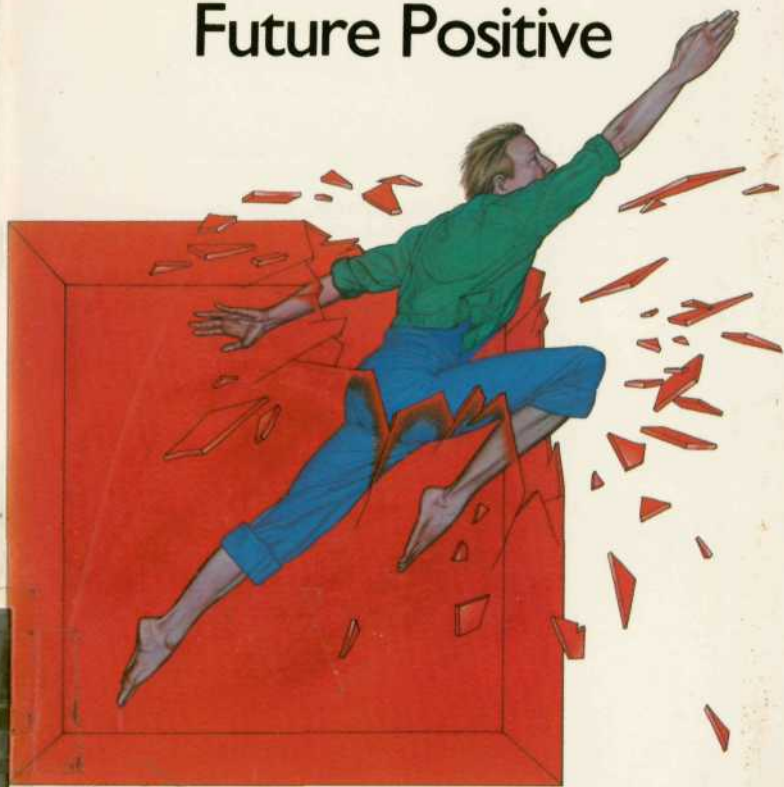


# EDWARD DE BONO

Future Positive



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# Summary

In this summary I shall try to crystallise the theme of the book. I shall do this by separating out the basic points so that each can get the attention it needs. There is, however, a considerable degree of overlap. We might start by looking at the three basic points.

- 1 The quality of life in the future will depend on the quality of our thinking.

To me this seems inescapable. Circumstances and natural events will modify the hopes of our thinking and at times over-ride them completely – but in the end we have nothing else to depend upon. If we do not do our thinking, then drift will do it for us. The question then arises: are we happy with the state of our thinking? I have suggested that we ought not to be, for our habits and style of thinking are largely derived from the disputations of medieval monks. Within the framework of the accepted idiom, there is a great deal of skill and brilliance. But in order to have a positive future we may need to develop a more positive idiom. I am not suggesting that there is an attractive alternative ready for adoption. But I am suggesting that we need to take a cool and objective look at the dangers of the thinking style we never dare challenge.

- 2 What happens to an organism that evolves characteristics that make further evolution impossible?

Society is an organism that evolves in order to cope with a changing world – even if many of these changes are brought about by its own efforts. If you set a house on fire you have to react to the flames even though you are responsible for them. Nor is it possible to suppose that if we do nothing at all the world will achieve a level of stability.

Many of our institutions have evolved to the point where they may – through no fault of their own – impede further evolution. The same applies to concepts which are but institutions of the mind.

- 3 Provided our hearts are in the right place, will intelligence, good-will and problem-solving skills be enough?

We have – or could pretend we have – an abundance of these attributes so why should we not tackle the future as it arrives, problem by problem? The many reasons why this traditional approach may not work are listed as separate points elsewhere in this summary. In general, problem-solving, like fault-correcting, cannot provide a new design but just a patched-up old one.

The three basic points have been given above. We can now look at the various problems that can hinder our evolution towards a positive future.

- 4 There are no villains and no stupid people: there are highly intelligent people acting sensibly within their own logic-bubbles.

I am aware that this is an exaggeration but I have tried, throughout the book, to regard as an axiom the claim that there are no villains or stupid people. It is only too easy to blame problems on villainy or lack of intelligence. That then becomes an exercise in blame and exhortation. Instead, I

believe we can explain many of the problems in terms of intelligent people acting intelligently according to the logic of the circumstances in which they find themselves. Collectively the result may be a disaster but an individual improvement in intelligence will not make things better so blame is pointless. To simplify this problem I have introduced the notation of the 'logic-bubble' which covers the total set of perceptions that dictate the logic of the moment. In large part the 'bubble' will be created by the rules of the structure within which the actor is placed. Most often people are locked in by structures and act sensibly within them. That is why we get such paradoxes as Catch-22, Catch-23 and Catch-24. It is clear (Catch-23) that something may need doing but that it never makes sense to do it at any particular moment.

- 5 It is not the destination that matters but the very next step that has to be taken.

Much of our utopian thinking is concerned with ultimate destinations. Yet there is no hope of reaching these destinations if the next step is impossible or unacceptable. To provide this obvious concept with the attention it merits I have coined the term 'the edge effect'. It is at the edge of action that we must focus our thinking, not on an ideal assembly of abstract notions that make up the architecture of a dream.

- 6 Can we afford to rely upon evolution through drift and crisis management or through the use of general 'compass' directions?

We can throw up our hands at the complexity of the future and just manage each crisis and hope to muddle through in the end – like a bridge player who survives his bad hands and hopes for better cards to be dealt. We may feel that complexity denies us any alternative since a planned future would be even more dangerous. In practice we tend to do a

little better than mere drift. We establish certain guiding principles as 'compass' directions and at every decision point we choose the right compass direction. This is sensible strategy but I have tried to show at the beginning of the book why it can be dangerous. There may be times when we might have to turn 'South' in order to be able to continue our journey 'North'. Are we prepared to turn away from some general principles, in order eventually to enjoy them more fully? In a democratic system with a short time-scale is it possible to take an action which has an initial negative phase? Or does political expediency make this forever impossible?

- 7 Powerful battle-cries are not necessarily effective operating principles.

Battle-cries sometimes provide the 'compass' directions mentioned above. A battle-cry or a slogan may be useful to highlight a grievance or to give a direction, but as an operating principle it may not be effective. A compass will indicate the North but a bicycle is more useful for getting there. We are good at guiding principles for protest but far less good at guiding principles for action. Very often in the evolution of society we are forced to use battle-cries as slogans and then we get confused when we try to use them as operating principles. We need to be rather more clear about the distinction.

- 8 Whichever way we look at it there remains an appallingly negative bias to our thinking style.

There are a lot of practical and historical reasons for this and I have considered them in detail in the book. The more one looks into it the more extraordinary does the phenomenon appear. I believe it to be derived directly from the thinking style used in medieval theological disputes to crush heresies on an intellectual level. That style came to dominate our educational establishments and so dictated the

idiom we still use. We often tend to forget its peculiar nature and to suppose it to be the only thinking style possible. We acclaim the critical intelligence and propose it as the ultimate aim of education. We operate the adversary system whenever we can and admire debating skills and dialectical argument. There are many practical reasons for this negative bias: to be destructive is easier and more immediately satisfying than to be constructive; destruction is itself immune from further attack. Protest can be highly effective and society needs the conscience role that protest offers. Yet somehow we have to accept that constructive and creative ideas need to emerge from somewhere. It is no use pruning if we are unable to plant. The real tragedy is that many brilliant minds trained to this idiom of negativity might have been just as brilliant – and far more useful to society – if they had been encouraged in a more positive idiom. We falsely believe that negative-design is enough: that is to say the improvement of a design by correcting the faults and dealing with the inadequacies. But we also need positive-design and that includes changing the basic concept, not just trimming the existing one.

- 9 The problem of complacency: how can you be convinced the present idea is not good enough if you cannot conceive of there being any alternative?

Man has a right to be smug and satisfied with his progress. Yet compared to the potential that technology has provided I feel that our progress is not much to be happy about. Complacency is a problem that arises directly from our negative style of thinking. You must prove that something is wrong before you earn the right to think of an alternative. But quite often something is good – but not good enough. With the negative style that is the end of thinking, for a successfully defended concept is thought to exclude any better alternative. With a more positive style of thinking we might be able to acknowledge the excellence of what is –

and still set out to think about improvement or change. If we do not set out to think up a new concept in the first place how can we find the concept that will show that it was worth setting out to find an alternative?

- 10 Many an institution in any evolved society has become an end unto itself and no longer contributes to society.

It is not enough that an institution should satisfy its own criteria of excellence. Philosophy, art, literature, education and the universities have all evolved their own framework of justification and they seek to play the rules as they have written them and to congratulate themselves on a success they have defined for themselves. Whether this definition of success has any relevance to society at large is another matter. When something becomes an end unto itself it can become a parasite on society for it absorbs money and the most brilliant minds but provides nothing in return. The players enjoy the game for its own sake. Like a spinning star the body whirls forever around its own axis. Rather too much of the productive talent of society is locked up in such bodies that have become ends unto themselves. Witness the lack of impact that the many university departments of philosophy have on ordinary life. It is high time that art, literature and philosophy came back into the main stream of life.

- 11 What is urgent will always take precedence over what is important.

There are always so many urgent things to do and so many urgent problems to be solved that there is never any time to consider matters that may be important. This is a particular instance of *Catch-23*. The problem also arises from our emphasis on 'reactive-thinking' rather than 'projective-thinking'. We train ourselves to react to problems, to collect information and then to react to this. We are more comfortable reacting than projecting our minds forwards to create

and construct. We are problem solvers rather than opportunity seekers. This tendency is especially dangerous since so many of our institutions, such as management training schools, see their role as the development of problem-solving skills.

It may seem strange that part of the book should be concerned with 'attacking' our negative habits of mind for that very 'attack' must itself seem an exercise of what is being attacked. Yet my intention is not to attack but to illuminate. I think we should become aware of those habits of mind that we take for granted. I think we should become aware of the restrictions we place upon ourselves. I think we should be made aware of complacency. All these things have a value and a place in society and it would be absurd to 'attack' them. Critical assessment is invaluable in order to prevent us making fools of ourselves. My point is that these habits have come to dominate our thinking to the exclusion of everything else and that is a danger – and dangers need pointing out. In continuing the summary we can look at some of the more positive points.

## 12 An organisation revolution is going to succeed the industrial revolution.

We cannot cope with complexity by hoping that it will go away of its own accord. The world is inevitably going to get more complex as we become able to do more, need more and want more. For example the suggestion of alternative life-styles and alternative work patterns will greatly increase complexity. The only answer to complexity is organisation. The computer has come only just in time to provide us with the perfect means of dealing with complexity. So the organisational revolution can get under way. The trouble is that most people are terrified of the idea of organisation because we perceive a direct clash between organisation and freedom. This is a nonsense that must be

tackled directly. There are different sorts of organisation: some are indeed restricting but others are freedom enhancing (for example the airline computer system that allows you to switch routes in a matter of seconds). Anarchy is only freedom for predators. We must take immense care that organisation should be used to simplify life and make people more free rather than the other way round. We must take immense care that the computer is not used just to make possible complicated schemes that restrict freedom. We must take care to see that the potential of the computer is used to simplify life. We must get this concept of organisation very clear because our future is going to depend upon it.

### 13 The concept of 'nodes' and 'nodalism'.

The tone of this book has been against 'big government' but in favour of organisation. I have therefore put forward the concept of 'nodalism' in order to provide a concrete suggestion as to how it is possible to be against central government but for organisation. I have not gone into detail as to how the concept might work and it could be worked up in much greater detail. Nodalism is a sort of 'functional tribalism'. People are connected together not by geography but by their desire to have organised for them the basic framework of life so that they can be more free. The organising node is a slave – not a master. A node would be a sort of computer 'village', for the computer would provide the organising framework. Around the node develops a community that can share and organise; assess its own priorities and make its own decisions. Alternative life styles and work patterns would fit naturally into the framework. Eventually the nodes would become alternative mini-governments and a person might switch his allegiance from one to another depending on his needs and life style. He would 'vote' with his feet. The implications of the concept are extensive. The technology is to hand.

- 14 There are many areas in which we need to develop new concepts.

In this book I have not wished to offer 'gee-whiz' concepts for the future. I am aware of the Catch-22 effect of creativity: 'If the concepts are way-out they will be acclaimed as creative but condemned as impractical: if the concepts are practical then they will be condemned as ordinary and non-creative.' I do not think there are any concepts – however wonderful – which we could accept as blue-prints for the future, because we would have no way of assessing their worth. I have, however, put forward a number of concepts: the 'trinity' concept for industrial organisation; the concept of 'profit per head'; the concept of 'unowned capital'; the non-market-labour (NML) concept; the concept of the 'timid currency'; the 'tandem economy'; the segmentation of crime as 'social pollution' rather than sin; and the 'New Programme' curriculum for schools – among others. The purpose of these suggestions is to show that it is possible to change some of our accepted concepts. Some of the concepts may have merit if developed further. Others may serve only as a provocation.

- 15 We ought formally to acknowledge the role of provocation in thinking.

This is difficult within the framework of our traditional thinking idiom. In many of my other books I have dealt at length with the role of provocation in creativity. There is no mystique about it. In a patterning system provocation is perfectly logical. In this book I have repeated the 'po' concept and I have also suggested – for the first time – a punctuation device that could facilitate the entry of provocation into written language. Most people are aware of the value of provocation in the development of new ideas – for how else are we to step outside the established frameworks? – but we are hesitant about formal recognition of this necessary part of constructive thinking. If we are

going to give more emphasis to this aspect of thinking we are going to need to develop the basic concepts. For example instead of immediately rejecting an offered idea I would like to see a listener capable of treating it as a provocation that might lead to a further idea. Creativity is not a mystical gift but the willingness to explore provocations forward until they begin to make sense. Provocation is as basic as analysis.

- 16 In general we need to pay a lot more attention to the development of thinking skills.

For too long have we tended to regard thinking as 'intelligence in operation'. Yet intelligence alone does not ensure effective thinking skills and in some cases (the 'intelligence trap') it may even be counter-productive. We tend to emphasise cleverness rather than wisdom. We tend to emphasise logical processing rather than perceptual breadth. We tend to emphasise reactive thinking rather than projective thinking. At several points I have mentioned the on-going programme that has been developed for use in the school curriculum to counter these tendencies and to give some direct attention to thinking. At the very least I believe that we ought to pay as much attention to practical thinking skills as to philosophy. We should regard thinking as a skill that can be developed and a tool that can be applied in a deliberate manner.

- 17 We need to be specific about providing mechanisms for change.

It is unreasonable to expect an executive to risk damaging his established operations by diverting part of his budget to trying something new. He needs a discretionary budget with which to experiment. It is unreasonable to expect those within an institution to encourage activities which run counter to the establishment of that institution. There is a need for by-passes. It is unreasonable to expect a manager to be an entrepreneur. We need to foster entrepreneurial

effort, not just leave it to fight its way through. We need to nurse new ideas and let them develop to the stage where their potential can be assessed. We need to develop test-beds for ideas, for otherwise an idea can only be judged within the existing framework of experience and its potential will be missed if it is the sort of idea that changes frameworks. We need to encourage plurality, options and choices rather than seek to standardise development. Above all we need to dispel the myth that there is enough creative constructive effort around and that a good idea will have its due effect.

- 18 We need to develop new concepts: some brand new and some just slightly different.

The killer phrase in creativity is 'the same as . . .' for the novelty in a new idea can be forgotten as the similarity with an old idea is commented upon. Do we concentrate on the 80 per cent that is similar or the 20 per cent that is different? Sometimes it is necessary to shift a concept slightly in order to allow our minds to develop new lines of thought. For example the concept of 'earned freedom' is only slightly different from that of ordinary freedom, but the implications are very different. When we shift a concept we often need to 'freeze' this shift with a new term, otherwise we cannot hold it. Similarly we may need to give a term to a collection of notions that each exist separately. For example there is nothing new in the idea of the three parallel goods: good for me; good for society; good for tomorrow. But the development of a concept like 'bonism' allows the package to be carried around instead of assembled each time. There is always the danger of developing jargon for the sake of jargon but sometimes we need new expressions. In fact we never need a new expression in order to *describe* something for that can usually be done by a combination of old expressions. But in order to use thought as an *operating* system we may need new expressions.

19 In the end mood is more important than anything else.

Does mood arise from circumstance, from habit or from an ideological framework? Which is preferable: ambition and striving or adjustment and contentment? There are no easy answers. We know that purpose, achievement, framework and self-image are important. We know how to make people miserable but are not convinced that people know how to make themselves happy. I have dealt at length with this problem of mood and happiness in a previous book (*The Happiness Purpose*) and so I have not thought it necessary to repeat that material in this book. The danger of the 'chemical' mood that might be induced by TV or by the complexity of society needs careful study. Operating moods such as the 'jungle mood' or the 'nursery mood' are easily changeable depending on such things as media and pop culture.

20 Education has a major role to play in the development of a positive future.

There are no villains in education. Instead there is a locked-in system that has evolved to satisfy its own requirements. The edge effect is so strong that change of any sort is difficult. Moreover, how can it ever be shown that change will be better than the existing state of affairs? So the problems are immense. I do not think there is much hope of changing the whole system at one time. I think there is a need for alternative tracks. I also think there is a great need for attention to such controlling points as university entrance examinations which dominate the school curriculum. In the future I think the academic side of education is going to be much less important than the people-developing side. I would not expect the necessary changes in education to come from within the system – not through lack of talent but because anyone within the system is locked in to the system as it exists.

21 Can we develop a positive attitude towards a positive future?

This whole book is based on the belief that we can. We may need to overcome the restrictions of some of our more enjoyable negative habits. We may need to throw out some traditional concepts and re-stock with some more suitable ones. We may need to pay much more attention to the structures within which people are locked. In addition to a general positive attitude we can develop some specific positive concepts like plurality, simplicity, effectiveness, organisation and even discipline. Instead of fatalism, pessimism and optimism, a positive attitude suggests that man is master of his fate – not because he has found a new ideology but because he is prepared to work positively towards a positive future. There is a lot of talent and energy available.