

World's Most Important Problem
by Elliot Temple, Feb 2020

First candidate: **aging**. Kills a ton of people.

What makes aging a hard problem?

Second candidate: **Environmentalism** (including worries about pollution, overpopulation and resource scarcity), is wrong and threatens to spend 16 trillion dollars destroying wealth and to have men with guns enforce new laws to prevent tons of production, wealth creation, etc.

Third candidate: **socialism/communism/Marxism**.

This is a matter of ideas and thinking.

Fourth candidate: **social justice**, postmodernism, antifa, LGBTQ activism, etc.

This is about ideas again.

Fifth candidate: **Islam**.

Islam is ideas.

Sixth candidate: **War, crime and violence**.

We could talk about methods of preventing crime, catching criminals, or how to do peace talks and diplomacy better. But, again, if people were way better at thinking it'd dramatically improve this problem. Choosing crime is broadly unwise.

There can be circumstances where crime is wise, e.g. some crimes under tyranny. If the government is bad enough, that involves thinking errors by the law-makers. There's bad thinking involved somewhere.

Seventh candidate: Inventing **AGI**. Or preventing AGI or some other technological singularity kinda thing from destroying civilization.

This is about creating good ideas, both about AGI/science/tech/etc. as well as about its potential dangers and what to do about them.

Eighth candidate: Meteor, plague, nuclear war or other mass death event.

We could do some stuff about this but it'd be much more effective and efficient if people had better ideas.

Ninth candidate: Poverty or inequality.

People need better ideas to understand what is and isn't a problem, why, the causes of the problems, appropriate solutions, etc. The reason this stuff is stuck currently in some ways (though poverty has actually been dramatically improving) is because people disagree about these topics. People need better ways of resolving disagreements and finding the truth.

The problem here is bad thinking more directly than with aging. So it leads to the same issues again.

2. People are bad at thinking.

What are the causes of this?

Bad parenting, education, schools.

Static memes.

Second-handedness and focusing on social dynamics over objective reality.

The extent is approximately everyone.

What sort of solutions could we work on?

1. Treating kids better so we don't break them so much.

2. A way to improve the thinking of adults who've already been harmed.

3. Philosophy articles spreading better ideas about epistemology. E.g. stuff about the myths of induction, justification, and strong arguments, and the use of decisive criticism.

4. Philosophy articles about thinking, discussing and living methods. E.g. stuff about overreaching, Paths Forward, impasse chains, and the problem solving method: "Given we disagree about X, how can we proceed?"

5. Educational materials to teach people the basics better and replace their confusions with clear knowledge. E.g. articles about grammar, logical thinking, grouping, arithmetic, basic economics, basic science, brainstorming, outlining, using notes, etc.

1. Human biology/metabolism/etc. is really complicated.

This problem is compatible with a direct approach. Work on aging. Done. But there's a problem which makes this harder.

This problem gets in the way of a direct approach. It's a reason the direct approach will be much less effective until after this is dealt with.

Could we just get 1,000 really smart people who are good at thinking and have them work on aging?

No because the problem is more severe than that. There aren't 1,000 people who know how to think well. There are major errors about who to think which are standard ideas in our culture, which smart people think are good and rational, which are actually disasters.