An 'Understanding' Filter

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English social word definitions are vague, as illustrated when debates and speeches lead to deep personal disappointments. For instance, in 2017, the U.S. Congressional debates on healthcare reform and the words of the U.S. President and his staff suggest that the odds of clarifying themselves through American social English are poor.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) word definitions are considerably more understandable worldwide. Furthermore, STEM uses real measurements, symbolic equations, and computer simulations in realizing the astounding technical accomplishments that occurred during the past 45 years. Unfortunately, some advances in technology have resembled a double-edged sword of productive and disruptive impacts on human societies. The internet's bountiful information access and cyber-warfare's disruptions of commerce are examples. Although STEM attempts to clarify and quantify real scientific values, we cannot assume that clear word definitions will guarantee human progress.

Communications can share and teach experiences. How we internalize an experience depends in part on what we were predisposed to learn. These predispositions act like filters, allowing the content(s) that we prefer to pass through for our conscious consideration while bypassing the rest. These communications and predispositions form our viewpoints, attitudes or perspectives.

Prior to finishing high school, most students' viewpoints haven't solidified beyond the point of being able to change perspectives based upon new learning methods. As an adult, it is more difficult to change our style of learning. Many adults form opinions without considering the validity of their thoughts because they have not learned how to search for accuracy, factuality, motives, and/or adverse side effects. Over-simplified learning narrows our awareness of both risks and opportunities just as surely as unnecessary complexity clutters our minds and hinders clear thinking.

Trust ordinarily eclipses understandings. As a constructive example: many people who use automobiles don't care to understand how most of their automobile's parts were realized. On the other side of the coin, unwarranted trust has been at the root of many people's hardships. The United States involvement in the Vietnam War and the 2nd Gulf War offers tragic & extremely expensive examples of misplaced trust in our officials & experts.

Frequently understandings are encapsulated in devices worthy of trust. Designers depend on Computer Aided Design (CAD) systems to aid them in working efficiently. Learning linear algebra without the tools to automate the computations is foolish since the automated solutions are reliable and affordable, whereas manual computation are usually neither reliable nor affordable.

While trust predominates, avoiding the harsh consequences which have resulted from misplaced trust is the compelling reason to train our ability to understand anything. For some people, curiosity is yet another motivator. When trust is in doubt or curiosity abounds, evaluate other people's viewpoints using the following 10 element 'understanding filter':

'Understanding' : JMS 2017.11.28
1. accounts for past Earthly experience &
2. clarifies present experience &
3. predicts future experience.

& Tries to:
4. grasp bounds
5. identify the motivating desire(s)
6. measure inputs and results
7. separate real and imaginary
8. encourage robustness
9. identify & mitigate sociopaths
10. inspect double downs & repeats.

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Not all of these elements are likely to be resolved for each viewpoint. Consider that most social lessons offer no means of measurement. One might ask, "Why not?" Most technical lessons have been amoral. Fairness hasn't been easily measured and hence hasn't been of much interest to technologists. Grasping bounds will remain open-ended because future reality will continue to deliver surprises which will modify our past experience.

A separate book could be written about each of the elements above. Ten introductions follow, suggesting a few among the many ways that each element might be used to shed further light on a given entity.

'Understanding' :
1. Accounts for past Earthly experience:
Learning from past experience is a great idea, but cannot be assured. When I was in public school in the 1950's and 1960's, significant historical events that occurred in American history had vanished from Maryland's textbooks. In contrast, U.S. History for Dummies by Steve Wiegand, 2001, ISBN 0-7645-5249-X and the historical documentaries of the last ten years presented on American public television are far more substantive. Likewise, the British seem intent on revealing some of the darker chapters of their past world leadership. YouTube offers a wealth of documentaries.

2. & Clarifies present experience:

Present work experience tends to be compartmentalized within professions, trades, organizational hierarchies, academic specialties, and hobby groups. Most skills are sets of contemporary experience, and on-the-job training is often a robust way to achieve full competency at the cutting edge of a skill. The considered opinions of experts in unusual fields can be freely accessed via YouTube, example *TED Talks*. The internet is improving communications within some special interest groups, and provides a way to advertise that group's expertise to a broader outside audience. Beautiful virtual travel experiences from around the globe have become ubiquitous on YouTube since the advent of small drones carrying 4k video cameras. While viewing these travel videos provides insights, they are not immersive experiences. Actually walking a mile in someone else's shoes provides immersive clarity. What constructive essentials can be deduced from present experience which will improve our common future?

3. & Predicts future experience:

The ability to predict outcomes separates understanding from reporting, speculating, & pretending. The predictive element of understanding yields efficiencies, whereby benefits can be achieved and catastrophes can be avoided without enduring the errors of trial and error. Finishing a project on specification, on budget, and on schedule fulfills three predictions simultaneously.

Elements four through ten of the understanding filter probe scope, intent, quantification, utility, quality, vandalism, and deception.

'Understanding' tries to:

4. Grasp bounds:

Paradigm shifts often change bounds. "I never thought of that!" reflects a previously unrecognized bound of an understanding. Also, just because "some is good" almost never implies that "more is better" to infinity. *Dimensions* are directions in which you can think or move. *Limits* are stop signs in a particular direction. "Thinking outside the box" (e.g. directions X, Y, and Z) expands limits in 3-D. Thinking in 4-D rather than 3-D (e.g. adding time) expands dimensions. *Bounds* take many forms which can include restricting dimensions and imposing limits. For example: in the social sphere, thinking of 'bounds' as defining 'the frontiers of personal tolerance' is insightful. Deciding what is 'us' and what is 'not us' deserves deep consideration in trying to understand and improve human affairs. For example, white supremacy's viewpoint is that white people are 'us', and non-white people are 'not us'. Another example of the consequences of ignoring limits is the confusion created when Congress disregards actuarial reality while debating healthcare. Novices who are unaware of known dimensions and limits invite adventures to be their companions. Just being alive makes a joke of considering bounds to be unnecessary, as our immune system is devoted to the 'bounds business' of neutralizing or destroying germs 24/7 or else one's health is failing. Systems limited in some ways may be more open to other new ways. Grasping bounds, dimensions, and limits is complex and open-ended; there's always something

beyond. The question: "What don't I know that I need to know?" suggests what to try to understand next.

5. Identify the motivating desire(s):

Caring about anything is based on desire; "rocks don't care" for lack of desire. Societies abound with competing viewpoints which are often driven by desire(s). Most viewpoints are expressed in incomplete ways. We might view the present political oppositions amongst many adult voters in the USA, as expressed by, 'my way or the highway' and reveals the depth of disagreements. Oppositions are strong forms of caring where some people's desire flaunts its destructive side ("I would rather fight than switch" attitude). The American Civil War (1861-1865) is a deeply tragic example of the inflexibility of competing adult desires. The present nuclear destruction threats from U.S.A. President Donald J. Trump and North Korean Dictator Kim Jung-Un reveal unpredictable political instability at the highest levels of governance. Selfish desires dominate both men's viewpoints. Desire frequently manifests itself in selfish ways, sometimes in cooperative ways, and in mixtures of the two. And desire can be morphed by cleverness. Millions of people have risked their lives and subsequently died supporting novel causes promoted by 'great speeches'. Ruling groups in human societies frequently point to nature's ceaseless life-and-death contests yielding "survival of the fittest", thereby inferring that their "fitness", rather than their selfishness, justifies their rule. As automated attack systems improve, human ruling groups will become less "fit" in their contests with autonomous lethal mechanisms. Perhaps succeeding generations of surviving rulers may desire and promote widespread social cooperation. Beware of great speeches that seldom emphasize or analyze possible adverse consequences of the rallying positions. Ask questions such as: "What desire(s) motivate the viewpoint?" and "Is the common good promoted by satisfying the desire(s)?"

6. Measure inputs and results:

Technology thrives on measurements. If you know how much (of something) is enough for you, then you can assess whether other people also have enough of the same thing. Enough may be subjective, but various versions of enough can be compared quantitatively. Having none of something that you don't want is enough. Food is real and you need enough to survive. Once we figure out what enough food is for us, we can quantitatively assess how much food other people have compared to our assessment of enough. Social balance might be defined as, 'everyone having enough of whatever'. However, addictions prevent addicts from defining what enough is and will then disrupt social balance. Many people thrive on money based bottom-line measurements and never seem to have enough. Quantifications will add clarity to social thought.

7. Separate real and imaginary:

World War I was a tragic example of three cousins not being able to get along: Russia's Czar, England's King, and Germany's Kaiser. Should this tiny family feud have led to millions of human deaths and extensive destruction in Europe? Of course not! Imagination has inspired much unnecessary human suffering. Redirecting imagination toward

constructive & happy pursuits and redirecting reality toward relieving human suffering could be an ordinary part of everyday common sense. For the purposes of this element, consider 'imaginary' to be those things that are replicated at no cost, or almost no cost. Much of human knowledge could now be imaginary, thanks to the advances in information technology since the early 1970's. For example, in the imaginary realm, there could be more than enough love for everyone. Now consider 'real' those things that require effort to replicate and/or perpetuate: food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, and pregnancy are examples. And skill is involved in making real things less expensive and more accessible. Deception can be involved in making both real and imaginary things more expensive and less accessible. An issue of this type is national healthcare.

8. Encourage robustness:

Robustness can be evaluated in lots of ways. A number of the words used in the design of products relate to robustness, and many of those words end in '-ility'. A few examples are affordability, reliability, maintainability, and survivability. Simplicity deserves honorary inclusion in the mix. The robustness of an idea relates to predicting the future benefits and costs over the lifetime of the idea. The periodical, Consumer Reports, has a great deal of information about the '–ilities' of consumer products. Meanwhile political speeches lack robustness, causing priorities to shift radically when we elect our next U.S. president. National governance based on a slowly evolving, transparent, and numerical model that is somewhat insulated from presidential politics, would provide a more stable basis on which citizens could plan their lives.

9. Identify & mitigate sociopaths:

In her remarkable book: The Sociopath Next Door (2005), Harvard Psychologist, Martha Stout, asserts that four percent of Americans have no conscience at all and are considered sociopaths. Such people actively seek ways to intentionally disrupt society for personal gain. Appealing to their consciences is a waste of time. In a second remarkable book: The 48 Laws of Power (1998), Joost Elffers and Robert Greene's provide a scholarly treatment of many ways that societies have been intentionally disrupted for personal gain over the last 3000 years. The bully on the bus is just the tip of the iceberg. Sociopaths and people who follow The 48 Laws of Power intentionally make other people's lives miserable in order to realize their own happiness. These are warped desires. If a person or an idea under consideration discourages shared self restraint, social cooperation, constructive human thought, peace, human well-being, individual security, personal integrity, or interpersonal love, then the behaviors of sociopaths are being further affirmed rather than mitigated. Sociopaths should never be allowed to have a position of power over others.

10. Inspect double downs & repeats:

A web search shows that "double down" has been written about for several decades. In September 2017, presidential advisor Steve Bannon raised public awareness of the idea of "doubling down" in political speeches in order to distract people and simultaneously to achieve desired outcomes. When the same ideas are being presented over and over again,

rather than teaching followed by testing & graduation, then question what is being taught. "What do I need to know to graduate?" & consider the merits of the answer using filter elements one-thru-nine. The enduring traditions of social groups are ideas that are taught to each succeeding generation. Does repetition across generations prove validity? Certainly the tradition of slavery is a counter-example. Consider whether vaguely defined social words are part of a double down and/or a repeat, as when the pressing need for loyalty is endlessly reasserted. The word loyalty is unbounded! 'Pivoting' is a contemporary political tactic for answering an arbitrary question with a double down refrain that has no relevance to the question. Double downs are at the core of brain washing. Advertisers often repeat their messages in ad campaigns. The people who sell information connectivity (e.g. 4G Smart Phones) endlessly repeat the idea that higher bandwidth communication is needed to satisfy social needs. Consider that in some circumstances communicating very well eliminates the need for ongoing communication. For instance, close friends may not communicate for years but still sense a close connection as though they were together yesterday. Being remembered positively by someone else for decades, with little or no communication, is an honor.

Human history would be comic if it weren't so tragic. Understanding has been problematic.

Appendix: Links to the papers in this series on World Peace:

"An 'Understanding' Filter"
  http://ftp.setterholm.com/WorldPeace/Understanding.pdf   This document

"Measuring Social Fairness"   Quantification of subjective concepts.
  http://ftp.setterholm.com/WorldPeace/MeasuringSocialFairness.pdf   ^

"Enduring Learning"   Avoiding unlearning.
  http://ftp.setterholm.com/WorldPeace/EnduringLearning.pdf   ^

"Wisdom's Deviant Anomalies"   Intellectual treacheries.
  http://ftp.setterholm.com/WorldPeace/WisdomsDA.pdf   2017

"Trust? –or- Bust?"   Perils of the status quo.
  http://ftp.setterholm.com/WorldPeace/TrustOrBust.pdf   2016

"Dysfunctional Interest Groups and Functional Interest Groups"
                              Deconstructions of competence.
  http://ftp.setterholm.com/WorldPeace/Digs&Figs.pdf   2015

"Learning Together in a Diverse World" A Philosophy of Philosophies / my meta-philosophy.
http://ftp.setterholm.com
Learning Together in a Diverse World.pdf   2004

The business-card-size summary of the understanding filter
  and the links listed above (on the back side of the card).
  http://ftp.setterholm.com/WorldPeace/Filter10.pdf   2017