

The Law of Late Birth

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When I was about ten years old, I used to throw stones at our neighbor's mango tree with the hope that one of the stones might hit a mango and make it fall to the ground. One of the stones, instead of hitting a mango, bounced off of a branch of the mango tree and hit my head with great force.

At the very instant the stone struck my head, it also struck me that some mighty force, hitherto unknown to me, had managed to pull the stone down after it bounced off the branch of the mango tree.

Something clicked in my mind and an idea forced its way past the great pain which I was feeling in my head. I searched my memory bank for similar occurrences and soon came up with a number of examples which were similar to the one which had just happened.

To cite just one example, there was the time when someone had thrown a cricket ball high in the air. After going up and up and up, the cricket ball, much like the stone I had thrown at the mango tree, suddenly started coming down. I do not know if it was just a coincidence, but the cricket ball too had landed forcefully on my head.

It was just a matter of time before my nimble mind reached a simple, yet profound conclusion. The conclusion was that "everything that goes up, must come down, because there exists a force which pulls everything down to Earth." For want of a better name, I called the mysterious force "the great pull-down force."

The very next day, I talked to my science teacher at school. I told him about my mishap with the stone which I had thrown at the mango tree. Then I told him how I had used that experience to come to the conclusion that a force must exist which routinely pulls all things down to Earth.

My science teacher, being wiser than I was at that point in time, told me all about some British chap named Newton, the apple which supposedly fell on Newton's head, and a force called "gravity." As the pain in my head began again to throb relentlessly, I cursed the "rotten apple" which had fallen on Newton's head. Why couldn't it have been a coconut instead? I mean a really, really, big coconut.

Painfully I realized that a rotten apple which had fallen on Newton's head a couple of centuries ago had robbed me of my chances of becoming a famous name in history. "What rotten luck," I thought to myself.

When I was a little older, I think I was about fifteen years old, I went to the railway station to meet a couple of relatives who were visiting my family for a

few days. As the train started pulling into the platform, I realized that the noise of the engine was getting louder and louder as the train neared me. My nimble mind started racing again.

"Aha," I thought to myself, "when an object which makes a noise is traveling towards you, it gets louder and louder." I further deduced that the reverse must be true for objects moving away from you. I was sure that I was on the verge of another scientific breakthrough.

I was so engrossed with my thoughts that I somehow managed to let my visiting relatives slip past me without my noticing them. I searched for them without much success for an hour in the crowded railway station and then went home alone.

When I reached home, I realized that my relatives had managed to find their way without my help, for there they were, sitting in the living room and talking to my father. I apologized to them and ran out of the house to visit with my friends. As I ran out of the house, I noticed that the angry words that my father was yelling at me about how irresponsible my behavior was, were getting fainter and fainter, thus proving my scientific discovery.

The next day I sought out my high school science teacher and talked to him about what I had "discovered" at the railway station the day before. He heard what I had to say, smiled at me, and told me all about a fellow named Doppler. I learned that what I had independently discovered at the railway station already had a name. It was called the "Doppler Effect."¹

While I was still in high school I happened to observe a really nasty dog fight. They were fighting over a female in heat. After a fierce fight, one dog, which was bigger and stronger than the other dogs, chased the other dogs away and started "claiming" its prize.

As I observed these events, my mind jumped to yet another scientific conclusion. "In the wild," I reasoned, "being big and strong must be beneficial for the survival of the species." I pursued this line of reasoning and developed what I called the "Theory of the Survival of the Big and Strong."

My high school science teacher burst my bubble once again. He told me all about Darwin, the theory of evolution, and the notion of "survival of the fittest."

One day, when I was in college, I was thinking about two pretty girls I knew. After much mental debate, I decided that one of them was prettier than the other. No sooner than I had done that, I thought of a third girl I knew. I eventually decided that the third girl was prettier than the one I had chosen earlier.

One thing led to another and I quickly came to the conclusion that beauty was a "relative" phenomenon. Soon I began to see that most phenomena were "relative." After a few days of intense mental activity, I began to form ideas for what I thought could be called a "Theory of Relative Phenomena."

A few days later, in Physics class, I learned all about a rather unkempt human being named Albert Einstein and "his" theory of relativity.

Now, I have a Ph.D. and have become a lot wiser.² I have also, over the last few years, come up with many more independent discoveries, only to find out later that someone else had thought of the very same idea years earlier.

Many such discoveries later, my "still-nimble-after-all-the-disappointments-mind" came to yet another profound conclusion. To my amazement, I found out that no one else has staked a claim to it.

I named this discovery, probably not the one and only profound³ discovery I will ever make,⁴ "The Law of Late Birth."⁵

The Law of Late Birth states:

If you independently discover something profound, and then also discover that someone else has discovered the same thing many, many years earlier, then you were born that many years late in time.

Years from now, some intelligent youngster will independently discover something similar to the Law of Late Birth. But that same youngster will also discover that he or she was born many, many years too late.

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1. I now know that the term "Doppler Effect" refers to the apparent shift in pitch (in the case of sound waves) or frequency (in the case of light waves) caused by relative motion between the observer and the source of the waves.
 2. I am sure that many of my friends will wholeheartedly disagree with me on this point.
 3. My friends will argue that this is not a very profound discovery at all.
 4. I am sure that many of my friends will wholeheartedly disagree with me on this point also.
 5. I also independently coined the phrase "With friends like these, who needs enemies?" only to find out that someone had already thought of it earlier.

Not My Department

Through the battered gates they pour,
Theorists, post-post-feminists and more.
They think history is on their side
And so they spread their banners wide —
Radicalize and feminize now!
Subvert the canon, that sacred cow
Of Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Donne,
Which of course is male oppression,
And, worse, realistic, not avant-garde.
(And sometimes, perhaps, a bit too hard?)
Their language-centered rubbish claims
That all is text, just clever games
That writers and readers play, puts all
That meaning-nonsense past recall.
Now books exist to back up theory,
Or promote the cause of certain dreary
Groups of marginals — a solid bet
If little's published on them yet.
They triumph, for the frightened men
Dare not disagree with voice or pen.
Dire things wait for the one who tries,
For to argue is to colonize.
People of color, Derrida, late Plath,
Cixous, Foucault, the garden path.
All else is wrong politically,
And that is what they dare not be.
They say “valorize” a lot, and jargon

Like “subject-position,” for they’re far gone
In a neo-speak that’s all their own,
As loudly they march the new truths home.
Sad humanists slink home to write
Their realistic books at night,
Or, if they’re male and white, not gay,
To calculate retirement pay.
How do new theories of narrative
Reveal to us how people live?
Or deconstruction tell us why
Some lines of poetry make us cry?
To them such questions are passé —
Discredited universality —
And “othering” a work of art,
If they don’t agree with it, is smart.
O solidarity in rabble,
Sustained by complacent psychobabble.
(Thank God for Updike, Davies, Drabble.)
One thing is sure — if there’s a heaven,
These zealots will never be forgiven
For fragmenting people more and more
And using poetry as a whore.
Prostituting works of art
Does damage to the human heart.
They haven’t quite killed that off yet,
But look out, the agenda’s set.

Christopher Wiseman

Et Tu?

I am unsettled.

The words that were so long my friends

Have now deserted me.

They have been wooed by strangers,

Even as I speak them,

Even those that once were soft and gentle.

We can no longer mingle.

Norra Taylor

