

WHY I WANT TO BE A PROFESSOR

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"The juvenile sea squirt wanders through the sea searching for a suitable rock or hunk of coral to cling to and make its home for life. For this task it has a rudimentary nervous system. When it finds its spot and takes root, it doesn't need its brain any more so it eats it. It's rather like getting tenure."

-- Author unknown

Imagine the smartest people in the whole world (this is a scenario, not a situation) sitting around deciding what to do. How should they set it up, they say to each other, so that our true intelligence is reflected gloriously in the way we interact with the world? How shall we be both subtle and dominant, in order to demonstrate our complete mastery of both worldly and unworldly things?

We know, they nodded to each other, that what has gone before is a complete travesty. Crude and brutish ego games and physical domination and even wars and death! No, that is not the path of wisdom. Neither feudal kings nor software magnates set a credible example, but they do tell us that the world does not take itself seriously. Thus we will not either.

Let us imagine the perfect joke, some cosmic laughter brought materially to Earth. That is how we shall set it up. The rule of contradiction hidden deeply in what appears to be, well shall we say, service to civilization?

And lo, the idea flowed forth with the natural rhythm and devotion of a river crossing a salt flat. For an algorithm had been identified.

What about instead of buying the tools of our trade, we have people give them to us for free? And the book vendors ventured forth offering fringe benefits.

What if we didn't have to work during the entire summer? Work and not work. And the school year obliged.

More absurd! What if we have people pay us to do our work for us? Get it? They pay us, and then they do our work, happily! Oh yes, let us have graduate students.

And let's work in a park, with beautiful youthful men and women walking around to entertain us! And let us have a guarantee that no matter how senile or crazy or controversial or just plain dysfunctional we become, we will still have our job. Yes, and our work should be our own, so nobody else can tell us what to do. No bosses, that would be good. We work behind

closed doors, without review. And, said the smartest of the smart, we had better be sure to have uneducated immature clients who wouldn't have the faintest clue if they were being robbed blind! To that came a hardy round of laughter and applause. This was getting good, even for a fantasy.

And out cascaded government sponsorship and ivory towers and tenure and publication and classrooms and students.

Oh what a glorious joke we are playing on the rest of humanity! They pay us to do our work, get it?

WHY ACADEMIA EXISTS

It is not that the general public are dumb hyenas. It is not that life itself does not provide lessons. Those who actually do live in reality know that people with attitudes such as those expressed in the short missive directly above are not only horribly deranged but terribly dangerous. Lord forbid if they actually were permitted to work among us. Let them have pure science and philosophy, we will live in music and money and sex and honey.

The only way to handle those lunatics is to lock them up in a stress-reducing park with all the other young troublemakers, until they get enough sense to join us here in the actual world of being. Let's keep their distorted attentions focused on the purely imaginary, like, oh yes, get this, mathematics! Get it? They spend their lives doodling away on paper, writing codes that only others who are equally deranged could possibly follow. We are guaranteed that they remain harmless and they think they are building the world. Yes let's have them actually believe that their meaningless scribbles are the way of the world. Now that is truly ironic and an appropriately harsh punishment for such blinding arrogance. And let's make sure that they stay behind closed doors. And let them torture each other by fighting for the same imaginary territory, ha! Let's have them responsible only to each other. Such cruelty and fun! They would have to spend their days justifying themselves to other lunatics. They would have to write books of meaningless gibberish, with all words at least three syllables or longer, in order keep the others busy trying to make up even more outlandish gibberish.

But we will need a way to identify these creatures before they become dangerous. Ah yes, again we can let them think that they are defining their own destinies. Those that seek to join this fringe will be required to never leave the park. Let them have undergraduate courses and graduate courses and postgraduate courses.

Yes it will be expensive, but surely our government will help, especially if we contain the two societal evils of youth and arrogance in the same prison.

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