

Higher Purpose



Deeper Meaning

I have been searching for deeper meaning all my life. Conventional definitions of success are concerned with achieving stature in society or monetary reward. I do not find these, by themselves, satisfying. Recently I have been able to unite this search for deeper meaning with my professional work, and the resulting congruencies have given me a powerful new outlook.

I am not interested in style or temporary trends if they are not tied to higher goals. This entails a subjective evaluation of what is meaningful vs. what is superficial. I have a limited time HERE, and I do not wish to spend it pursuing fleeting or temporary meaning.

I have always been drawn to perceptual niches that nobody else occupies. I do this for multiple reasons. It creates a differentiator, a clear internal understanding of my own uniqueness or place in the world. It creates an external personal “mark,” being known and hopefully remembered for something different. And finally it satisfies my inclination to work by myself. I’m most productive when I’m free to continue an exploration deeply, uninterrupted, in a space of my own making.

Early in my career I felt I needed to conform to conventional definitions both of architecture’s purpose and of personal success. For a time this was satisfying as I learned my profession.

A crisis point in my career became a personal rebirth and a way to unite my search for deeper meaning with my professional work. This is an amazing opportunity that few are given.

The Problem

Others have engaged in similar searches for deeper meaning. Philosophy and religion are founded on this. I am combining this search for deeper meaning with a desire to solve an overarching problem.

Something is fundamentally wrong with our existence, our reality. It is getting worse as time passes. The industrial revolution has accelerated it. It cannot be fixed through the usual methods. The discovery of new technology or natural resources will not repair it. This wrongness is difficult to define, though I feel it. I have felt it all my life, but have never been able to verbalize it satisfactorily. Here are some statements that start to get at its heart:

- A growing disconnect between what we value and what is truly valuable.
- A growing remoteness between our lives and natural principles.
- A feeling that we are on the wrong path.

It is the largest of problems. In fact, it is The Problem. It is like a cancer that infects everything: physical, spiritual, social. It involves the biggest things: Not only the physical structures of our technology, nature, and the universe, but more importantly how we perceive them; how we structure our perception of them. It is not a problem of what is known, but rather what is and our place in it.

Here I need to make the distinction between epistemology and metaphysics. Both are terms from philosophy. Epistemology is most easily described as the study of what is known, or the nature of knowledge and its limitations. On the other hand, metaphysics is concerned with what is, principles of reality transcending those of any particular science. Because the problem's solution lies in what is and our place in it, I am primarily focused on metaphysics in solving the problem.

There are three fields at the heart of metaphysics (this is only my opinion). They are religion, philosophy, and physics. They are all concerned with the smallest component to the largest systems: physics physically, philosophy intellectually, and religion spiritually. They show us our place in the universe of what is. They get to the heart of the matter.

This higher purpose of getting at the truth of what is to repair The Problem is like the allegory of the cave from Plato's "Republic." What is known is like the shadows cast on the curtain: We can only guess at the nature of the things casting the shadows, based on what we know. What is is like looking behind the curtain and actually seeing the source of the shadows. We spend too much time looking through the curtain of what is known or what we're comfortable with, as opposed to understanding directly the largest components of what is, and working on manipulating our perception or outlook on them.

I could certainly ignore The Problem, trying to look past it to focus on the things that are good. A lot of people do this. This is an effective strategy for dealing with things that we feel that we can't change. But I am not content to take that route. I have an opportunity to change what's wrong. I can't exist solely in the narrowly defined world that a profession dictates. I need to grapple with larger issues.

Searching for the Source

To get to the heart of The Problem, I am engaged in an effort to peel back or see through the layers of our reality to understand what's really true, real, fundamental. Thoreau stated this pursuit beautifully with his phrase about moving one's feet down through the mud to find the bedrock of "what is." This is a purpose we all engage in as part of determining our individual value sets, but I am approaching it more holistically than most. Not only am I searching for the bedrock pertaining to a personal value set, but also a definition and an understanding of the fundamental forces of our entire collective reality; what is. This understanding is required to manipulate and rearrange these forces (or our perception of them) to give us all a more fulfilling perception of and relationship to our reality. This attacks The Problem at its heart.

The what is nature of The Problem at first suggests that religion is the best vehicle to address it, but it cannot be solved by that. Too much of its solution is rooted in science and evidence, as opposed to faith. However, its solution may eventually be viewed as a sort of religion.

On the other hand, working as a technician within a particular field can not repair this either.

The solution is a marriage of the two. I am approaching it secularly, but with some of the language and fervor of religion.

I am searching for The Source, the building blocks of what is: the largest components that work to determine the character of our lives and of our future. I feel that if I can understand these components deeply enough, I can show the way to the big moves, the rearrangements that repair The Problem. I have begun to identify and manipulate these components:

- Technology
- Nature
- Beauty

- Values
- Change
- Prosperity

There are others I have yet to identify.

This purpose always moves me away from the epistemological nature of most solutions, particularly regarding sustainability. Mainstream sustainability is filled with solutions that pick at the edges of the problem; quick-fixes with little holistic impact. I think this is because they are predominantly created by technicians within isolated fields working from the bottom-up. I am drawn to The Source, toward top-down solutions.

The investigation, the search for The Source, moves far outside of and above architecture. It moves toward the few and the basic, the overarching components that make up our world and looking for truth in them. Peeling back the superficiality, trying to understand The Source and its application to The Problem.

My life is an integrated search for what is in relation to The Source and The Problem. There is little separation between business, personal, social, and spiritual. I have bent my business expertise to it. It determined the place where I live, looking for the meaning of place. It is exhibited in my non-professional pursuits: understanding things on their most basic terms. Using simple tasks to think about the relationships of components. Inferring the unknown from the known.

Application

Sustainability approaches some aspects of The Problem, but The Problem is much larger than sustainability. Sustainability has become a timely and suitable vehicle to launch broader explorations of the larger problem.

I intentionally avoid typical classifications in my pursuit of The Problem and its solution. Academics work to build upon the work of other academics. Technicians work to develop implementable solutions. I am neither of those. I am coming to grips with the world and the solution of The Problem in my unique way, occupying my own perceptual niche. My work is partially based on the work of others, partially based on my experience as a technician, and partially based on my unique world outlook.

I want to give others the tools to rise above, and look upon from a higher level, what they do every day. What goals they pursue. What meaning they give to their work. I want to help them to climb out of their paradigmatic rut. I'm exploring what is, The Source and The Problem, in order to translate them into concepts that can help others think differently.