

Responding to the Global Megacrisis

Richard A. Slaughter
Foresight International
Australia

In a pluralistic world there's no single way to understand or describe the global megacrisis (GMC). That said, there are more and less productive ways of attempting to do so. Shopping lists of symptoms may be useful to the extent that they identify areas of concern and forewarn that various actions and responses may be necessary. But Einstein's insight that problems cannot be resolved on the level where they're first understood or described is often overlooked. In other words, while accurate problem description is a valid and useful first step, it is only that. A second step involves a meta-level overview and a third seeks to develop relevant responses with salience at a number of levels and in a variety of contexts.

Halal and Marien are to be congratulated for engaging in their public debate and for extending the conversation to others who've also considered the GMC in some depth. This may be the most significant conversation on the planet today. The crisis has not sprung upon us out of the blue - it's been steadily emerging for some decades. During this time many observations and warnings about the planetary condition have been offered yet most have been ignored. We've simply not been paying attention, which is one way of identifying an underlying cause - the mismatch between interior and exterior development. The GMC is indissolubly bound up with these human and cultural factors.

What I find interesting is that it is these very factors that have thus far been widely overlooked. Halal places way too much confidence in the ability of 'technology' to move things forward. I agree with Marien that he is wildly over optimistic about this. 'Technology' is not just 'stuff', it emerges from complex social processes and is ever and always ambiguous. It is a double-edged sword that takes away even as it purports to give. So it's a fallacy to expect 'technology' in any shape or form to help us resolve the GMC other than in marginal ways. So I find Marien's broader and generally downbeat view more in tune with my own.

Where I differ from both is that I believe that there are capabilities within individuals and cultures that have thus far hardly figured in such debates. This can be seen by considering the drivers of the GMC along with the far fewer 'resolvers' in Figure One. What this reveals is similar to the pattern I found when surveying the literature on global warming. That is, most attention is given to Lower Right (LR) phenomena, i.e. the familiar collective exterior world.¹ Less attention is paid to the Lower Left (LL) domain, i.e. the interiors of collective cultures. No attention is paid at all to the Upper Left (UL), or individual interiors nor, interestingly, to the Upper Right (UR) of individual action. Hence the debate seems structurally, albeit unconsciously, biased.

The four-quadrant model of an Integral perspective appears to provide a more coherent and systematic framework for coming to terms with the GMC. There are several reasons for this. First, it draws attention to the interior development of individuals and of cultures and reveals the shaping power of each.² Second, it balances inner / outer and individual / collective factors. Third, it is an objective framework that is not culture specific and does not tell anyone what to think.

In my own recent book on the GMC I set aside most of the current futures-related literature and drew much more widely on material that deals with phenomena across all four of these domains. In doing this I assembled a broader and more coherent picture both of the GMC itself and of what I call 'proto solutions' shown in Figure Two.³ These are 'solutions in embryo,' as it were, that can be expanded, re-defined, re-interpreted etc. in unlimited ways in different cultures and environments. Since no 'one size fits all,' this inherent flexibility is vital.

What I think emerges from this brief overview is a clearer picture of where concerned individuals, groups and organisations need to re-direct their attention. Solutions to the GMC will not emerge from new technology and associated infrastructures, no matter how 'green' they may be. They will begin to emerge when people look more honestly and clearly upon their own interior selves and understand that the most potent source of innovation and 'progress' is within agents of knowing themselves. It is in fact the very sense of self in all its complexity and potential depth that determines what capacities are brought to bear on the GMC – and hence the resolutions that can emerge.⁴ The cultural environment in which newly aware selves emerge into and operate within also dictate how well or poorly these capacities are nurtured, whether they are fully developed or extinguished.

If there's one central 'message' it's that we cannot hope to make headway with the GMC if we only address one, two or even three of these domains. We have to deal with all of them, as well as the many interactions between them. What this amounts to is a profound re-balancing of our efforts and our attention that, in turn, has real consequences. As this and similar perspectives gain ground we can expect, for example, that views of futures will no longer be dominated by hardware of various kinds but, rather, that the latter will be seen in their human and social contexts. Similarly, we can expect to see an upsurge of mainstream social investments in social innovations of all kinds. For example we require a new generation of Institutions of Foresight (IOFs) funded from the public purse and staffed by a new generation of highly trained and integrally informed practitioners. I can think of few more productive investments that humanity can make in its own long-term wellbeing.

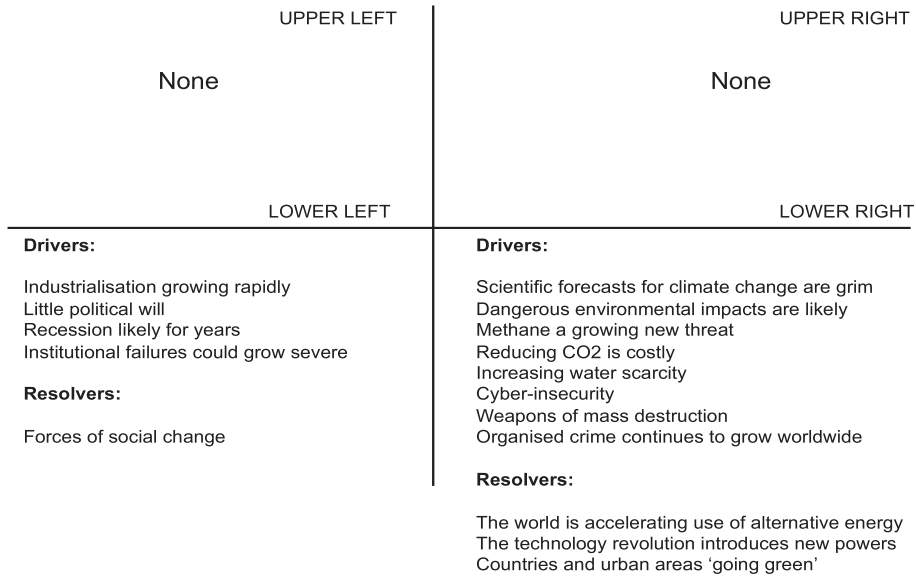


Figure 1. Overview of Driver and 'Resolver' Domains

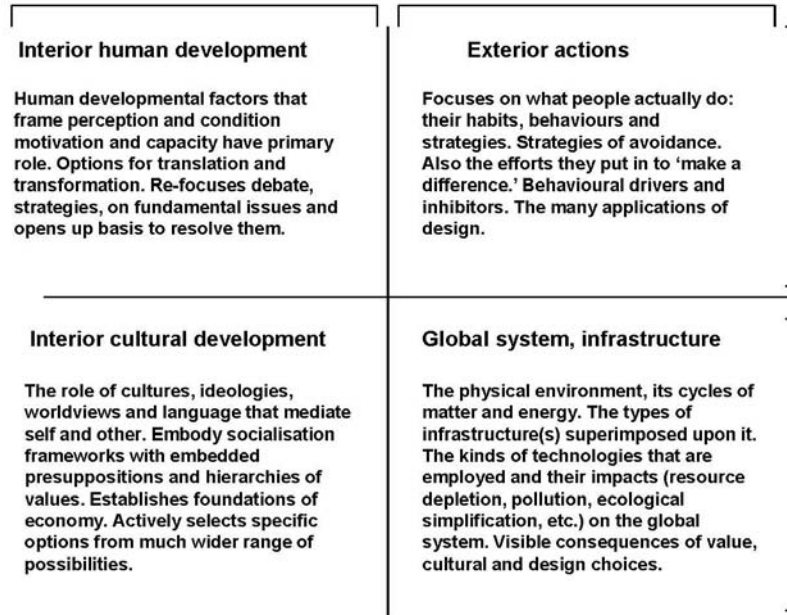


Figure 2. Domains of generic responses

Source: R. Slaughter, The Biggest Wake Up Call in History, Foresight International, 2010, p.153.

Correspondence

Richard A. Slaughter
PO Box 793, Indooroopilly, Queensland 4068, Australia.
Email: rslaughter@ozemail.com.au
Weblog: <http://www.richardslaughter.com.au>
Website: <http://www.foresightinternational.com.au>

Notes

1. Much futures work in the US has been stranded here for as long as I can remember - which is why it tends to 'skim the surface' of social reality.
2. Wilber, K. *Integral Psychology*, Boston, Shambhala, 2000.
3. Slaughter, *The Biggest Wake Up Call in History*, Brisbane, Foresight International, 2010, p.153.
4. The emphasis here is not only on cognitive development but also a wider range of factors including: values, self-sense, moral reasoning, worldview etc. See R. Slaughter, 2010, *Ibid*, pp.172-9 for examples of individuals who exhibit some of these qualities along with their real-world consequences.