The LCL Initiative – Meta-dimensional Ideas

'Generative of Life, built on Trust'

Besides the 'five leading causes' of life (see separate document 'mapping' them), other critical ideas permeate the LCL Framework. In fact, they underlie it; without them the entire Framework easily turns into an instrument only, a tool that can be made to fit any purpose rather than it being what is intended—a different, positively transformative way of seeing, thinking and acting. These underlying ideas, briefly introduced here, include an understanding of 'causation' that shuns any final certainty (which, as human creatures, we never possess), and an understanding of the human being whose 'life' we are talking about, grounded in: imagination and play, spirit, and *poeisis*.

We never see a 'cause'!

What enables one to say that there are 'five causes' of life? How do we know whether they really are causal rather than merely arbitrary assertions?

To understand this, we need to say something about causality in general. In our crudely empirical era in which we take appearances or phenomena to be the 'really real" and everything else to be speculation at best or ignorance and illusion at worst, it is often (wrongly) assumed that causes are established with certainty when we can 'objectively prove' that they necessarily and always give rise to particular effects. This works pretty well at some levels and, in fact, is essential to experimental method. But we can never be sure. Actually, not being sure we have the right hypothesis or theory is essential to science, in principle its rooting in inquiry and doubt rather than certainty and finality, the very motor of exploration and discovery. 'Hard' sciences must accept this permanent limit on theoretical reason into account or fail on the same grounds of dogmatism as do other kinds of human thought and thus fail their own aims.

More than this, though, it is to see that, strictly speaking, we never actually see a cause. We only ever see effects. We extrapolate from those effects to a hypothesized 'cause' and we must do so. We must *add to the phenomena we experience something that is not in the phenomena themselves but that comes from us!* This now leaves every 'cause' up for grabs again, ready to be reassessed, even overturned, when new insight emerges or new ideas of causation are proposed. We can test our hypotheses, of course, we can be very sophisticated about doing so, and we do gain understanding in doing so. Still, any causal claim remains dependent upon our senses (or their extension through tools and instruments), and our interpretations of what we perceive through them. We only have access in this indirect way to reality, as cosmologists, particle physicists and other cutting edge scientists have long acknowledged. Being aware of this allows us regularly to question and rethink what we take to

be causal, as new insights or evidence emerge that seem more persuasive or adequate. It might even mean accepting multiple, overlapping or indeterminate causalities (the most famous example being the wave/particle theory of light).

To attribute causality to anything, then, is to make our best attempt at understanding and interpreting the real, knowing that it always in part escapes us. That we add explanations—concepts—to what we experience in order to understand anything does not make it less real. The critical question is whether our specific understanding, any particular concept or set of concepts (theory), is persuasive or adequate to our accumulated knowledge and experience. This applies most obviously to our experience of nature and when we get it wrong it can and does bite back (we can imagine there to be no such thing as gravity, for example, and jump off a building to prove it, but we are likely to be disappointed, disastrously so).

But it applies equally to causes of human 'life' which, beyond our biology, includes the non-material, supersensible (*not* supernatural) dimension of ourselves that makes us human: our spirit and its spiritual expressions, we can say, our creative freedom that allows us to act in the world and towards ourselves and each other in ways that are not constrained by mere instinct or nature, in ways that are genuinely transformative of "what is" (the way things actually are) in order to make room for "what can or should be" (new possibilities that go beyond what is).

The five 'leading causes' of life of the LCL Framework will be judged accordingly. The suggestion here is that they do indeed offer a productive 'lens' on the real that is sufficiently complex yet conceptually elegant enough (even attractive), well suited to helping us meaningfully order our understanding of what generates life across a wide range of sciences and experiences and, in doing so, to helping us act transformatively for the sake of all. This is why the Five-Causes Framework, even if we can attach a variety of research tools or instruments to it, cannot be reduced merely to that narrow end.

Imagination and play

We might wonder about the power of human *imagination*—the representations by which we grasp our actually and envisage new possibilities—as a possible sixth 'cause' of life. Equally, we could think of *play* as another 'cause'—if play is understood as the investigative, experimental and free-ranging way in which we work at the world (beginning as an increasingly conscious child). Both imagination and play are clearly crucial to human being.

However, rather than seeing either as another discrete 'cause' that can be identified through particular effects, it seems more accurate to treat human imagination, and the play that feeds or expresses it, as basic to what it means to be human, and hence as intrinsic to all five 'causes' of life. Actually, what is really happening in imagination and play is that we are exploring various symbolic systems that we insert between what would otherwise be little more than a stimulus-response activity of the brain as a way of grasping, ordering and enhancing our experience of the phenomena (including ourselves and other people).

If imagination and play are indeed that fundamental—central to all five 'causes' of life—then it would imply that any serious diminishing of imagination or grave constriction of play (especially of the neonate or young and growing child) would negatively affect one's ability to

find coherence, establish connection, express agency, experience intergenerativity or project hope. Contemporary research in early childhood development supports exactly that realization. Here we touch indirectly upon something else that must be taken as central to the LCL Framework: the personal, social, material and environmental conditions that determine the extent to which the human imagination and play are either enhanced and encouraged, or restricted and damaged. Severe poverty, malnutrition, deprivation, isolation and the like—torture too—are affronts to life in general.

The notion of the 'leading causes of life' must then at bottom rest upon a basic set of needs that secure human functioning. These constitute the conditions of life. Correlatively, paying attention to what we mean by the 'causes' of life can then also be understood as one way of grasping what one might do to strengthen any struggle to secure the conditions of a *full* life. Here we find a congruent (but not identical) body of thought in Martha Nussbaum's work, with Amartya Sen, on human capabilities (see Appendix for a brief summary). The LCL Framework can help us understand what enhances and encourages that full set of capabilities.

Understanding the human spirit

Our imagination and its expression in play, as fundamental as they are, establish something further about our nature as sentient beings. We possess a reflexive and not merely symbolic capacity. We are able to invent new symbols, new concepts, new ways of seeing and acting. This, in turn, enables us to grasp that the actualities that govern our lives (whether of nature or of society)—actualities that do constrain us and that we cannot deny—nonetheless do not exhaust our ability to transcend them, to change the actual. We are able not only to see new possibilities, but also figure out how to bring them into being, *de novo*. An extraordinarily powerful (if ambiguous) *creative capacity*, it applies as much to the physical world (from making a digging tool to unleashing the power of the atom) as it does to the social world (from creating languages or music to ordering political and economic life).

We are thus imbued with what we might call the first principle of our nature as sentient beings—a *creative freedom* that nothing but death can constrain. It is the root of spirited existence. And it is a freedom, not a freedom of choice but freedom from having to act merely habitually, instinctively or deterministically. It is a freedom, because we have it and because we will use it (because we cannot not act on the basis of it), that requires us, in principle, to determine how we choose to use it—constructively oriented toward the life of all with moral intent, or destructively and manipulatively in service only of one's own life with evil intent. (It is worth noting here that our intent or choice is determining here; we can never be sure of the consequences of our actions, of course, some of which may turn out to be contrary to what we intended, which introduces another dimension of the human spirit—humility on the one hand, conceit on the other).

The LCL framework assumes the creative freedom as a necessary condition of human spirit (without denying the possibility of a divine or other spirit, which can only be assumed in faith through attestation and never as a matter of knowledge or proof).

Life's work as *poiesis*

The action or activity that we engage in when we are guided by the various 'leading causes of life' is a kind of work. We might even call it a life's work. It is serious work, and to the extent that we take it up, it not only enters into, but cuts across our organizational, institutional or formal frameworks of work. This is 'work' in a much deeper sense than the usual instrumental or purposive-rational definitions of work—the dominant understandings in our contemporary political and economic theories. It postulates actions and activities that express the power and delight of feeling one's life being called into being, and of being found useful. It encompasses a vision that is simultaneously radically hopeful and realistic in nature. A surprising number of people seek or give themselves to this kind of 'work.' Far more than what the word 'work' usually means, how may we describe it?

Finding no English word, we have turned to an ancient Greek term, *poiesis*. From the root of 'to make,' it is the same root from which we get 'poetry.' Originally a verb, it referred to the *action that transforms and continues the world*. Poiesis work is thus not just about technical production, or simply making something (Marx's *homo faber*). It's work that merges thought with matter and time, that links person with the world, that 'calls forth a new world.' The work involved in leveraging the 'causes of life,' as we see it, is poiesis work.

APPENDIX: THE CENTRAL HUMAN CAPABILITIES

[From Nussbaum, Martha C. "Adaptive Preferences and Women's Options." *Economics and Philosophy* 17, no. Symposium on Amartya Sen's Philosophy 5 (2001): 67-88. This essay is based on chapter 2 of Nussbaum, Martha C., and Jonathan Glover, eds. *Women, Culture, and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*: Oxford University Press, 1995.]

1. **Life**. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.

2. **Bodily Health**. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.

3. **Bodily Integrity**. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.

4. **Senses, Imagination, and Thought**. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason ± and to do these things in a `truly human' way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non- beneficial pain.

5. **Emotions**. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)

6. **Practical Reason**. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)

7. **Affiliation**.

A. Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)

B. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, and national origin.

8. **Other Species**. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. **Play**. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. **Control Over One's Environment**.

A. *Political*. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protection of free speech and association.

B. *Material*. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from un- warranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.