BEING VALUES AND BENEFICENT OBSESSIONS: APPLYING THEORIES FROM MASLOW AND ASSAGIOLI TO EVOLUTIONARY GUIDANCE MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Memes are units of cultural information, the symbols that shape our worldview. In seeking to create a sustainable worldview we require memes, i.e., words, images, and systems, capable of serving as evolutionary guides for societies at varying levels of development. The evolutionary guidance systems framework designed by Bela H. Banathy is one such societal meme. Its application to media resulted in evolutionary guidance media, a framework for creating media designed to promote planetary consciousness. In continuing the design of evolutionary guidance media, this paper explores the application of Maslow's theory of "metapathologies" as a means of isolating and/or diagnosing societal ills, and examines the use of "being values" as antidotes. To expedite the healing process Assagioli's "technique of evocative words" and the "beneficent obsession" are presented.

Keywords: social systems design; evolutionary development; evolutionary guidance systems; media, transpersonal studies; humanistic psychology; positive psychology

EVOLUTIONARY GUIDANCE MEDIA

As systemists, we investigate synergistic interactions, whether among/between atoms, cells, and organs, or family units, communities, and institutions. Indeed the investigation of such interactions is considered to be the defining characteristic of systems science (Laszlo, 2001). Although many of the interactions systemists investigate seemingly take place effortlessly, in looking at human interactions, specifically at the societal level, it is easy to feel disheartened - often our interactions resemble that of a species hell bent on obliterating, not only itself, but the very matrix within which it survives. Global warming, brought on by human actions and interactions with the natural world, is but one current example.

In an effort to find ways and means to facilitate and promote more sustainable and peaceful interactions between human beings, systemists set about designing evolutionary guidance systems (EGS) - systems that actually guide the development of human systems such that the systems created are able to encourage the holistic development of both individuals and their systems (Banathy, 1996). EGS are capable of being applied at the micro level, to the for example family unit, or the macro level, e.g., the societal. Through applying the EGS framework to media, a system designed to facilitate the creation of conscious media, or evolutionary guidance media (EGM) was birthed (Klisanin, 2003, 2005, 2007). Application of the EGS framework to media was perceived to be particularly relevant due to the central role media plays in creating and transmitting units of cultural information, or memes (Dawkins, 1978). In order to facilitate peaceful planetary co-existence, memes, i.e., words, images, and systems, are required that are capable of serving as evolutionary guides for societies at varying levels of development. EGM was created with that purpose in mind. In short, EGM is media designed both in context and content for the purpose of guiding and/or facilitating the societal emergence of transpersonal consciousness, specifically planetary consciousness.

Following Banathy's lead, the EGM framework was designed utilizing nine interactive dimensions of human activity, including "social action, economic, moral, wellness, design, scientific, technological, aesthetic, and political" (1996, pp. 324-325). The interactive nature

of the dimensions encourage synergistic unfolding, often revealing new directions for research and/or valuable insights, for example, in earlier research a merger between the moral and technological dimensions resulted in the concept of *transception*, a term coined to refer to cyberception infused with qualities of high spiritual development, such as compassion (Klisanin, 2005).

This paper focuses on exploring data arising from both the wellness and aesthetic dimensions while utilizing data previously allocated to the moral dimension (i.e., Being values). In the generic EGS framework the wellness dimension exists to "nurture the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being of the individual and society," while the aesthetic dimension represents "the pursuit of beauty, cultural and spiritual values, the various forms of art, the treasures of humanities, and the enrichment of our inner quality of life" (Banathy, 1996, pp. 324-325). As applied to EGM, goals of the wellness dimension include promoting integral practices and avenues of interpersonal contact, while goals of the aesthetic dimension include utilizing subjects of visionary art and metaphors of consciousness (Klisanin, 2003). Three approaches to inquiry (outside of systems science) have been and continue to be particularly important to on-going research in EGM; these include the humanistic, transpersonal, and integral approaches. In this exploration, the following constructs, arising from the humanistic and transpersonal disciplines are examined: Maslow's construct of "Being values" and "metapathologies" (1968, 1971) and Assagioli's concept of the "technique of evocative words" and the "beneficent obsession" (1970).

Maslow's Construct of Being-values and Metapathologies

Maslow's (1968) theory of development is a holistic process based on motivation, exemplified by his well-known "hierarchy of needs" pyramid in which basic needs, such as food and shelter must be met before attention can turn to meeting other needs, such as love and belonging. In the course of his research, Maslow found that the presence of certain universal qualities, traits, and/or values, were necessary for people to successfully cross from the level of self-esteem to that of self-actualization (i.e., the apex of the pyramid, considered to be a dynamic on-going process of integration). He coined the term Being values, or B-values, to refer to those specific qualities, traits and/or values, and included among them: truth, goodness, beauty, wholeness, aliveness, uniqueness, perfection, completion, justice, order, simplicity, richness, effortlessness, playfulness, and self-sufficiency (Maslow, 1968, pp. 133-135).

In addition to finding the presence of B-values necessary for movement into self-actualization, Maslow found that the *absence* of B-values led to the creation of specific metapathologies; for example: the absence of *truth* led to disbelief, mistrust, cynicism, scepticism, and suspicion, while the absence of *simplicity* led to overcomplexity, confusion, bewilderment, conflict, and loss of orientation. While providing an incomplete summary, the following table offers further examples.

Table 1. Being Values and Specific Metapathologies (excerpted from Maslow's table 1971, p. 318)

B-values	Specific Metapathologies
Truth	Disbelief; mistrust; cynicism; scepticism
Goodness	Utter selfishness; hatred; repulsion; disgust

Beauty	Vulgarity; loss of taste; fatigue
Unity, Wholeness	Disintegration; arbitrariness
Aliveness	Deadness; robotizing; loss of emotion
Uniqueness	Loss of feeling of self and individuality
Perfection	Discouragement; hopelessness
Completion	Feeling of incompleteness; cessation of striving or coping
Justice	Insecurity; anger; mistrust; total selfishness
Order	Insecurity; wariness; loss of safety
Simplicity	Overcomplexity; confusion; bewilderment
Richness, Totality	Depression; uneasiness; loss of interest in the world
Effortlessness	Fatigue; strain; striving; clumsiness
Playfulness	Grimness; paranoid humorlessness
Self-sufficiency	Dependence
Meaningfulness	Meaninglessness; despair; senselessness of life

Assagioli's Technique of Evocative Words

In a monograph entitled "The Technique of Evocative Words," Roberto Assagioli (1970), an Italian psychiatrist and the pioneer of psychosynthesis, outlined a method of acting on the psyche to modify behaviour, or attitudes. For purposes of psychological development, integration, and transformation he suggested that a specific word be chosen representing a desired quality (e.g., patience) and then be written on a card and placed where it could be easily noticed. He suggested that a stronger effect could be obtained by placing several cards with the same word in multiple places and rooms, referring to the latter as a "beneficent obsession" (1970, p. 2). He specified the following words, while noting that others could be added as desired: calm, joy, comprehension, love, confidence, patience, courage, serenity, energy, silence, enthusiasm, simplicity, goodness, will, gratitude, wisdom, and harmony (1970, p. 4).

Assagioli (1970) went on to qualify the use of words as the most basic method of persuasion, referring to the techniques used by the advertising industry as yet more sophisticated means, (e.g., the use of displays and posters; suggestive phrases and slogans; persuasive and fascinating pictures; persistent repetition of name, theme, or slogan; musical themes; and rhythmic movement, gestures, and dances). He mentioned Farhad Hormozi,

(1970) an advertising executive who at that time had proposed that desirable qualities and socially healthy attitudes be promoted by incorporating techniques common to his field. Indeed, Hormozi went on to create one of the first campaigns demonstrating the idea in action (1987).

Assagioli suggested that such techniques be applied not only to foster integral self-actualization and realization in individuals, but that they could be utilized in education, as a foci of concentration, psychological conditioning (e.g., preparing for a competition), and psychotherapeutic applications (e.g., in hospital rooms and offices). However, he pointed out that in some instances the technique of evocative words might elicit negative reactions, particularly in those who may have a lack of such qualities, in which case he suggested other forms of psychotherapy.

Application to Evolutionary Guidance Media

Maslow's constructs of metapathologies and B-values, and Assagioli's technique of evocative words and the beneficent obsession, have their origins in the humanistic and transpersonal psychological traditions, both of which hold that individuals have the capacity to evolve. EGM creators may find those constructs helpful as points of departure in their quests to create media designed to promote planetary consciousness. Although EGM creators are not therapists, through simply being aware of the relationship between B-values and metapathologies, a new level of awareness is brought into play when examining the needs of communities and the world-at-large. Likewise, one need not be a therapist to appreciate the potential of using B-values, and evocative words to simulate positive development, however familiarity with an Integral model (e.g., AQAL) would be helpful (i.e., memes created to appeal to persons at the egocentric, or ethnocentric levels of ethical development may not be appealing to those at the worldcenter level, and so forth) (Wilber, 1995, 2000). Recall that in Maslow's developmental model, it was a lack of movement, or growth, from the level of self-esteem needs to that of self-actualization that brought attention to the important role of B-values in furthering human development.

While truth, simplicity, and meaningfulness are general terms, they are laden with symbolism. As such, when considered as guiding themes, they have the potential to simulate and facilitate the creative process. Many have been the subjects of visionary art (e.g., beauty, love, truth) as well as metaphors of consciousness (e.g., unity, wholeness, wisdom) in cultures around the world, and as such they complement the aesthetic dimension.

Addressing the wellness dimension, an EGM creator might, for example, research various B-values across cultures, and create hybrid memes -- words, images, stories, music, films, videogames -- capable of serving as bridges, facilitating understanding and cooperation between people of various nationalities, ethnicities, spiritual traditions and so forth. A historical example of such an attempt can be seen in Hormozi's (1987) work. Noting that musical notations, mathematics symbols, trademarks and logos, were the same around the world, he posited creating a symbolic language to express human qualities, and to that end, commissioned the British graphic designer Tom Eckersley to demonstrate one style, seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Symbols designed to represent universal positive human qualities (Hormozi, 1987)

In the years since Maslow and Assagioli conducted their pioneering research, investigations in the area of human values, qualities, and traits have flourished. Today the results of such research is nowhere more evident that in the field of Positive Psychology. A seminal handbook in that field, *Character Strengths and Virtues* (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) identifies six classes of core virtues (including: wisdom and knowledge; courage; humanity; justice; temperance; transcendence) and twenty-four character strengths. The on-going research in this field should prove to be an important source of material for EGM creators.

While it is true, for the part, that media designed with intensity of style and scope is often aimed at inducing the consumer to purchase and consume, there are notable exceptions, including campaigns by non-profit organizations designed solely to effect positive change in the world. Examples include: the Natural Resources Defense Council (2008), dedicated to preserving and protecting the natural world; The Foundation for a Better Life (2008), dedicated to creating public service campaigns modelling the benefits of a life lived with positive values, and the pioneering Ad Council (2008) dedicated to creating and distributing public service advertising campaigns designed to effect positive change. Each of these organizations serve as valuable models for media creators seeking to promote planetary consciousness, particularly as each have interactive components inviting participatory action (via websites and links to other organizations).

The proliferation of personal computers, laptops, and cellular phones equipped with Internet connectivity has provided media creators with opportunities to see the memes they create span the globe in mere seconds. One particularly fertile area where EGM creators might venture (with B-values on their palettes) is that of videogames. Bogost (2007) has argued that video games, due to their representational mode of procedurality (i.e., rule-based representations and interactions) represent a new form of rhetoric, i.e., "procedural rhetoric," and as such, a new form of persuasion (2007, p.ix). He suggests that videogames can be designed that support existing social and cultural norms, or that change those norms.

Being Values and Beneficent Obsessions

Although many videogames are geared towards the solo player, many others are played on-line by multiple players simultaneously. The on-line gaming market is one of "synthetic worlds" where millions of people choose to spend enormous quantities of time (Castronova, 2005, p. 4). Videogames and synthetic worlds both offer promising venues for media creators seeking to impact the world through their creations. (Note: investigating such areas brings the technological dimension front and centre, demonstrating the fluid or porous nature of the EGS model.)

In summary, EGM creators familiar with the pioneering works of Maslow and Assagioli, as well as current research in the field of Positive Psychology, will find much to take into account when creating consciousness-raising media. By skilfully blending data from the wellness dimension, the aesthetic dimension, and the technological dimension they may yet give new meaning to the term, beneficent obsession … and in doing so, make Assagioli and his pioneering counterparts proud.

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