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Gloria Frimpong

Third-Place Winner

Short Essay Category

2019-2020 Emerging Writers Contest

Have You Considered?

When thinking about human nature, one story comes to mind. Several of my friends seem to share a profound childhood memory, considering they never met each other in their youth. During the zenith of summer, they'd run to their backyards with magnifying glasses clutched in hand. The meadows, shimmering in golden-green glory, revealed small pockets of red ant hills. With smiles, my friends would hurriedly sit and hover their magnifying glasses over them. The ants' bodies enlarged. Every prickly hair on their legs was in crisp detail, as was the slight tremble of their antennas. With the invention of the magnifying glass, they were able to study organisms hundreds of times smaller than them. Innovation— this byproduct of human curiosity and creativity — has driven humanity to new heights. In fact, we are the only species to inhabit the entire globe. Forests that once housed wild bears and boars now house skyscrapers, neighborhoods, and universities. Many would say that the human race is on top of the world. But as we push the limits of what we perceive as possible, have we considered that we are the greatest threat to life?

The human mind is too complex to fathom, and our abilities are innumerable. Though we cannot speak things into existence, our hands are able to work at length with our imagination to create what we perceive as impossible. Besides our ever-growing technology that has given way to efficient communication, medicine, infrastructure, and more, our creativity also tends to bend

the bounds of reality. We are storytellers. We create fantasies that are not compatible with science— horses with wings, half dead humans with the hunger for craniums, spell-casting women with pointy hats and jars of magic. Solely with our language, merely symbols on a page, we can paint elaborate images in a person's imagination, and still have each person envision entirely different things. Even now, as my fingers dance across a pad of uniformed keys, the delicate, silvery notes of gothic instrumental music waft to my ears. And I see tight-knit collections of clouds across the sky, fused together in a way that prevents even a ray of light to escape its folds. Our creativity is unhinged. Why, the things humans have created are too great to ponder, and too great to bear.

Our responsibility on Earth is measured by the power we bear. If destruction is in our hands, so is life. The Amazon Rainforest is up in flames, devastating humans and nonhuman animals alike, and it is due in-part to our love of money. Species are going extinct at our hands because we would rather have the beauty of the elephant tusk than the regality of the creature itself. We inflict genocide on ourselves, on our brothers and sisters, only because they do not fit our frame of *human*. Adolf Hitler exterminated over six million innocents because they weren't created in his image of humanity. Europeans arrived in the Americas hundreds of years ago and fought to the death for the end of its inhabitants. Africans were bound in chains, led into slavery, killed, and had their history taken from them. The subjectivity of morality combined with our unusual power leads to catastrophic changes of life. Who are we to have amassed this much power? To tip the balance of life whenever we want, and however we please?

We are the cause of radical change, whether good or bad. We build cities and obliterate them beyond repair. We endanger species and pull them from the edge of extinction. We solve problems and give birth to plentiful pain and suffering. With our ambition alone, we have pushed

past the atmosphere of our very planet and set our feet on the moon. We have created automatons to breach hidden places, if only to see what our feet cannot yet reach. At any second, our many nuclear bombs could bring Earth to a reality of eternal waste. And we are the only ones keeping that from reaching fruition. Where a forest once stood, a new metropolis can then breathe. Look at clouds of burning coal wrestle with oxygen! The power humans have is too great to control, too great to do anything but watch.

Humans, with their natural anthropocentric mindset, try to deny their pride, yet never cease to give their likeness to things who are not like them. Videos bounce around the internet, showing elephants drawing with their snouts or dogs emulating what we call human emotion. We praise animals when we can see ourselves in them. In entertainment, we paint creatures and objects in our image. Like gifts, we grant them our language, our faces, our emotions, and our rationale. Personification. We put this in the box of figurative language, a style of art, when it also belongs in the box of self-glorification. We define what is beauty by the standards of ourselves. We define what is glory, what is moral, what is wrong. We name the creatures and the plants. We dig under our skin to understand the functions of our organs. The power of creativity is built somewhere within us, and we walk with surreptitious crowns on our heads. The audacity humans have is too great to comprehend— too great to bring to an end.

You can ask a human what they fear most and they would never say themselves. Our minds have the capacity to wrestle against itself and win, yet we don't fear it. The mind can deceive itself, giving it images and perceptions of reality that are not true, yet we don't take a step back and realize its dangerous potential. Our emotions run wild, and with hands created with the ability to build and destroy, do we realize the power we wield? A person with temporary fury can choose to lower his own inhibition and stab his former love with invigorating passion. He

finds unusual pleasure in watching blood trickle from— ah it's too intense to fathom. Our potential as the human race is as deep as the oceans go, or perhaps as wide as the galaxies grow. We must use our consciousness to define what is right and what is wrong, what is just and what is brutal. For we can craft beautiful art just as we can craft intricate destruction. We have great good and great evil in our hearts, constantly wrestling for the fate of all life as we know it.

Our creativity has also driven us to perceive the world holistically, not bound to a particular environment or even a way of living. The fish of the sea probably can't fathom the existence of humans, not until they are caught by the lips on a hook of rusty metal. Then they must look in our eyes and silently scream for water as they realize their final moments of life will be spent in an alien environment. The sun is blinding, the heat unbearable, and the suffocating air clings to them like plastic. Then there are the humans. How can they dare smile? Their eyes pop with excitement at their new catch. How could a creature express such joy at the expense of an innocent life? When it comes to things like this, the minds of humans have stretched beyond the mere will to survive. For many, fishing is not a necessity, nor is hunting. But we take to it because we regard it as fun. The humans, with their clothing, sprawling technology, and ever-growing power, do not just wish to survive. We aim to be the very best at everything we can possibly do. Each year, we emerge with new technology and come ever closer to the reality of artificial intelligence. Can you imagine? Mechanical machines with human likeness— all of our ability, intelligence, and perhaps beauty. Except, they are perfect. What else can Earth then do but bow?

We do not perceive ourselves as powerful because we cannot do what our imagination wills at the snap of our fingers. We are not God in that we do not have dominion over creation itself, nor do we fully understand even the tip of the iceberg that is existence. However, as I

interviewed Dr. Ellwanger, a practicing anthropologist, about the difference between humans and the rest of animal life, he mentioned that “it’s creativity, innovation, and sharing of information [that] are the biggest driver for why we’re different” (Ellwanger). We are creators because we have depthless creativity. What once were stones are now guns that are used to massacre children in what is supposed to be a safe school. What once were trees giving life to all are now walls used to steal life from those we deem unworthy. Who are we to now hold the judgement of worth? The standard of beauty? The standard of anything— if we are mere products of nature itself?

Something I failed to mention in the story of my friends and their magnifying glasses is that their excitement wasn’t actually hinged on the discovery of the ant’s anatomy. Rather, they learned that sunlight concentrated through the glass, and that burning heat inflicted excruciating pain on those ants. They scattered under the massive eyes of the humans, scattered from the sharp sting of fire. In uncovering the mysteries of nature, my friends killed. They killed and cared little. Humans are enough to fear. We are far too great for justification. To whom will we answer to when the world crumbles at our bloody hands?

Could we even say a word?