

On Profits and Prizes

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The following submission follows the form of an essay, but could just as easily be classified as a manifesto or a therapeutic exercise. And not so different from a Jazz musician's improvisational performance, it is the author's current expression of thought in constant flux, but returning again and again to a constant theme. There has been little, if any, conscious attempt at style, and communicative responsibility has been left largely in the hands of the reader. This submission is a modest first attempt to integrate art, science, religion, education, and morality into a single vision with little attempt to document evidence or justify assumptions. As such, the reader, if so inclined, is invited to read this as a bit of intellectual entertainment or as a personal challenge.

Boot Strapping ... On Profits and Prizes

A recent television news commentator (November, 2008) said that the Nobel Prizes awarded to Japanese physicists are a validation of the current educational system in Japan, and therefore prove that Japanese scientists can compete at the same level as scientists from Western countries. In a competitive consumer society, I should not have been shocked to hear this attitude about the Nobel Prize. Why shouldn't personal ambition be considered a motivation to excel in the sciences, arts, and humanities just like any other sports event or business enterprise? After all, Yoga has recently been 'elevated' to the competitive level, and there is even a group lobbying to have yoga admitted as an Olympic event. It doesn't take much of a slippery slope to imagine competitive fasting, competitive prayer, or competitive humility. Any institution, organization, socio-cultural framework, or tool can be constructed, appropriated, OR co-opted, to serve a competitive purpose.

After a recent, indiscriminant rampage in Akihabara that left several people dead, there was a swift reaction to place a ban on the sale of the type of double-edged survival knife that was used in

the attack. A myriad of reasons could be cited as to why such seemingly unwarranted attention was paid to proximal causes rather than ultimate causes. It was easier than taking decisive action aimed at adjusting the social and cultural institutions that contributed to the dysfunctionality of the individual who was responsible for the random attack. One could cite the need of politicians, government bureaucrats, and law enforcement officers to reassure the public, to reinforce the face-validity of their own jobs, to displace the collective angst unto a conveniently concrete hook on which to hang blame. But such justifications for remedies that have little effect on preventing further random killings is more likely to reflect the current state of education among the citizenry.

The social, economic, and environmental problems that are the focus of University research are increasingly recognized as solvable only through interdisciplinary approaches. But to draw seemingly disparate academic fields together to solve practical problems, one must begin with a seemingly impractical foundation built from those areas of thought normally associated with philosophy. It is almost embarrassing to acknowledge that even within a university academic community, recent experience compels me to explicitly point out that the ‘philosophy’ I am speaking of is not some obscure domain of an academic specialist, but rather the quality of analytic and integrative thinking that should be assumed of anyone in an academic community, or for that matter, anyone who aspires to authenticity.

And so I begin with the lowest common denominator of life, in Latin, *conatus*, the instinctual drive for existence. Any life form must establish, protect, and expand its resources in order to genetically perpetuate itself. Available resources are not infinite, not even sunlight, as anyone familiar with the ecology of plant competition for sunlight could attest. An influential human perspective on this drive is ‘personal success’ at the expense of the ‘other’. Indeed, this assumption is the basis for the laissez-faire, free market economy that currently appears to be on the verge of collapse. For the purpose of this paper, ‘other’ refers to anything (or anyone) outside of the traditional notions of a biologically distinct ‘self’, rivals for example, or outside of an identity defined by an in-group, often expressed as a stereotype. Similarly, a naïve approach to science assumes that anything that can be analyzed and is independent of whoever is doing the analyzing — the assumption of a Cartesian duality — is fundamentally true, fair, and objective. With this essay, I hope to have returned to a broader range of contexts that will reveal this assumption of a ‘self-other’ distinction as both inappropriate and inadequate to serve as a foundation for an educational community.

Returning to the purpose of this innate drive to life, the default assumption of success is popularly described in terms of the imperative to win the ‘zero sum game’, This term is borrowed from game theory, and more specifically, from the competitive models in which the gains of one must be balanced by the losses of the other so that the sum total of zero never changes. Although it is the easiest to understand of the models, it is by no means the only model.

For example, using the metaphors of Einstein’s physics, we could say that matter and energy are interchangeable forms of the same *conatus*, and so at this level of organization, there is no clear point

where matter ends and energy begins, no fundamentally separate 'self' or 'other' aside from where we choose to make the distinctions.

Time and again, the debate will arise between those who say we 'choose' and those who say we 'discover' the fundamental patterns, for example, as was seen in the debate between Albert Einstein and Max Born. But there are others, including myself, who sidestep the argument altogether by seeing emergent process as fundamental, and any forms, including distinctions between 'self' and 'other', as being merely provisional. By extension, a world of 'winners' and 'losers' is valid only if we assume the boundaries between self and other are fundamental. Even a passing exposure to theoretical physics is enough to show us that the atom is not a fundamentally real 'thing'. The researchers and theoreticians responsible for the concept would be the first to point out that the atom is a mathematical metaphor for complex emergent phenomenon. No doubt, future physicists will reveal that the quark is not 'the' fundamental particle any more than the atom was. The awareness that any 'thing' or 'pattern' that can be formalized cannot be ultimately fundamental is not a result of innovative progress through modern science. This awareness itself is an emergent, intuitive consciousness expressed through any number of arts and cultural institutions since the beginning of history. Various traditional 'mystic' religions have long since reached the same conclusions, for example, the ego-busting traditions of Buddhism through Zen, and Islam through the Sufis.

From another moral perspective, both at the macro level of organization such as might be found in an ecosystem and at the micro level of subcellular processes, other non-competitive metaphors from game theory and information systems, such as 'maximin', can be shown to be equally valid. Maximin can be described as looking at profit and loss in terms of maximizing the gains of the weakest member. Another way of looking at this alternative metaphor to competition would be through the 'bottleneck' of engineering problems in which the viability of a system depends on its weakest link. Zero-sum is the moral priority only for those who stand to benefit from the Social Darwinist views described by Ayn Rand's philosophy of selfishness, which in turn, assumes a never ending competition between fundamentally distinctive and forever separate 'others' ... the war of all against all.

Most social primates, like many other social animals, appear to have evolved as a default pattern of social behavior, a triangular hierarchy of social organization as a way of optimizing the sustainability of the group. In chimpanzees, for example, the most dominant individual in the group, usually the most robust male, occupies the apex of the triangle, although bonobos, of equal genetic distance to humans, are different in that groups of females dominate the larger males. Among humans, Social Darwinism, the previously mentioned philosophy of selfishness, assumes that dominance within the group is based on a competitive model of group behavior, which most resembles the behavior patterns of chimpanzees.

'Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny' is a concept stating that the biological growth of the individual often mirrors the evolutionary development of the species, a biological equivalent of

fractal geometries. For example, at some stages of fetal development, humans physically resemble present day fish or pigs, descendants of earlier evolutionary stages leading to primates. Similarly, some behavior patterns can be seen from this perspective, for example, the barking cry of present day domestic dogs resembles that of young wolf pups, but not adult wolves. An extrapolation of this idea can be seen in the proportionally large heads and underdeveloped limbs and torsos of the highly evolved aliens as portrayed in the popular imagination through cinema. It is now largely dismissed by the scientific community because of its association with the disproven Lamarckian theory of evolution (inheritance of acquired characteristics). But even more damning was its overuse by the more literal minded people. Although I have neither the interest nor need to restore this concept to its 19th century status, I think the concept is useful in this case for describing group behavior of a general nature. In the following paragraphs, I would like to argue that although a pyramid shaped hierarchy of power may be our default pattern of social organization, it is an emergent phenomenon, and is most effective only at immature stages of personal and societal development. This simple pattern of social organization, and its realization through such paradigms as an unregulated free market economy, is perpetuated only through a sustained state of immaturity, and is insufficient to deal with the multidisciplinary problems that face a modern, multicultural world.

I will not attempt to defend my assumption that humans are genetically predisposed to a pyramid structure of social organization for two reasons. First of all, the recently emerging biological paradigm expressed by writers such as Steven Pinker point to such dynamic and subtle connections between genetic influences and cultural expressions of those influences as to make any attempt to defend this correlation far beyond the scope of even a life of research, much less this essay. And secondly, my priority is to identify and solve practical problems in education of a more immediate nature. Even though wide disagreement over the source of a problem is natural, it is also natural for a greater degree of agreement and cooperation when faced with the proximate, damaging consequences of those connections. For the sake of expediency in solving more imminent problems, I will assume the pyramid shaped hierarchy of social organization is real, it is a phenomenon common to all humans, and it must be adapted, abandoned, or transcended if humanity is to sustain itself. Some of these limits are only briefly stated here.

(1) First of all, as a foil against any logical construct as being mistaken as fundamental, rather than a provisional expression of dynamically evolving processes, the limits of language and logic have long been pointed out by several mystic traditions such as Zen and LoShi (Lao Tzu). Nietzsche heralded post modernism with his warnings of the self-deceit arising from the unreflective life. The noble but failed attempts of logicians Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead through their *Principia Mathematica* to create a self-contained, complete, and consistent logic, Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* as one description of why such a fundamental structure is impossible, and Gödel's *Incompleteness Theorem* serving as a formalization of those limits — all point to the fallacy of any structure, hierarchical or not, as being fundamental. But in

this apparent vacuum of logical validity, T.S. Kuhn through his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, pointed out the social dimension of the scientific community as the primary transformative and stabilizing factor behind emergent paradigms.

The mathematical metaphor of fractals, the fundamental nature of emergent processes, and the Jungian concept of synchronicity are mysterious only when different levels of organization are mistaken for what is fundamental, as opposed to provisional constructs and divisions. A simple example of the illusory nature of common sense limits of organization is the classic logical conundrum of Bertrand Russell, in which a box is drawn and inside is written "The sentence inside this box is false" ... the verbal equivalent of an Escher print. Any logical structure, set of laws, paradigms, or societal institutions can, at best, only modestly aspire to the status of being a more or less useful tool, provisional as opposed to fundamental, and therefore a transient stage of constantly emergent phenomenon. This is simply a restatement of my earlier dismissal of the argument as to whether 'fundamental' structures are discovered or created.

Extending this awareness into the realm of social organization, the currently used Japanese word for human 'individual', 'kojin', was coined only in the last 150 years or so, as a way of translating 19th century European philosophy. Until that time, the individual was defined in terms of their relationships. The idea of an individual distinct from relationships was an abstraction that did not require a specific word. A parallel example from popular culture, would be the motto of the Boston Celtics professional basketball team, 'ubuntu', roughly translated from the Zulu language as 'I am because we are.'

(2) The strained limits of natural resources, as pointed out by Thomas Malthus, the 19th century British political economist, in his treatise *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, are only accelerating the current political turmoil over diminishing resources of energy, food, and water. The zero sum game of the triangular hierarchy only widens the gap between the haves and the have-nots. When the losers at the bottom of the hierarchy reach their breaking point, the resulting crime, revolution, and turmoil forces a reframing of the paradigm into the engineering metaphor of bottleneck. Or in other words, maximim ... the chain of a community is only as strong as its weakest link.

(3) Competing political/economic priorities prevent us from effectively dealing with problems that have no political/economic boundaries. Just within the last year (2008), for example, China's government refused to share weather data that would have helped neighboring countries deal with the environmental problems arising from the airborne desert sand originating from China. It is the rare country that does not place a priority on their own economic or military agendas, and neighboring countries, even with the best of intentions, are powerless to prevent continuing environmental damage and disruption. A military industrial complex's attempt to sustain hegemony can only thrive by prolonging the immature, hierarchical triangle of social organization. Such a government policy precludes the emergence of a more mature paradigm of social organization. Again, an alternative to

zero-sum such as maximin, must emerge as a tool to unite nations in mutual self-interest.

(4) There is increasing evidence that genetically constrained behavior patterns such as inequity aversion, as pointed out by Frans de Waal at the Yerkes Institute through his book, *Our Inner Ape*, may have major implications on our morality and politics, as described by Steven Pinker in *The Blank Slate*. The historical rise and fall of societies, as well as economic bubbles and wealth distribution patterns might be better understood through the windows of evolutionary psychology and behavioral genetics. The crucial question is whether emergent self-awareness will determine the structure of society, or whether we will allow our naïve, competitive priorities to keep us in the relatively immature default pattern of behavior exhibited by chimpanzees.

(5) As for logistical limits of a pyramid shaped hierarchical society, one needs only look at the human rights movement in America during the 1960s. This social unrest could not have been a top-down movement initiated by wealthy, white, Anglo-Saxon, male, Protestants. They had nothing to gain by giving up their privileged positions within the hierarchy. It was rather a case of the top down burdens becoming too great for the minorities to bear. Women, African Americans, homosexuals, and later – the handicapped, AIDs victims and other sick, elderly, and other minorities reacted to the pressures of unnatural societal stress. A moral and optimally efficient viewpoint, the previously mentioned maximin, derived from the idea of original position developed by the American philosopher John Rawls, takes the stance that any viewpoint, any opinion, from anyone within the hierarchy is equally objective or equally subjective. But it is to the group's advantage to pay particular attention to the weakest members of the group, as that is the place where the integrity and sustainability of the entire group is most likely to fail. Again, this simple 'bottleneck' can be summed up with the aphorism that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. The problem is that there are those who refuse to accept the chain as a metaphor because that would mean giving up advantaged status in a hierarchy. One solution would be for status to be tied with one's capacity to sacrifice for the group, much like the 'potlatch' tradition of native people of the North American west coast. The higher one's status in the tribe, the more valuable the goods they were expected to throw on the ceremonial fire. In an ideal situation, the goods would go to the weakest members of the group in the spirit of John Rawl's maximin idea of justice.

As indicated by the five previously stated reasons, there is evidence indicating that the limits of this default structure of social organization must be transcended if humanity aspires to sustainability. I will now argue that a school's particular 'system' or a government's particular bureaucracy is NOT fundamental to human behavior.

As mentioned earlier, humans share 98.5% of their genetic material with chimpanzees and bonobos, both of which species demonstrate a wide variety of behavior patterns that optimize the chances of survival of the group. All group animals involve strategies far beyond the simple rivalries, bullying, and the sycophant driven stress of the simplest hierarchical human groups, such as might be seen in typically dysfunctional companies, schools, or governments. These strategies have

evolved, which means that although there may be few specific genes for specific behavior patterns, there are at least correlations between groups of genes, at particular stages of the individual's growth, with some behavior patterns. Those behavior patterns, in turn, have a significant impact on the large-scale socio-cultural patterns that emerge.

Despite the self-serving argument for placing our superior reason at the top of a hierarchy of evolution, we often use reason largely as a post-hoc justification for genetically constrained behavior. For example, examine the following chain of reasoning. 'Unaided by technology, humans are not born with a body that equips us to fly like birds because God did not intend humans to fly. Therefore I will not get into an airplane.' As naïve as the argument appears to be, in other contexts, we are making similarly absurd decisions. For example, imagine a company had been discovered to have been responsible for producing a faulty product, which in turn, had injured customers and therefore made the evening news. A dysfunctional management would quickly meet and decide on how to allocate resources to facilitate damage control through public relations. Working under the typical corporate hierarchical organization, the management would dissociate itself from the offending weak link in its structure so as to avoid guilt by association, and therefore deny culpability or responsibility.

A similar process on a societal level unfolded in the press regarding the previously mentioned random killing in Akihabara ... dissociation from the culprit, and displacement through the banning of the sale of survival knives ... post-hoc reasoning that will have little impact on preventing similar problems from arising again. In the previously mentioned corporate example, if the company were mature, it would try to avoid similar problems in the future by implementing procedures that would prevent similar problems from reoccurring. Rather than giving in to immature patterns of dissociation and denial, mature behavior would be to allocate resources to the bottleneck, and try to identify other potentially similar weak links in the organization. Again, we see the maximin morality of John Rawls ... strengthen the weakest link. But why and what is that barrier separating dysfunctional from functional behavior, both at the individual level, and at the organizational level? Although free choice and decision making implies conscious awareness, our individual fates and institutional paths are still beyond the reach of predictability. Perhaps it is because we are once more thrown into the false argument of whether we have free choice, or whether there is a 'correct' fundamental pattern to be found and followed. Emergence is a concept that captures the idea of growth, without the necessity of assuming conscious choice or finding a fundamental pattern. Emergence is a transition between immature patterns of behavior and mature patterns, but as mentioned earlier, 'maturity' might be recognizable, and describable by reason, but only after the fact. After all, without the necessity of knowing how or why, cats and dogs, nonetheless, mature.

An interesting description of emergent behavior in ant colonies, 2006, by Laura Cyckowski and Paul Grobstein on the Bryn Mawr website – Serendip, may give us pause in our celebration of human consciousness. As they point out, there are no individual 'conscious' decisions on the part of each

ant, yet there is a dynamically evolving organization to the group which seems to be derived from the sum total of all the individuals reacting to information from their environment, although this organization can not be predicted from a simple cumulative summation of individual ant behavior patterns. This metaphor for describing emergent phenomenon should be enough to give us pause to reconsider exactly how much of our own behavior is the result of conscious choice, and how much is largely unconscious, emergent phenomenon. Although we may get trapped in a metaphysical tautology by the very fact that we are capable of doubting our consciousness, we might be able to get off this cognitive merry-go-round by returning to the evidence driven ground of the sciences. Other animals have some degree of consciousness, and are therefore capable of being confused, but they live on. Their conatus is certainly grounded. Again, cats and dogs mature, regardless of whether they know it or not.

My particular focus on emergent behavior is to use it as a foil against naïve consciousness, to illustrate that the bureaucratic mind-set which causes so many institutions to be dysfunctional is simply an illusion born NOT of the lowest common denominator of life, but rather the lowest common denominator of our consciousness of self, and a similarly immature consciousness of social organization.

Humans, like ants, are born with genetic constraints. For example, we are endowed with enough capacity to interact with the environment and interact with each other to be able to create a flying machine. But we are not born with wings. We tend to behave according to superficial features that are easy to 'see'. This is our 'common' sense. Our common sense tells us that the structure of the human body consists of two arms and two legs. We do not see wings, and so our common sense has told us for thousands of years that we were not meant to fly. Similarly, we tend to be aware only of proximal power relationships between each other, and therefore assume that only a pyramid shaped hierarchical society exists. Using flight as a metaphor for patterns of social organization, I should be careful to point out that I am not making assumptions about what is natural or what is man-made. The point I am trying to make is that seeing only a competitive, pyramid hierarchy model of social organization as the 'the way the world is' is the psychological equivalent of never leaving the ground because man was not born with wings.

One alternative to simple hierarchies would be democracy. Despite the messy competitive elements within the paradigm of democracy, the ancient Greeks discovered the advantages of cooperation. Communism, if one is to assume is lexically associated with 'community' must have been inspired by a similar desire to rise above the pettiness of the default hierarchy of social organization or entitled class privilege, as is the more recently coined 'communityism' that the American president elect Barack Obama is attempting to inspire. Yet, as mentioned of all structures and institutions earlier, the institutions of democracy and communism, as well as free market capitalism, have also shown their vulnerability to the default status of the immature, naively self-interest-driven individual, whose identity is inextricably tied to the simplistically brute,

triangular hierarchy of the only society that they can 'see'. Democracies, just like religions, science, and survival knives, can be co-opted for the competitive gain of immature individuals. Even local communities or non profit organizations, no matter their purity of motive, is subject to the same tendency to revert to the default, retrograde level of social organization and naïve self interest.

Returning to the news commentator's assessment of the significance of Japanese winning the Nobel Prize, with a bit of maturity and critical thinking, the meaning of the Nobel Prize can be reframed as a recognition that Japanese scientists are capable of cooperating, rather than competing, with scientists all over the world to make the world a better place. Stated more clearly at a forum at Nagoya University on Oct. 18, 2008, Nobel Prize winning Physicist Leo Esaki, said that winning the Nobel Prize is a "result, not a purpose".

I am assuming that his statement implies that the relentless self-critique and honest search for truth that is central to the self-correcting mechanism driving science, the pursuit of truth as emergent phenomenon, eventually produces all kinds of largely unpredictable benefits ... practical, social, and personal. The Nobel Prize is simply recognition of outstanding work which has made the world a better place.

But to narrowly focus on the Nobel Prize as an educational goal or purpose implies a competitive frame of mind which is in direct conflict with the cooperative imperatives of modern science. In fact, a priority on competition throws us back into the retrograde pattern of chimpanzee-like behavior, the unexamined, pyramid-hierarchy that is the default pattern of social organization. Modern science depends on cooperation and collaboration to such a degree as to show the conflict between 'pure' science and applied science as a false dilemma. After all, even the most fervent advocates of science for science's sake ultimately depend on funding derived from the practical sector of society. Basic research is simply further removed, along a continuum, from the immediate problems which science tries to solve. And if nothing else, science is a disciplined way of solving problems in society.

To revert to a competitive mode, and put national pride or personal ambition ahead of problem solving as the priority, to be motivated to win the Nobel Prize as a purpose, inevitably leads to a corruption of science that eventually renders it ineffective as a transformational tool. Such is the danger constantly confronting any institution which aspires to high ideals ... the legal system — with its cat and mouse game between legislators seeking regulation to protect the weak and big business seeking profits as a priority, organized religion — with its temptation to ostentatiously represent spiritual ideals, and science — spawning the Nazi inspired eugenics program, greed-driven social darwinism, and the atomic bomb. These are institutions and systems whose claim to legitimacy is derived from those institutions' original purposes and evolving organizational capacity to solve problems, but as often as not, end up creating greater problems.

Within the educational community, much of what has been said about the above limits of larger, cultural institutions can be applied to the more localized traditional institution known as the 'Speech

Contest'. A speech contest, much like the above-mentioned Nobel Prize, is often regarded as a language skills foot race. But similar to the mistaken idea of competing to win the Nobel Prize, a contestant whose obvious priority is winning a speech contest should NOT be awarded a prize, precisely because that student's priority is not the stated aims of the speech.

A plausible critique of this stance is that it is too idealistic, too 'pure', and that speech contests are simply won by whoever best performed their role as a public speaker. But judges, along with a focus on clarity, form, and style, consciously attempt to award a prize in recognition of the contestant's commitment to the ideals embodied in the speech. One only needs to look at some of the criteria by which judges often evaluate speeches ... authenticity in gestures or voice, evidence to support reasoning, or simply the appearance of sincerity in presentation.

I have only recently been able to identify my own discomfort with speech contests as the contradiction between the apparent priorities in the performance, and the behavior afterwards. For example, immediately after a recent speech contest, the contestants, coaches, organizers, and guests met for a brief party. In my role as a member of the contest organizing committee, our conscious purpose of the party was to provide a time for informal feedback, socialization, and celebration at a more personal level. But upon observing the difference between behavior at the party and behavior at the podium, I could not help but to question the goals, rules, and assumptions governing a speech contest. Specifically, each speaker, when at the podium, had to perform in such a way so as to convince the judges of the sincere priority of values the speaker professed to believe through their speech.

Yet, at the following party, most students, most of the time, eagerly sought advice about their form or how they 'looked' in front of the audience, not about the validity of their ideas, or how their ideas connect to other speaker's ideas, or questions concerning the limits of their vision. It was as if the ideas and ideals were a vital, living thing at the podium, and dead as a doornail soon after. One student was reported to have been so despondent at not winning a prize, as to have skipped the party altogether. If, while they were standing at the podium and giving their speech, their words reflected their 'true' selves, where were those 'selves' after the competition had finished and winners had been decided?

This is not an accusation of 'low moral values' or an indictment of the 'corrupt youth' of this day and age; it is simply a reflection of human nature. All it takes is a slight disjunction in time, and a different social situation with different rules, and the priorities suddenly change. The individuals are not yet fully socialized, and therefore more apt to be living in a fragmented world of a 'proper place and time' for everything, rather than attempting to mend their contradictions and tautologies into a more consistent, integrated sense of self. And as stated earlier, the default social organization of the immature individual is the triangular, hierarchical society ... in which these immature people are divided, and let themselves be divided, into winners and losers of a provisional game, rather than unique individuals with unique potentials.

To be fair, many of the comments and much of the advice initiated by judges, teachers, guests, as well as myself, also similarly focused on form rather than content. The students presumably spent months of research, thinking, and reorganizing their ideas. Although the judges at most E.S.S. (English Speaking Society) contests receive copies of the speeches weeks in advance, the judges and most of the audience at this contest had only the benefit of a four-minute window into the heart and soul of the speaker. It is easier to talk about form. Grammar, organization, pronunciation, or posture is capable of being standardized in a way that content cannot, particularly at the expected proficiency levels of non-native speakers from Junior Colleges. Form could conceivably be taught, year after year, with little variation between one school and another, with the goal of raising all students to a minimal acceptable standard. Because form is approachable from a surface perspective, some teachers, perhaps many, are trainers at best. But to engage the speakers about the events, ideas, and values making up their speeches, to be able to connect with the speaker meaningfully and personally, requires educators to be well informed and willing to prioritize immediacy and involvement with their students.

Perhaps a useful angle from which to view this uncomfortable contradiction lying at the heart of speech contests is the idea of 'bad faith' from the Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre. A crude description of 'bad faith' would be conscious self-deception. The focus of education is on the student, with the assumption that students are more vulnerable to their own self-deception. But as pointed out in the previous paragraph, all members of the community are subject to the same dangers, and we can only hope that the longer experience of the adult can justify our role of educator. The identity of the immature individual must 'die' in order to give birth to the new identity of the socially responsible member of the community. It is the immature identity that the ego-busting techniques of Zen or Sufi wisdom attempt to overcome. And indeed, Nietzsche's warning that language, itself, is the last great deceiver, has the illusion of a cognitive vacuum to the ears of the literal minded — the immature individual laboring beneath the default hierarchical organization. William James parsed this psychology of adult development through more traditional paradigms of the mystic religious experience, and Joseph Campbell did likewise through traditional religious myth. But despite the benefits of millennium-old traditions and institutions, social behavior patterns indicating the individual's maturation process, can neither be accurately predicted nor controlled. These patterns are primarily stochastic, emergent phenomenon, much like the progress of science, or construction of a speech.

The maturation of the individual, the shift from prioritizing naïve self interest towards prioritizing social responsibility, is nature unfolding. Biological changes within the individual, as well as responses and initiatives from the community mold the growing individual. But regardless of the integrity of any societal institution attempting to foster that process, the naïve, 'self' unconsciously uses all its resources to preserve its own identity at the cost of growth. Successful outcomes are not easily recognized or quantifiably measured. Furthermore, unless the mentoring

function of the institution is similarly dynamic and emergent, the socialization and maturation of the individuals it claims to serve ceases to become the priority of the institution. The institution itself reverts to a self-serving organization, the default pyramid hierarchy of chimpanzee society, though it may continue to dress itself in the inspirational language of emergence. Martin Luther King's Letters from a Birmingham Jail reminds us that the moral potential of the individual is greater than that of the group, and it is from the struggles of the individual that the group must take its inspiration and derive its purpose.

Consequently, I would suggest that the most deserving winners of a speech contest, like the Nobel Prize, are only identifiable after the contest is over ... when the speakers are not expected to talk about ideals, but rather naturally reveal their 'true', or more consistent, selves, as determined by the degree of their conscious attempt at creating and maintaining an integrated sense of self and other.

The real winners are those who are still pursuing their professed goals long after leaving the stage. The 'real' prize is the post-hoc recognition of maturity and quality of consciousness, the after-the-fact recognition of the individual in the throes of the emergent process of maturation towards becoming a socially responsible individual. The practical problem of a judge at a contest is how to access this knowledge about the speakers while they are still on stage. The short answer is, they can't. *We* can't. We simply do the best we can, we judge by appearances. We try to make educated guesses, informed decisions. And we observe when the students are not aware we are observing. Ouch. Doesn't this mirror the same wagging-the-dog dilemma of teaching for the test? The same cat and mouse game between Wall Street traders and government regulators? In the larger context, it is the same perpetual tension and struggle between emergent phenomenon and its increasingly dysfunctional, proximal substrate — a specialized and rigidly fragmented society.

And once more, I digress to the fractal kaleidoscope. What has been said for speech contests and Nobel Prizes can be said for a university. If a school's priority is profit, then like the military-industrial complex of an aggressive nation state, the default retrograde hierarchy of society is sufficient, but on the other hand, this begs the definition of education. If a school is defined by its education community — teachers, students, upperclassmen, alumni, parents, counselors, NPOs, NGOs, citizen volunteers, the Ministry of Education, other schools, and so on — financial profit is NOT the purpose of an educational community any more than winning a speech contest is the purpose of a speech contest, or a Nobel Prize is the purpose of choosing a career in science. Financial profit is not even 'one of the purposes'. Profitability should be seen as a reflection of genuine commitment to the ideals embodied in education. Profit is simply one of the natural results that come from the honest pursuit of the larger goal of education ... to identify, nourish, and sustain the weaker members of the ever-expanding circle that is the community. In the case of a school, the weak link is assumed to be the student because they are yet to be integrated as responsible members of the society of responsible citizens. Besides, even if financial profitability were given the highest priority, teachers and academic researchers are not known for their business acumen, nor do many have the prerequisite

training and experience necessary to successfully sustain profits.

Beyond glib platitudes, what is my claim to the previously mentioned 'larger goal of education'? Any starting point is legitimate. All starting points are provisional. It is the convergent aim that is fundamental. As a college sophomore, I started by reading Arthur Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*. He tried to solve the personal problem of how to find tranquility in the stormy sea of life. He found three answers; to lose one's self in the contemplation of art, to renounce all earthly desires, and to embrace moral behavior. One way of unifying these three choices reveals a common theme that can further be extended into other options. The common thread is the breaking down of the barrier between self and 'other', obliquely expressed by Schopenhauer as the 'veil of Maya' ... that curtain of illusion that separates what we think we know from what exists. But in reframing this distinction in terms of 'self' and 'other', we can see far more implications, many of which seem to be supported by scientific evidence.

For example, recent studies of primate behavior and neurobiological research are providing insight into the roots of empathy. Mirror-neurons are the neural network at the cellular level most directly connected with this behavior. Empathy, originally coined not much more than a hundred years ago to describe the relationship between a work of art and the observer, has been extended to embrace what is now thought to be fundamental, evolutionarily adaptive behavior within which altruistic behavior provides optimal efficiency for survival of the group. In other words, a mother's self sacrifice for her new born, through the cascade of biological events that include this special neural network, erases the naïve distinction between self and other as a way of protecting and sustaining the gene pool. One can imagine only slight variations of these cascading events leading to the surrender of self in the throes of romance, or for a 'higher' cause or calling.

It takes only a bit more imagination to realize that moral behavior, the willingness to give up a bit of one's own comfort for the sake of the disadvantaged other, is simply an extension of the empathetic behavior necessary for survival at the family level. In the same way that giving up one's seat on the train for a handicapped individual is an extension of the mother-child roots of empathy, so is the heroic dedication of Mother Theresa, or the forfeiture of one's life for the greater good, as in Martin Luther King, an extension of that same continuum. Although it may be seen as a mere scientific upgrade of Schopenhauer's view of morality as a way of easing one's own instability, science can be seen extending the justification of morality, and its means, through many alternative paths. The path of mirror neurons even further blurs the illusory distinction between self and other.

For example, the various electro-transmitters involved in the synapse have been tied to anything from runner's highs, to redbud highs, to romantic love, to the thrill of a New Year sunrise, to a once in a lifetime pilgrimage, to creativity, to schizophrenia, to group behavior, to religious ecstasy, and even biological death itself. These can be described in terms of a breakdown of pre-existing, exclusive, naïve notions of the self, and subsequent re-creations of a more integrated, extended self ... or in the case of schizophrenia and the schizophrenic-like dysfunctionality of some group behavior, the reverse.

Like the law professor who once described justice as wisely choosing between competing metaphors, 'self' is a metaphor defining itself against other metaphors. But we do not need to feel resigned to feeling trapped in the cognitive vertigo of a postmodern world of tautologies and contradictions. Again, our feet can find firm ground in the evidence of genetically determined constraints being uncovered by interdisciplinary natural sciences. As mentioned earlier, science is not to be trusted as an institution, but as a continual process of honestly searching for our nature. Our genetically grounded constraints and potential have always been with us, accessible through observation and intuition and experience, and expressed in everything we do ... from 'great' art, to daily social patterns. We are no wiser than the wise who were among us millennia long past. But science can provide more perspectives, more options to help us mature.

Another example of metaphors arising from science is the neurobiological perspective that can be found in the life and research of Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor. Chosen by Time Magazine as one of the world's one hundred most influential people for 2008, she used her own brain and nearly fatal stroke as objects of investigation. Her findings lend further usefulness of the left-brain, right-brain paradigm as a path to individual moral responsibility. Her experience of different hemispheres having different personalities is paralleled by Steven Pinker's comments on split-brain research in which the linear thinking, calculating part of our brain — the left hemisphere — seemed to quickly come up with any justification for behavior that was not under its control, and those justifications were usually not at all connected to the stimulus that initiated the behavior. In other words, our calculating mind can not be trusted for its stated reasons for behavior, which would have obvious implications for human behavior. Again, cats and dogs mature, with no idea why. Again, emergence, growth, is fundamental, and any understanding or construct resulting from our understanding, is post-hoc and provisional.

If science is a disciplined approach to problem solving, the larger goal of education is a fostering of the break-down of the naïve, self-interested identity of the individual who sees him/herself in the war of all against all within the default pattern of a triangular society ... to fostering the re-creation of the self in terms of becoming a responsible member of the community, in this era ... a world citizen. This is not a denial of our competitive nature, but rather an acknowledgement, and then a transcendence of it. A responsible member of the community must have the survival skills necessary to sustain one's biological integrity, but any healthy living thing accomplishes this by default. Cats do not have to be trained to take care of themselves. Humans, on the other hand, have the capacity to either extend and sustain the immature, naïve sense of self through blind ambition and greed driven success at the expense of the other, or alternatively extend empathy beyond the immediate family, for that matter, beyond our own species, in order to sustain the human species. A cat could not care less if it sees another cat crushed by a car. But a mature human response to the stress of such an event is an attempt to prevent such a tragedy from reoccurring. If self is to be defined in terms of community, the boundaries of that community must be clearly understood, and

continually expanded.

If the basic unit of education is the community, a crucial corollary is that the focus of the community through education is the individual. Normalization or standardization is just a tool, not a goal. And like a survival knife, it is a potentially dangerous tool in that there is a tendency to focus on only the quantifiable surface of normalization, standardized tests for example, as way of identifying successful outcomes. From a more thoughtful perspective, one would never dream of choosing a potential life partner by looking at their academic record or test scores. In the same way that I.Q. tests were originally designed to identify people with learning difficulties so that they could be helped, this tool has been misappropriated to support the simple, brute, triangular hierarchy, but fancied-up in a new dress. The elitist mentality that accompanies ranking is a brute simplification of individuals and institutions, often justified as a 'necessary' evil for maintaining stability. As president elect Barack Obama reiterated in his inaugural speech, it is never justifiable to sacrifice human rights and values in the name of expediency. The ends cannot justify the means without a corresponding degradation of those ends. The only people served by perpetuating such pyramid hierarchies of social organization are those who are able to take personal advantage of the system. But even then, those advantages are hollow and short lived. In summary, the goal of education and the goal of mass-education (via unexamined and naïve assumptions of 'normalization'), are diametrically opposed.

The goal of education is to foster a fundamental, positive change in the individual. Such is the goal of counseling. Such is the goal of religion. Such is the goal of parenting. Such is the goal of great art. The particular institutions just mentioned are provisional, but the goals of these cultural institutions are convergent and fundamental. Specifically, the positive change referred to means to foster a mature individual, a socially responsible individual, an individual whose identity is defined by that individual's capacity to give up their comfort for the sake of the suffering 'other'. For in truth, the fundamental self IS the fundamental other. Differences are only at naïve levels of awareness. The breadth of one's compassion and the depth of one's conscious awareness are one and the same. But how would we go about fostering such benign human beings, such socially responsible citizens? Having identified the goal of education, we must now shift our attention back to the fundamental *unit* of education.

The University is not the fundamental unit of education, and the classroom is even less qualified to make that claim. John Dewey, the educational reformer and pragmatist philosopher, has said as much. As stated earlier, the fundamental unit is the community. *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us* was the title of a 1996 book by Hillary Rodham Clinton, the purpose of which was to say that it takes a community to raise a child. While university students are not children, neither can they be said to be responsible adults. What good are the sharpest technical skills or highest test scores if they are not able to cooperate as team members to work for a greater cause, or devote themselves to the disadvantaged other? The government and mass media have

made it abundantly clear that creating a competitive student who becomes a competitive job applicant does not insure a satisfying career. Even before the current economic downturn, it was common knowledge that within the first couple of years of employment, more than half of the new employees will leave their job, and the biggest reason is human relations. It only stands to reason that our competitive impulses and tools of normalization are not quite preparing our students for a lifetime of work. The system, as it now functions, seems to be optimized for placing students in a company, at which point the school takes no further responsibility. Many parents can be seen as doing the same thing when they choose a school, thinking the school will do what the parent cannot. And likewise, teachers blame the parents, and corporations blame the teachers. This is not a problem particularly endemic to this culture or era. It is human nature to 'pass the buck'. But the economies of scale, the rapidity of economic change, and access to global information have all conspired to exacerbate the consequences of avoiding personal responsibility for fundamental change in the individual. And thus, Akihabara — another random killing — this time addressed by banning the sale of survival knives.

So who is this 'community' that is responsible for these fundamental changes? The students are at the center, and the community is the collection of those individuals who focus on helping the students grow into becoming responsible members of that community. As mentioned earlier, those individuals may include other students, teachers, researchers, artists, counselors, administrators, members of other academic institutions, family members, local government, the Ministry of Education, businesses, NGOs, NPOs, the media, citizen volunteers - the list of stakeholders is limited only by one's own vision of how large the community should be. And if we have identified the community, let us once more clarify the goal as to foster the emergence of the caring, responsible, mature member of society ... a citizen defined by their capacity to help other emergent, but as yet, 'weak' links in the community. Those weak links, the disadvantaged and discriminated minorities for example which are the primary focus of change envisioned by the Barack administration in the United States, would include those with inadequate health care, the handicapped, the poor, ethnic minority communities, the gay community, the elderly, and so on. The validity and sustainability of a community can be, should be, defined by its capacity to identify and allocate resources to its weakest links. Authentic 'normalization' can be measured by the capacity of those formally weak links to allocate their newfound resources to helping others less fortunate than themselves. The election of Barack Obama, a member of a racial minority, to the presidency of the United States is a realization of this fundamental hope. This is the fundamental change, the emergent maturity that educators are trying to foster in their charges.

Returning to the nature of a speech contest and the contestants themselves, as a public speaking teacher in my own school, in accordance with my vision of the educational community, I have attempted to foster the notion in every one of our student representatives to the speech contest, a framework for entering the contest as a way of stepping up to take personal responsibility for an ideal that is both beyond the classroom, and deep inside the individual's heart ... to take responsibility for

meaning and connection beyond the student-teacher relationship ... to take responsibility for being more than just a 'winner' compared to a 'loser'.

Sometimes it is difficult to sustain that vision because some otherwise professional colleagues, as well as students, consciously assume that the purpose of the speech contest is to win, and competition is the only realistic framework from which a public speech contest can be approached. Perhaps it is the choice of the term 'contest' that is problematic. Even past administrations have not indicated an alternative purpose other than winning. For example, only once, in my memory, has a top administrator personally thanked our student for choosing to represent our school and participate in the speech contest. But was she thanked for her initiative, extra effort, and ideals? Maybe it is just by coincidence that the student, who was given a bouquet of flowers and posed for photographs with the top administrator, had won the prize for 2nd place in the contest that year. A cynic might be tempted to think that teachers and representatives were not actually thanking that student, but simply availing themselves of some useful catch-copy for marketing the school. But that sends the wrong message to students ... that only 'winners' are worthy of recognition. This is a message that can be traced back to the default pattern of social animals, the naïve self-interested ego, competing with others within the triangular hierarchy, or with schools competing against each other for limited resources. This message of 'winning' or 'losing' is not worthy of anyone whose primary concern is education, fostering the positive fundamental change in the individual. This message is not worthy of an educator or an educational community.

This year marked the 34th Annual Tokyo College Speech Contest. Although I am a member of the speech contest organizing committee, I am also a teacher supporting one of my own students. Our student, as well as the event itself, was fortunate to have had support from several members of the community beyond my narrow confines of the 'ivory tower' of academia; the vice-president of the Hino City International Friendship Association, three leading members of Junior Chamber International, and a foreign part-time teacher who is not even working at Jissen this year — who presented a lovely bouquet of flowers to our speaker — all came as volunteers, all of whom took personal responsibility for building and sustaining their educational ideals through a community. These people, and fellow colleagues who were involved with our student's emergent development, are excellent representatives of the educational community that best serve the interests of that student ... of any student. These are the members of the educational community I support.

Maybe one reason institutional support often appears to be a little less than enthusiastic is because statistically speaking, most of the representatives from any single school will not be prizewinners. But from the perspective of a member of the speech contest organizing committee, I feel confident in saying that the purpose of the speech contest is not for separating students into winners and losers. Like the Nobel Prize, a speech contest prize is simply a result, not an educational purpose, and certainly not an end in itself. The purpose of this contest is the same as the purpose of education as a whole ... to help all students, not just the competitive winners, join the

larger community of responsible citizens, but also to remind us, as educators, what it means to be members of an educational community.

Epilogue

It was the last week of class before the New Year's break, and the last Friday before Christmas. I had planned on making a quick side trip to the local Costco to pick up some chocolate and candy for the students. But I had no idea that the Christmas rush in Japan would match the traditional American shopping madness. After waiting thirty minutes for a parking spot, a quick glance at the equally crowded check out lines was enough to send me back to my car to spend another thirty minutes just to get out of the parking lot. No problem. I had just enough time to pick up something from a convenience store. My route to school took me past a couple of other universities and parallel with the monorail heading to Tachikawa. Just as I passed the Tama zoo, my progress was stopped by a traffic jam. I was stuck on a small downhill incline, so I just sat in the car, taking advantage of this time to relax, look at the houses, and just let my thoughts wander. Just ahead of me and to the left, an elderly woman was slowly making her way up the sidewalk towards my car. She looked to be in her 80's, bow legged, one arthritic hand, shaped like a claw on the top of her cane, and with a daypack on her back.

I wondered how she must have looked ages ago, when she was the same age as my students ... all so fresh and full of laughter, so fashionable with their elaborately decorated nails and equally customized keitai. This woman looked like a different species of creature altogether. Yet I knew that she too was once a twenty-year old full of hopes and dreams, and probably just as cute and full of laughter as my girls. Yes, my girls. I imagined those lovely young students inevitably transforming into this withered, old crone ... and myself, (looking in my rearview mirror) becoming likewise even sooner.

But when I looked through the windshield again, the woman had suddenly disappeared. Gone? A young college-aged guy came pedaling his bike up the sidewalk from the same direction. Without slowing his progress, I saw him look down towards the ground at the side of my car where the woman should have been standing, but I could not see over the passenger window. He continued on his way. 'Something is wrong here' I thought. I put on my emergency lights, slowly pulled out of the traffic and over to the left side of the curb. The car behind me immediately eased into my previous place in the line of traffic, so I had to carefully open my door so as to not hit his car.

I walked around the front of my car and looked towards the rear to see the woman on her back, arms and legs sticking up like a Galapagos tortoise flipped upside down. I ran over to her and helped her slip out of the pack's shoulder straps, helped her to her knees, and then to stand. Out of nowhere, a couple of young women (they appeared to be local housewives in their late twenties) came up to us to help. The old woman explained that she had gone grocery shopping next door and

had put too many canned goods in her backpack. I picked up the pack and was surprised by how heavy it was. She was thankful and apologetic for causing us so much trouble, and probably a little extra shaken to see that it was a foreigner who had come to pick her up. She apologized again and explained that her house was only a few meters further up the hill. The other two women thanked me and they began escorting her the last few meters to her house. I got back into my car and after a few minutes, another driver allowed me to re-enter the line of traffic. I would only be a few minutes late.

In the following fifteen minutes that it took to get to school, I would go over the scenario, again and again, and each time I returned to that moment when the college student pedaled his way past the old woman on her back, the video-playback in my head stopped cold. What could have possibly been in that young man's head as he rode right past her? Was his behavior the natural consequence of this competitive, consumer-driven era? Or, was his the appropriate response for this country's particular in-group defined culture? I was stunned. What could possibly be the cause of behavior so utterly opposed to what I have assumed people should be? Or more likely, I admitted to myself, the question should have been 'Was I that callous when I was his age?'

A recounting of the event slipped into class as if it had been scripted. The chill of synchronicity ran through me. On another day, it might have been the cold wind of paranoia, but on that day, at that moment, students were expecting something. And out it came ... unpredictable emergent phenomenon of the highest order ... a perfectly natural segue for the planned discussion about the psychological themes underlying the animation classic, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. And as I ended the last class of the year by challenging my students to ponder the purpose of education, I reminded them again of that day's event, urging them to use the experience as I had used it ... as both a tool for focus, and as a clue to the answer.

I recalled easing out of the traffic jam and the cars pulling up to take my place. And my girls ... moving in lock step ... class-to-class, semester-to-semester. Step out of line for a moment, and your place is taken, your position is filled as if you had never existed. And so it is in the world of the war of all against all. I assume the boy on the bike was not late for class.

From Shakespeare's *As You Like It*:

"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts ..."

Recent research has shown a correlation between specific physical neural anomalies and a diminished capacity for empathy as measured by the subjects' responses to moral dilemmas. The implications of such findings on moral culpability and its repercussions on the legal system open a whole new world of potential danger and hope for society. A slight shift and reframing of the question highlights the fundamental question. In the same way that individual ants in a colony

perform a specialized role, are some humans genetically constrained to never transcend the fragmented mind-set of the zero-sum game? In the same way that pups and kittens display individual temperaments at birth, are a human's character and values and convictions — the sum of their experience — merely variations played upon the genetically constrained theme of individual temperament as determined at conception?

If so, the loftiest ideals of education — fostering the emergence of a socially defined and socially responsible individual — may be a mute point. If so, perhaps a large portion of humanity is destined to be incapable of seeing beyond the literal surface of the ethos and mythos that culture lays down as road signs pointing to the integrated self. If so, perhaps a large portion of humanity cannot see beyond the naïve self-interest of 'boys be ambitious' or 'winning is the only thing' or 'that's the way the world is'-law-of-the-jungle. Moreover, they cannot be *taught* to see. As a critical thinker, I cannot help but to honestly admit this bleak vision of human nature is at least a possibility. But as an educator, I find myself scrambling for a refutation of such a vision through the latest research in developmental psychology, or insights through the arts and traditional culture. Despite the pathologically terminal gaps in my own education, and my limitation towards addressing those gaps, in my role as an educator, I take it as my duty to carry on with an *allogical* faith and absurd hope in the potential for the growth, transcendence, and redemption of every individual. Motivated by a faith beyond logic? Moved by a hope beyond reason? And for things that can neither be counted nor seen? For all *practical* purposes, maybe I am not so different from the worker ant after all. Maybe *we* are not so different. It all depends on the perspective of you who have indulged me this far.