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Alternative Perspectives

Success: The Human Problem

When I sat down to think about the big questions or problems in the world I could not find a big problem worthy of attention. The questions and problems that keep my mind occupied are ones about human consciousness, awareness, identity and the evolution of these concepts. These are ideas that most people do not find to be particularly important. So I went on a quick search to find what other people thought were the big burning questions of our age.

A survey of three lists of big wicked world problems resulted in the following common set of problems:

- Pollution
- Limited Resources (especially water and energy/oil)
- Various Crisis (Economic, Environmental)
- Global Warming
- Rising Population

I pondered on these big problems. They are truly problems we must face. But why were they problems in the first place. How did they become problems? It's not like we, as a human species, set out to destroy the environment, use all the resources available and engage in destructive activities to bring about crisis. I decided to utilize the Presencing method from class, to ponder these problems. As I went into a meditative state, moving backward in time, I saw that these problems were the result of our success as a species.

What does it mean to say the human species is successful?

Success as a word generally means to show the winning or accomplishment of some goal. Attaining wealth or fame or a favorable outcome of something attempted.

Before we can say humanity has been successful, we might ask, what does the human species do? Or what are we trying to accomplish (consciously or unconsciously)? But rather than limit my question to the human species, I asked the question of Life. Humanity is a complex expression of life. What does Life do?

I like Teilhard de Chardin's Law of Complexity/Consciousness which is "the tendency in matter to become more complex over time and at the same time to become more conscious". I would swap his word "matter" with "life."

Life, and humanity as part of life, becomes more complex and conscious over time.

I would like to add that humanity refines resources. Refine generally means to remove impurities, but it does so in a very complex way. Thus what is refined is more complex than the raw material used.

This refining of resources, a making of something complex while removing impurities, is what humans do.

Looking at our list of big problems, one might see them as byproducts of the human success of refining resources.

- Pollution as a byproduct of a plentiful and stable food supply. A stable food supply allows the focus on other skills, which encourages a market economy with the creation of products and services, which in their production may create pollution.
- Limited Resources (especially water and energy/oil). In a previous paradigm, these were plentiful resources to be used for refining. Before this time, the resources were not used in such high quantities, and one might not know their limits could be reached. In fact, there may be resources we use today, that we cannot see the limits of, because we have not reached the place where we can see those limits. These are resource constraints we have yet to discover.
- Various Crises (Economic, Environmental) are an experience of feeling the edge of resources, pulling back, and pushing/exploring a further edge. It is finding the true limit and exploring ways around it.
- Global Warming as an unintended consequence of the consciousness of our actions. In the past, we had little consciousness of actions; as our knowledge and understanding about our environment grew (refining of empirical knowledge through the scientific method) we became aware of the impact of our actions. One cannot change things that one has no consciousness of.
- Rising Population: Humanity has succeeded in stabilizing death and disease, yet our mental models have not shifted with our biological medical success.

Many of these problems are understood with an underlying guilt. We humans are guilty for creating these problems. (It's important to note, that these are considered problems from the first world developed nation perspective. I highly doubt that people in developing nations would consider these their big problems.) While it is true that humans through our activities have created these problems, their individual causes are described by the problem they create – a limiting perspective. By saying these problems are caused by the success of the human species, the guilt associated with them is lifted, as well as acknowledge the progress that occurred to have a reality in which these problems exist.

These big problems exist when humanity reaches a level of success.

With that in mind, I chose Appreciative Inquire to explore how to solve these, and all other, big problems for humanity.

I utilized these AI Principles along with the 4-D Cycle

- Constructivist Principle
- Poetic Principle
- Simultaneity Principle
- Anticipatory Principle
- Positive Principle
- (Define)
- Discovery
- Dream
- Design
- Destiny

The Constructivist Principle

The Constructivist Principle is the rule that we see the world as we are. That our interior state, our mores and values and experiences create the lens in which we view the world.

As I mentioned earlier, these so called big problems are problems from a developed nation perspective underlined with human guilt. So let's take personal responsibility for these problems and explicitly view them from our perspective. Since I am working alone, I took a first person singular perspective. I recommend you the reader take this perspective to heart as well and identify and take responsibility on how you participate in these activities.

- I Pollute
- I use Limited Resources
- I make the world warmer
- I add to a Rising Population
- I contribute to the Water Crisis
- I encourage Peak Oil
- I made Economic Crisis
- I create World Wide Catastrophe

Now that these problems are specific and personal, it shifts the perspective. It makes the responsibility clear and personal, making the problems seem smaller. We have shifted the size of these problems from big impersonal ones to specific personal ones. There are no actions to be taken to solve big impersonal problems. But we're not interested in solving these problems yet. We just want to be clear about our worldview. So let's look at what we focus on, which is the second AI Principle.

The Poetic Principle

The Poetic Principle says, what we focus on grows. So what have we been focusing on, regarding these big problems? I've touched on a few of these already.

- A Laundry list of problems: Focusing on the problems, instead of understanding where the problems come from (maybe they came because of a huge positive movement forward)
- Doom and Gloom media attitude: It's clear that media, journalism and entertainment have a bias for the negative and dramatic perspective.

- Negative Gravity: A reinforcing feedback loop, focusing on the negative helps us focus on the negative, which trains our Reticular Activation System, our brain's pattern recognition system, to only see the problems.
- Celebrity Solutions: Our current culture has an obsession with fame and celebrity, thus it is biased to big problem solutions that are promoted/marketed by a celebrity.
- Overnight Success: Similar to the above celebrity bias, media and news coverage look for the quick win stories. Focusing on the success at the end of a long road of determination and persistence.
- BIG!: Building upon the overnight success, it's not the small solutions that get attention, it's the big ones. This increases the desire for big solutions and the effort put toward big solutions.
- Armchair visionaries: Theorists that think, but do not have experience in action. Five years ago, I was at SXSW listening to the author of WorldChanging. This was a huge book success and the author was put up on a pedestal. At the end of his talk, he opened for questions. An audience member commended the author on the theory and motivation his book gave people – to questioner himself even – however he wanted to know some practical actions that could be done to really change the world. The author stumbled over some words finally ending on an, "it's up to you to put it into practice" answer. I felt this was irresponsible of the author and everyone who had put him up on this pedestal.
- Fear based Inaction: Fear paralyzes action and instead encourages distraction.

After identifying the current focus, I flipped the coin and identified things we could focus on instead.

- Happiness
- Baby Steps
- Positive Reinforcement
- Small Solutions
- Practice
- Ongoing success
- Celebrations
- Everyday people
- Encouraged Experimentation

Some people are focusing in these areas, specifically in the area of positive psychology and the importance of Happiness and experimentation through Maker and DIY communities.

The Simultaneity Principle

The Simultaneity Principle is the rule that when we ask the questions we have already begun to change. I like to think of this as change in-flight. Change doesn't happen in a vacuum, or in only a certain segment of a process. Change is happening all the time, at any stage of the process.

Even now, after reading my paragraph on the Constructionist Principle, where we take responsibility for these problems, you have begun to change. The students in class who heard my presentation have begun to change shortly after I started my presentation. These seeds of ideas, memes, move through our brains, ideas, and consciousness. It's happening right now.

This principle reminds me of Draper's System Law, where everything is connected to everything else.

The Anticipatory Principle

The Anticipatory Principle is the rule that what we believe, we conceive. So let's throw out those big problems we started with and instead ask ourselves, what is the world we want to anticipate? If we were to conceive the world today, what would that look like?

- Pure, Fresh, Clean, Re-Newed World
- Abundant Resources
- Plentiful diverse economic exchanges
- Supporting Self-Actualized Population
- Comfortable Climate for Life
- Curious Excitement
- Positive Pioneering
- Ongoing Practice and Exploration

And most importantly as part of this new world: A new set of problems.

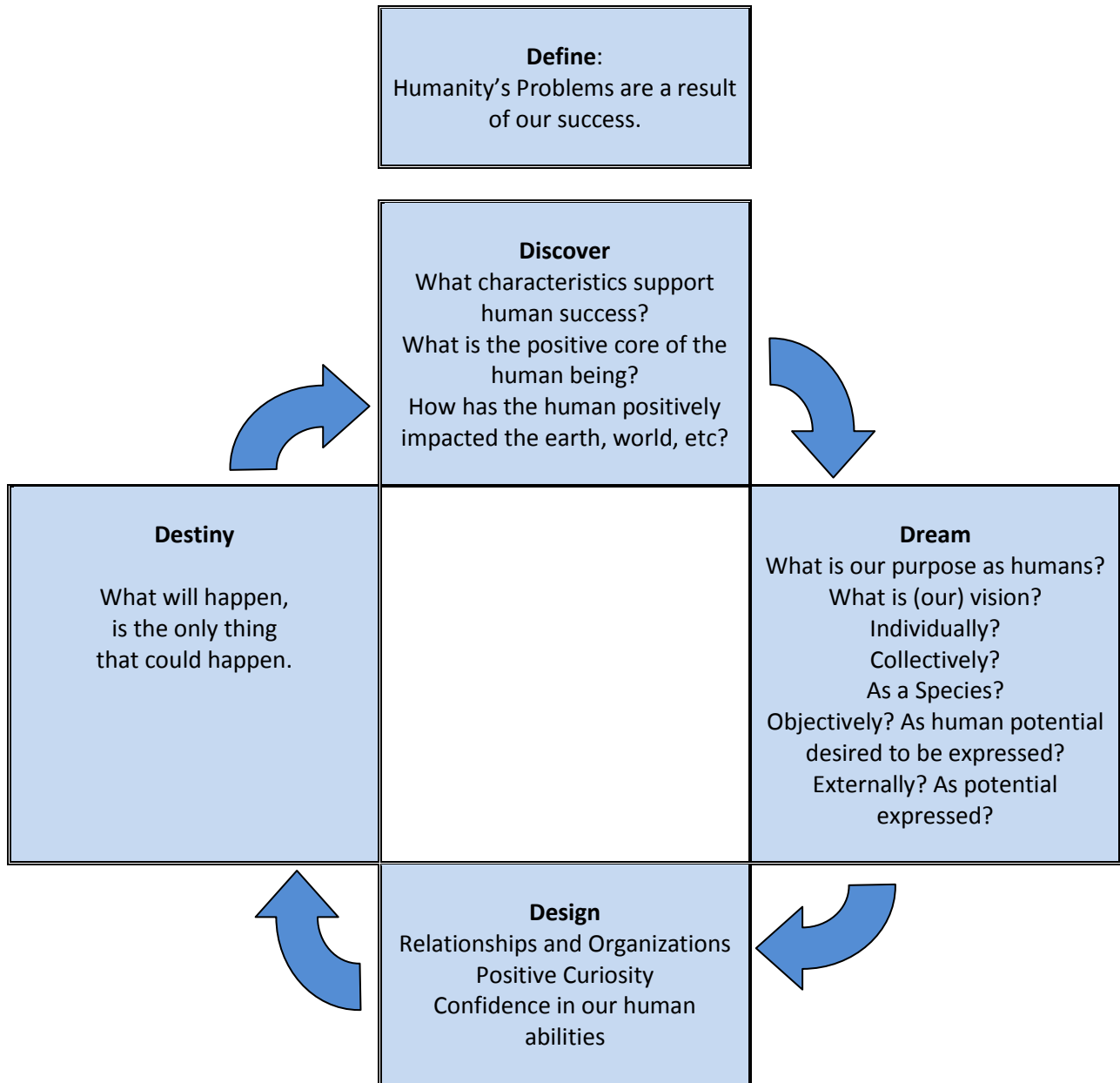
The Positive Principle

The Positive Principle is where we identify and leverage strengths. One thing I like to keep in mind is the history of human success our reality is based on. Successes like: language, writing, science, math, knowledge. None of these things were handed to the human race. These were all things we invented, observed, understood, discovered. These successes, even in hindsight, are much larger than the challenges we as a species face today. What can we leverage from those successes to apply to our current challenges?

- Communities
- Science and Discovery
- Open Communication, Sharing
- Increasing Stability, Certainty
- Transformation of raw to refined
- All those good human emotions
 - Joy, Love, Compassion, Inspiration, Cooperation
- Tenacious

Most of all, we as a species must believe that we can solve these problems. We need to throw out this belief of a *deus ex machina* as a solution to our problems and take responsibility for co-creating our world.

The 4-D Cycle



Conclusion

So what is the answer to these big problems?

As the Simultaneity Principle says, as we question, we change. I do not doubt humanity will “solve” these problems. Just as I do not doubt that the solutions to these problems will result in new big problems to solve. While it would be nice to wrap this paper up with a bow and the answer to these problems, the answer is another step along the path to solving an unveiled problem. Using AI as a navigational method to solve these problems might make the journey more pleasurable, while building confidence in ourselves as a species.