortunate for the G20 that both history and its critics would readily define the G20 process as symptomatic of madness in a period of global crisis, as with those of its leaders in the G7 (*Group of 7 Dwarfs -- Future-blind and Warning-deaf: self-righteous immoral imperative enabling future human sacrifice*, 2018; *Considering All the Strategic Options: whilst ignoring alternatives and disclaiming cognitive protectionism*. 2009).

Cultivating the illusion that a leader is a fool of any kind, dangerously distracts from recognition that the foolishness has been systemically evoked and is a valuable mirror for those responsible for that evocation -- and for those who need a scapegoat to compensate for their own inadequacies.

Challenge to binary thinking?

If a riddle is a challenge to conventional thinking, this could be seen as embodied in the chequered dress of the [harlequin](#) -- typically associated with the court jester. Like the jester, the dramatic role of the harlequin is as a light-hearted, nimble, and astute servant -- typically acting to thwart the plans of a sterner and melancholic master, in resourcefully pursuing his own interest. The role could be considered as challenging simplistic assumptions regarding right and wrong -- presumably as might be required in engaging with a riddle.

It is intriguing to note that the harlequin was a fundamental inspiration to Picasso -- a device by means of which he inserted an alter-ego into his worldview, as fruitfully discussed by Aaron Wasserman (*Self-Identity and Picasso's Harlequin*, Swarthmore College, 2005) and by Theodore Reff (*Harlequins, Saltimbanques, Clowns and Fools*, *Artforum*, 10, 1971, 1, pp, 30-43). For Wasserman:

Because of the figure's symbolic legacy in Picasso's work, the return of the harlequin should be interpreted as Picasso's attempt to reconsider his artistic and social identities. This re-examination is ultimately a transformative one, as the Cubist-inspired formal techniques suggest the distortion of a former self and the closure of an era... The role of the outsider had a strong appeal to Picasso and provides an obvious explanation for his identification with the figure.

For Reff:

...Picasso has always delighted in transforming reality itself into a theatrical event, in which he plays a definite role and often wears a mask or costume improvised for the occasion.

Given the much appreciated symbolic importance of Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), of particular interest are the complementary comments of Mark Harris (*Picasso's "Secret" Guernica*, *Guernica's "Secret" Harlequins, Guernica's Hidden Images of Death*, 1995-6; *Carl Jung analyzes Picasso, Jungcurrents*). *Guernica* can be understood as a riddle in its own right, appropriately associated with a [conspiracy of authenticity](#). For Harris:

Guernica has been the subject of more books than any other work in modern art and it is often described as..."the most important work of art of the twentieth century", yet its meanings have to this day eluded some of the most renowned scholars.... In Picasso's "secret" *Guernica*, he has invoked a number of unseen Harlequins to overcome the forces of death represented in the painting.

Deprecated in the light of his narcissistic characteristics, the divisiveness that Trump has evoked in American society and the world could be more deeply examined through the harlequin-like intermixing of understandings and reflections of right and wrong. In an increasingly surreal cultural context, their transcendence is potentially better explored through comparative discussion of the aesthetics of Picasso and Dalí, as by [Enrique Mallen](#) (*The Myth of Narcissus: themes of life and death in Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dalí*). For Mallen:

As is the case for all masks, the one Picasso places over his own face in *Life* is intended to be an agent of metamorphosis, revealing as much as it conceals. In Picasso's works, masks are objects that intentionally destabilize the identity of the subject: wearing one, literally or symbolically, is to cease being oneself; removing it potentially reveals a deeper truth. For the Symbolists, masks were part of their quest for enigmatic mysteries, swaying between apparition and dematerialization. They also embodied internal torments, being connected with the theme of neuroses and "the agony of the Ego.

How might the current symbolic importance of Trump for global governance be understood in such terms? How is his mask to be understood as indicative of a riddle with which society is now faced?

Disassociation of humour from governance?

Governance is carefully framed as a serious business -- if not the most serious business. And yet humour is variously evident in governance, if only in its interstices and in the widely appreciated response of comedians to it -- as exemplified by the long-running TV series *Yes Minister*. These tended to end with a variation of the title of the series -- spoken as the answer to a question posed by the Minister.

Is there a fundamental sense in which governance itself is a joke and calls for appreciation in that sense? The role of humour in that respect can be variously argued (*Humour and Play-Fullness: essential integrative processes in governance, religion and transdisciplinarity*, 2005). Although long-forgotten, this dimension has been appreciated to a degree by the United Nations itself (V. S. M. de Gunizbourg, *Wit and Wisdom of the United Nations: proverbs and apothegms of diplomacy*, United Nations, 1961).

Consistent with this argument is appreciation by Buddhism and Taoism of the role of so-called crazy wisdom, otherwise understood as *divine madness* (Chogyam Trungpa, *Crazy Wisdom*, 2001; Wes Nisker, *The Essential Crazy Wisdom*, 2001). This in turn is consistent with the many sets of much appreciated *folk tales* embodying collective wisdom (*Aesop's Fables*, *Br'er Rabbit* tales, the *Panchatantra*, *Nasruddin* stories, etc). The relevance is appropriately highlighted by Orville H. Huntington and Annette Watson (*Interdisciplinarity, Native Resilience, and How the Riddles Can Teach Wildlife Law in an Era of Rapid Climate Change*, *Wicazo Sa Review*, 27, 2012, 2, pp. 49-73)

It is intriguing to note the playful traditional celebration of misrule in various cultures. The role of a *Lord of Misrule* (*Prince des Sots* in French; *Precentor Stultorum* in Latin) can be traced back to pagan times. It was a feature of the ancient Roman festival of *Saturnalia*, and of the *Holy Roman Empire*. This role is notably celebrated on carnival occasions, with its incarnation triggering a valuable psycho-social learning processes -- correctives to an accumulation of social ills -- for which a need may be argued in the case of Europe, for example (*Necessity for a European Lord of Misrule?* 2009). Should the role of Donald Trump be similarly celebrated?

Somewhat in that spirit, a surprising number of towns have elected animals to public office, as noted by *Wikipedia* (*Non-human electoral candidates; List of frivolous political parties*). With particular animals identified as *national symbols*, however much of a riddle these may then constitute for many, it might be asked whether these could embody a presidential role in any fruitful way. Emperor Caligula's horse *Incitatus*, allegedly proposed as a Roman consul, has for centuries been an allegorical figure when referencing examples of political ineptitude,

If some dimensions of global governance are best understood as a joke (as is argued by some religions), is comprehending the riddle it constitutes as problematic as any effort to explain a joke to those who do not "get it"? Through such explanation, the essence of the joke completely loses its meaning and "falls flat". If those unable to appreciate humor and riddles tend to be on the *autism spectrum*, this suggests a particular challenge for global governance, since many with much-valued technical expertise are of that nature. In curious contrast artificial intelligence has been applied to the resolution and creation of riddles in the light of traditional Chinese game (*Chinese Tradition Inspires Machine Learning Advancements, Product Contributions, Microsoft Research Blog*, 5 March 2015).

Surprise?

Global governance is clearly faced with a continuing series of crises and dilemmas. Given the riddles they constitute, and a degree of dependence on their reframing through the humour of "court jesters", these can be usefully explored as surprises. Humour is dependent on surprise. The solution to a riddle is typically surprising. This suggests the need for far greater attention to the role of surprise, understood through *Black Swan theory*, as explored by Nassim Nicholas Taleb (*The Black Swan: the impact of the highly improbable*, 2007). Even more intriguing are the forms of governance which can benefit from surprise, as explored in a subsequent study of *antifragility* by Taleb (*Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder*, 2012).

As might be expected, Donald Trump has now been compared to a "Black Swan" (Angela Chen, *Jared Kushner Thinks Trump Is A "Black Swan" -- And The Analogy Will Really Make You Think*, *Bustle*, September 2018; Charles-Edouard Bouée, *President Trump: another Black Swan?*, Roland Berger)

Wonder?

With surprise comes a degree of wonder, if not bemusement. In the case of a court jester this could be evoked through unusual skills in poetry, song and juggling. A case can be made for the reframing of the complexities of governance through poetry, if only to render relationships memorable. For example, the biologist/anthropologist Gregory Bateson, in explaining why "we are our own metaphor", to a conference on the effects of conscious purpose on human adaptation:

One reason why poetry is important for finding out about the world is because in poetry a set of relationships get mapped onto a level of diversity in us that we don't ordinarily have access to. We bring it out in poetry. We can give to each other in poetry the access to a set of relationships in the other person and in the world that we are not usually conscious of in ourselves. So we need poetry as knowledge about the world and about ourselves, because of this mapping from complexity to complexity. (Cited by Mary Catherine Bateson, 1972, pp. 288-9)

Could the riddle of the times be best articulated through poetry, as can be variously argued (*Being a Poem in the Making: engendering a multiverse through musing*, 2012). Riddles have notably been expressed in that mode. A related argument could be made for song, as has been characteristic of court jesters, notably through skills in the improvisation so typically absent from public discourse and its outcomes (*A Singable Earth Charter, EU Constitution or Global Ethic?* 2006). Is the wisdom by which governance is supposedly best informed

to be found especially embodied in poetic form, as suggested by the appreciation in the riddle-like formulation of haiku (*Ensuring Strategic Resilience through Haiku Patterns*, 2006)?

Both poetry and song can be understood as juggling with words in ways that intrigue and attract. It is in that sense that engagement with the riddle of governance might be fruitfully inspired by any unusual capacity to juggle and thereby to manage multiple factors. Governance is readily understood as the art of juggling priorities, but the comparison merits much more attention (*Governance as "juggling" -- Juggling as "governance": dynamics of braiding incommensurable insights for sustainable governance*, 2018). Should Donald Trump indeed be appreciated as a *juggler extraordinaire*?

Framing the riddle?

If indeed global governance is to be understood as continually faced with riddles of some kind, by whom is the riddle framed? Given the ambiguity of the legendary role of sorcerer and oracular source of wisdom, how is the riddle posed? Understood as a dilemma, or a Gordian knot, how is it articulated? It is notably the case that the nature of dilemmas is readily denied in conventional party politics where each side sees the solution as simple and not constituting a dilemma -- except in how to marginalize the other perspective.

And, supposedly, the response to any Gordian knot is simply to "cut it" -- despite the difficulties in doing so (Bernard Harborne and Bernhard Metz, *Cutting through the Gordian Knot: analysis of conflict and violence*, World Bank, 16 June 2015; Gabriela Lemus, *Severing the 'Gordian Knot': defying conventional wisdom and reversing current trade policy*, *The Huffington Post*, 2 June 2015; Reinhard Wagner, *The Gordian Knot of Global Collaboration*, *International Project Management Organization*, 22 January 2016; Pawel Opala and Krzysztof Rybinski, *Gordian Knots of the 21st Century*, 2007).

The capacity to frame a riddle is clearly somewhat alien to conventional thinking in that it calls for a form of transcendence of the binary thinking associated with the conventional frustration of strategic dilemmas, as can be variously explored (*Systemic Mapping of Strategic Dilemmas*, 1992; *Reframing the Game of Strategic Dilemmas: a 12-fold interplay of possibilities of otherwise*, 2009).

Once posed as a riddle, this is then a fundamental challenge to insight and ingenuity. This has been traditionally exemplified to a degree by the *Zen koan*, and the traditional compilation of such devices known as the *Gateless Barrier* (*Wumenguan*) -- whose essential ambiguity is reflected in its common translation as the *Gateless Gate* (*Configuring a Set of Zen Koan as a Wisdom Container: formatting the Gateless Gate for Twitter*, 2012).

Missing insight?

Any sense of a riddle is accompanied by a sense of something missing. This is especially evident in articulations of something that has been lost -- a secret key, perhaps embodied in a lost symbol, as is the focus for many mysteries which exert enduring fascination. Is there a particular insight which is missing from the vain efforts at sustainable global governance -- one that is perhaps framed by nostalgia for "lost civilizations" or the past, even one characterized by a "lost language", for which a quest may be envisaged (Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language (The Making of Europe)*, 1997).

Intriguing in this respect is the argument of Terrence Deacon with regard to fundamental role of the missing in structuring human society (*Incomplete Nature: How Mind Emerged from Matter*, 2011; Joseph Bracken, *Is Terrence Deacon's Metaphysics of Incompleteness Still Incomplete?* *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, 38, 2017, 2-3)

As discussed separately (*Varieties of recognition in practice of an elusive missing dimension*, 2018; *Evolutionary influence of the absent*, 2011), for Deacon:

Basically, it means that our best science -- that collection of theories that presumably comes closest to explaining everything -- does not include this one most defining characteristic of being you and me. In effect, our current "Theory of Everything" implies that we don't exist, except as collections of atoms. So what's missing? **Ironically and enigmatically, something missing is missing.** (p. 1) [*emphasis added*]

As it may be experienced, any sense of missing might well relate to that of sensing that something has been forgotten. This is clearly a problem of individual and collective memory and how these may be affected by the passage of time (*Societal Learning and the Erosion of Collective Memory: a critique of the Club of Rome Report: No Limits to Learning*, 1980). At the time of writing concerns have been raised by the low-level of remembrance of the Holocaust, a pattern evident with respect to other genocidal massacres. Have valuable insights from past civilizations been lost in this way -- whatever the efforts to remember their achievements? So framed, does understanding past constitute a riddle in its own right -- especially if the lessons of history are not learned, retained and transferred to future generations. More provocatively, is there a collective form of *Alzheimer syndrome* which may increasingly affect global governance, especially in the case of aging decision-makers in an aging population?

Surreal embodiment of requisite complexity?

The current period is witness to frequent comment on the surreal nature of society and its governance, as separately noted (*Surreal nature of current global governance as experienced*, 2016). It could be said that surrealism has become a defining characteristic of international politics, if only to some degree (as argued on a website *Surrealism in Politics*).

Can the sense of the surreal be recognized as the emerging sense of a riddle with which global governance is faced? Is it possible that the confluence of factors contributing to the sense of the surreal could be recognized through a riddle -- as a kind of cognitive nexus embodying the *requisite variety* with which governance is obliged to engage?

Collections of riddles may be made, but seemingly of relatively little relevance to governance currently. The possibility might be usefully framed in terms of strategic dilemmas (Jacint Jordana, *Governance Dilemmas of the Contemporary State: the politics of infrastructure policy*, *Oxford Scholarship Online*, 2014; François Matarasso and Charles Landry, *Balancing Act : twenty-one strategic dilemmas in cultural policy*, Council of Europe, 1999). Of possible relevance is the approach of the [Edge Foundation](#), with its participative [annual questions](#). A case for identifying "annual riddles" of global governance?

Solving the riddle?

Supposedly the challenge is to "solve" any riddle in some way, as with the more fundamental challenges of governance -- and as embodied in [partisan politics](#) to so little effect.

Arguably achieving genuine sustainability could be understood as constituting the riddle of the times. As noted above, however, it remains a fairly complete mystery as to how people and groups would then function -- although many hopes and illusions can be projected onto the possibility. However, for a society so deeply invested in competition, with each aspiring to being "great again", if not the "greatest" in some respect, the systemic nature of the illusion becomes readily apparent. It recalls the driving concern of the Evil Witch in the widely dramatised traditional tale of [Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, who is the fairest of them All?*](#) . The irony of that tale, with respect to governance at this time, is evident in the [Group of Seven](#) as the epitome of global governance (*Group of 7 Dwarfs -- Future-blind and Warning-deaf: self-righteous immoral imperative enabling future human sacrifice*, 2018).

Other than "scoring" competitively, to a greater degree than others, how is a solution to be understood -- and what does it enable? It is readily framed as equivalent to "winning the lottery" -- with all that that is expected to lead. Curiously one aspiration for the heavy investment in the [International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor](#) (ITER) is the possibility for humanity to have access to "unlimited energy". This could be said to correspond to existential aspirations to enlightenment, Nirvana, Heaven, or possession of the Holy Grail (*In Quest of Sustainability as Holy Grail of Global Governance*, 2011; *In-forming the Chalice as an Integrative Cognitive Dynamic: sustaining the Holy Grail of global governance*, 2011).

With any riddle understood as a puzzle, the satisfaction of its solution is exemplified by the worldwide preoccupation with [Rubik's Cube](#) and its variants. The preoccupation of the United Nations with its [Millennium Development Goals](#), as replaced by its [Sustainable Development Goals](#), can be explored in this light (*Interplay of Sustainable Development Goals through Rubik Cube Variations: engaging otherwise with what people find meaningful*, 2017). However the nature of the dynamics of sustainability when achieved readily eludes comprehension -- beyond naive oversimplification, as with the imagined dynamics in Heaven.

Potentially more fruitful than the competitive approach are the kinds of infinite games envisaged by James Carse, as mentioned above. The difficulty is that it is not clear how they might be designed in order to prove attractive -- if indeed the attraction of games is a displaced or surrogate form of the killer instinct. Current creativity in this regard, to ensure that games are not fundamentally boring, is as yet far from *The Glass Bead Game* (1943), as imagined by [Hermann Hesse](#) in the context of Castalia, and otherwise explored (*Evoking Castalia as Envisaged, Entoned and Embodied: the great game informed by the bertsolaritza cultural process?* 2016). The most recent inspiration this has offered is the work of Niki Harré (*The Infinite Game: how to live well together*, 2018).

These associations offer curious echoes to the elaboration of a "game of spheres" by [Nicholas de Cusa](#) (*De Ludo Globi*, 1463), written as a contribution to both a literature and a practice of moral game-playing. This formed part of the tradition of the forgotten chess-like game [Rithmomachia](#) ("The Battle of Numbers" or Rhythmomachy), which combined the pleasures of gaming with mathematical study and moral education. Intellectuals of the medieval and Renaissance periods who played this game were not only seeking to master the principles of [Boethian mathematics](#) but were striving to improve their own understanding of the secrets of the cosmos (Ann E. Moyer, *In The Philosophers' Game*, 2001).

Consistent with the "cutting" insight is the famed Zen tale regarding a riddle framed by a vase -- here to be usefully compared with the vehicle of governance and the attitude cultivated by revolutionaries:

Three disciples of a Zen master were each asked to explain the nature of a beautiful ancient vase. The first and the second were each absent a year and returned with complex statements -- which were rejected. The third smashed the vase with one blow -- and thus achieved 'satori'.

With respect to the aftermath of achieving any such solution, this is unfortunately matched by another Zen adage:

Before enlightenment: chop wood, draw water. After enlightenment: chop wood, draw water.

Riddle of governance as a question?

Whilst "riddle" is somewhat alien to the modern world of governance, reframed as a "question" this becomes far more acceptable -- especially when a "solution" is seen as an "answer" to the question, enabling society to "move on".

Riddles were of considerable importance to the major decisions of governance of classical Greek and Rome -- through the esteem in which oracles were held and their tendency to communicate through riddles. Numerous studies have been made of this process, notably through the role of the [Oracle of Delphi](#). Of particular relevance in this respect was the influence on archaic colonization of foreign lands by Greece, anticipating that of Rome (Carol Dougherty, *When Rain Falls from the Clear Blue Sky: riddles and colonization oracles*, *Classical Antiquity*, 11, 1992, 1). The role of riddles is recognized in the thinking of Socrates, as founder of philosophy.

More intriguing however, in the face of a plethora of questions, is that little attention is given to the nature of questions and answers and

the dynamics of their processing in governance. The nature of questions and answers is considered to be so unquestionable (if not unanswerable) that there is every expectation that hypothetical aliens will also engage in that modality -- as with the encounter with beings in any hypothetical afterlife. This attitude is most obviously cultivated and reinforced by the scientific method as an unquestionable requirement for the advancement of human knowledge.

Missing from this commitment is the dimension highlighted as [negative capability](#) by [John Keats](#): *that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason*. Otherwise considered beyond criticism, scientific inquiry can be challenged in that light, as is any invasive inquiry in many contexts ([Beyond Harassment of Reality and Grasping Future Possibilities: learnings from sexual harassment as a metaphor](#), 1996).

Science itself could be considered as the embodiment of a riddle it is unable to frame ([Knowledge Processes Neglected by Science: insights from the crisis of science and belief](#), 2012). Understood as inherently "positive", in contrast with methods it deprecates as inherently "negative" and questionable, science has proven to be incapable of offering insights to governance with respect to managing the relation between positive and negative more fruitfully otherwise. Tragically, this is despite the radical insights of [Nikola Tesla](#) regarding electrical power ([Reimagining Tesla's Creativity through Technomimicry: psychosocial empowerment by imagining charged conditions otherwise](#), 2014).

Especially intriguing with respect to governance is the manner in which the 7 characteristic forms of question may frame -- fortunately or unfortunately -- the crises with which governance tends to see itself to be faced. Together these lend themselves to comparison with the insights of [catastrophe theory](#) ([Conformality of 7 WH-questions to 7 Elementary Catastrophes: an exploration of potential psychosocial implications](#). 2006).

Considered otherwise, is there a fundamental question that the processes of governance are failing to frame and ask? Does this imply a strange relationship between a riddle and a lie -- the Big Lie of the times? Is governance effectively cultivating and embodying a "Big Riddle" that is a challenge to collective recognition and comprehension -- as may be otherwise explored ([Existential Challenge of Detecting Today's Big Lie Mysterious black hole conditioning global civilization?](#) 2016).

Is the unquestionable enthusiasm of "science" for exploring Mars to be recognized as an inherently non-paradoxical means of avoiding the riddle posed by the challenges of governance on Earth -- whilst assiduously claiming human creativity of the highest order ([Challenges More Difficult for Science than Going to Mars -- or exploring the origins of the Universe or of Life on Earth](#), 2014)?

Framing the paradox of a surreal context as a riddle?

The challenge for the natural sciences, acclaimed as the the primary method knowing, is the relationship with the psychosocial and alternative cognitive modalities -- deprecated as [pseudoscience](#), if not nonsense (Alan D. Sokal, and Jean Bricmont, [Fashionable Nonsense: postmodern intellectuals' abuse of science](#), 1998).

Whilst the natural sciences are tolerant of [paradox](#) -- exemplified by the incomprehensible [duality of wave and particle](#) -- this capacity does not extend to any ability to encompass other modalities of knowing. With a paradox readily understood as a riddle -- and with the extensive [use of paradox by riddles](#) -- science is itself trapped in a paradoxical relationship to psychosocial dynamics in which scientists are individually and collectively embedded.

As a riddle beyond the capacity of science, this is dramatically exemplified by the current challenge of climate change to governance. With the greatest naivety, there is the expectation that the framing of the challenge by science will appropriately engage the attention of a population -- which typically employs other modes of knowing whose meanings are systematically deemed by science to be incomprehensible, superstitious and irrelevant. Are there implications from the wave-particle complementarity for transcending that limitation, as can be variously argued ([Alexander Wendt, Quantum Mind and Social Science: unifying physical and social ontology](#), 2015)?

As discussed separately, and potentially consistent with how a riddle might come to be understood, Wendt makes a case for recognizing people as "walking wave functions" ([On being "walking wave functions" in terms of quantum consciousness?](#) 2017). It is perhaps to be expected that the argument is riddled with misunderstanding (Matthew J. Donald, [We are not walking wave functions: a response to "Quantum Mind and Social Science" by Alexander Wendt](#), *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 30 March 2018).

Living with a riddle -- or within one?

If global governance is to be appropriately considered to be a riddle, this frames the challenge of what it means to live with a riddle. This is consistent with the long-standing articulation of a so-called [world riddle](#) associated with [Friedrich Nietzsche](#) and [Ernst Haeckel](#) ([Die Welträtsel](#), 1895; [The Riddle of the Universe](#), 1901). The latter was preceded by the renowned articulation of "seven world riddles" in 1880 by [Emil du Bois-Reymond](#) in a famous speech to the [Berlin Academy of Sciences](#). As "shortcomings" of science, he notably asserted that some of them neither science nor philosophy would ever be able explain. There is the intriguing possibility that this 7-fold articulation of riddles relates in some way to the 7-fold articulation of questions and "elementary catastrophes" (as mentioned above).

The challenge famously featured as a theme of the speculative science fiction of [Douglas Adams](#) ([The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy](#), 1979). This included the tale of a group of hyper-intelligent pan-dimensional beings in quest of the [Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, The Universe, and Everything](#) -- for which a supercomputer ([Deep Thought](#)) was specially constructed. Deep Thought took 7.5 million years to compute and check the answer, which turned out to be 42 (namely 7x6). The computer offered the comment that the Answer seems meaningless because the beings who instructed it never actually knew what the Question was.

Aspects of the argument have been extensively explored in terms of living with [uncertainty](#), if not with the the absurd as a different descriptor of the surreal. As a philosophy, [absurdism](#) explores the fundamental nature of the absurd and how individuals, once conscious

of it, should respond to it. Given the increasing complexification of society, this also frames the challenge of living with ignorance and incomprehension, however much this may be relevant to positions of governance (*Living with Incomprehension and Uncertainty: recognizing the varieties of non-comprehension and misunderstanding*, 2012).

Rather than the frantic quest for closure and explanation, as deprecated by John Keats, tolerance of the unexplained is an option, as can be argued with respect to the aesthetics of *liminality* (*Living as an Imaginal Bridge between Worlds: global implications of "betwixt and between" and liminality*, 2011). From that perspective, given long-standing philosophical preoccupation with identity, the traditional question of "who am I?" might be recognized as not calling for an answer in the conventional terms in which the question is posed. The persistence of such questions helps to make a distinction between relatively trivial riddles -- typically published with answers -- and those for which the nature of a meaningful answer is called into question.

People could be understood as having the right to be a riddle, both for others and themselves -- a notion partially explored in terms of *apophasis* and unsaying (*Being What You Want: problematic kataphatic identity vs. potential of apophatic identity?* 2008). The case can be made otherwise (Christopher James Galloway, *Deliver us from Definitions: a fresh way of looking at public relations*, *Public Relations Inquiry*, 14 May 2013). On an overcrowded planet, stretched for resources, it would then also be fair to argue that the world is riddled with people with conflicting agendas -- in the various senses of the term.

How cognitively "radical" are people now called upon to be in engaging with the emerging challenges of governance (*Encountering Otherness as a Waveform: in the light of a wave theory of being*, 2013; *Being Neither a-Waving Nor a-Parting: considering both science and spirituality*, 2013). "Waves of opinion" versus "political Parties"? There are indeed many references to "political riddles", exemplified by the contributions to the *Special Political Riddles Edition* of the journal *Capitalism.HK* (2, 2013, 1).

In the riddling spirit, there is a delightful comparison to be made in German between the *Bundesrat*, as the epitome of unquestionably serious governance, and *Bundesrätsel* -- exploiting a diminutive form and embodying the sense of riddle (*Rätsel* in German). Dennis Bühler: *Am kommenden Mittwoch ist es so weit: Nach monatelangem "Bundesrätseln" werden wir wissen...., Doch wer wäre der beste Bundesrat? (Wählt den fähigen Kandidaten!* 15 September 2017). Marco Ratschiller: *Bundesrätsel: In besonders hoher Konzentration findet sich Wahnsinn innerhalb der Bundeshaus-Mauern (Draussen vor der Anstaltsmauer, Rebelspalter*, 2 September 2010). Perhaps appropriately, the principal German journal of weekly socio-political commentary features a *Rätsel der Woche* in its science section.

Given this German perspective, any exploration of global governance as a riddle can appropriately conclude by associating aspirations to any form of world government (*Weltrat*) with Haeckel's exploration of *Die Welträtsel* (1895) -- enriched by Nietzsche's provocative insights into such a world riddle at that time. These insights, articulated in the philosophical novel *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1891), inspired a *tone poem* of the same name by *Richard Strauss*. Composed in 1896, this features a so-called *world riddle theme*, framing the riddle in musical terms.

Collections of riddles of relevance?

- *Classic Riddles 1-100 -- Riddles 101-200 and Riddles 201-243 (Savage Legend)*
- *Greatest philosophical riddles of all time (9Riddles.com, 30 September 2017)*
- *11 of History's Toughest Riddles (MentalFloss, 15 August 2017)*
- *11 of the Most Famous Riddles in History (Readers Digest)*
- *Top 10 Intriguing Riddles From History (ListVerse, 27 October 2013)*
- *Short Philosophical Riddles (Genius Puzzles)*
- *What's the best philosophical riddle? (Quora, 3 January 2017)*
- *15 paradoxes that will make your head explode (Business Insider, 2 January 2018)*
- *Puzzles, Paradoxes, Jokes, Humor, Thought Provoking Questions (Riddles, 4 October 2015)*
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