

Notes on 2012 Company of Ideas Forum

Jeffrey Rubinoff, October 12, 2011

Natural History is history. What specifically interests me as an artist is the apparent universality of the expression of the spiritual in humans, evidence of individual conscience, and the ordering of aural and visual material.

I perceive the prevalence of these traits as evolutionary in origin. The ability to completely identify with the spirit of the prey is the essence of hunting successfully and ultimately survival when the prey is large animals. I refer to this in my 2010 Forum paper regarding the art of the late Palaeolithic caves. Individual conscience provides extended skills for co-operation beyond the aggression of a pack. The genes cluster for the artists' abilities for aural and visual mimesis and for the higher ordering of aural and visual mimesis into temporal and spatial counterpoint provide the hunter and gatherer with critical anticipatory skills. Arguably the combination of these is among the most important skills that lead to the dominance of humans as the ultimate predators.

For some 2.5 million years our human ancestors evolved as hunter and gatherers. Modern humans evolved 200,000 years ago. By contrast agriculture has been practiced only for the last 13,000 years. The skills of hunting and gathering that led to the dominance of humans have clearly had a long genetic history whereas the age of agriculture applies to cultural evolution. Agriculture led to civilization. To the extent that history applies to the written word, agriculture is culture.

It is interesting to think, given the evidence of the late Palaeolithic caves, that "survival of the fittest" may not be the current pejorative of "social Darwinism". The best hunters may have had the concentration of genetic characteristics of artists and not warriors. It is true that some of those characteristics are obviously common to both, but as I pointed out in my 2010 forum presentation, there is no evidence of war in the caves of Chauvet, Altamira and Lascaux.

Except for residual Lamarckian dreams, we have come to accept that social evolution in the time limits of the age of agriculture could not significantly alter our Darwinian nature.

In the Post Agriculture period that I have postulated, this potentially is no longer true. And it forms a significant argument for not only re-evaluating the institutions of the age of agriculture themselves but more importantly to wholly revised and perhaps original institutions for the oversight of genetic engineering. These institutions must be rooted in arguments of essential human values.

With the possibilities of genetic engineering of the human genome there cannot be the disconnect from essential human values that has occurred with advancements of science in the production of weapons of mass destruction. Kaiser Wilhelm clearly set out to place science at the service of the warrior class when the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes were created separate from the oversight of the universities prior to World War I.

The application of science to advanced weapons has applied these principles since.

As to the release of the nuclear genie, even the present accumulation of weapons grade plutonium, measured in the hundreds of tons with a half life of 24,000 years will require a regime of continuous vigilance into the foreseeable future. Moreover, even if weapon production were to cease, nuclear power plants continue to produce significant amounts of this grade of plutonium as a by-product.

With a cursory study, the present limitations placed on major thermo-nuclear arms do not account for thousands of tactical (battlefield) nuclear weapons many with more destructive power than Hiroshima or Nagasaki. Submarines, typified by the MRVed missiles of the Trident class—each submarine is capable of destroying nations or multiple nations—are out of sight but cannot remain out of mind.

In the Post Agriculture period, not only does the ongoing nuclear issue need to be effectively addressed but the rapid adaptation by industrial farming to the production of genetically engineered foods speaks to the exigency of the oversight that is necessary. The luxury of post-modernism by the attack on meta-narrative as described by Lyotard has allowed the default of the humanities regarding their responsibilities to the future.

This must no longer be perceived to be tenable.

Re-enforcing the disconnect between the humanities and science and perhaps arguably because of it, the advent of post-modernism in the universities has allowed self-indulgence to be perceived as academic freedom and allowed the humanities to abdicate their responsibility to the meta-narrative of natural history.

Likewise, the completed process by the 1960's of the commodification of art begun in 1918 has rendered art and artists irrelevant to the measure of human values. This includes the perception of art as political capital—a commodification that stills the independent voices of artists even more than the market.

The Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park is the context of the sculpture. In presenting the insights that have evolved from and with the sculpture as arguments, art becomes embryonic ideas and therefore a source of knowledge beyond self-reference. Art understood as such a source of knowledge becomes essential to the necessary measure of human values in the Post Agriculture Age.