

In Defence of the iGeneration

Renée Wilson

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(3151 words)

Abstract

A scientific and anecdotal rumination on why today's kids are more than alright—they're the best generation yet.

1 I had only been a college professor for three years when Gregory Levey's controversial and much-discussed magazine piece "Lament for the iGeneration" was published in 2009. I interpreted it as a cautionary tale: if we're in the hands of the next generation, we're really screwed. Levey, a Ryerson communications professor, basically argued he's pretty sure education has tanked; the iGeneration (those born in the 1990s) can't handle post-secondary learning; and that the gap between the schools and the kids is too huge to mend. Dismal stuff, but I understood where Levey was coming from—kind of.

2 I was terrified when I first started teaching. I didn't have any teacher training. I got hired via email. There was no mentoring, no lesson plans, and no prep. One day I was writing a magazine column in my crap clothes from home, and the next I was dressed like a grown up stammering through a lesson at the helm of a full class. I just wanted them to like me. I guess that's why I took it personally when they paid more attention to Facebook than they did to me during a lecture. It was an out-of-body experience to have to tell them to turn their computers off and listen to me. I felt the same frustration Levey described in his article: "Radical advances in technology

over the past decade have made today's young minds incompatible with traditional learning. It isn't just what they know or don't know. It's also how they know things at all."

3 Seven years later, I still die inside a little bit when, inevitably, I have to give the speech about shutting down screens when I'm directly addressing them. I hate that I have to say it, but now I don't take it personally. I still worry that they won't get the crux of the lesson if they don't give me their full attention, but I know they're not mentally flitting around out of disrespect. Asking them to drop their tech would be like asking you to wear your shoes on the wrong feet. It's do-able, of course, but does it ever feel wrong. What I found is that this generation multi-task very well, and that the cynicism surrounding the iGeneration is dead wrong. Not only are the kids alright, they could be the best generation yet.

4 My cynical generation is great at slapping critical labels on the iGeneration. We do it all the time. "Everyone dumps on the youngest generation," says Giselle Kovary, co-founder and Managing Partner of Toronto-based Ngen People Performance Inc., which specializes in managing generational differences in the workplace. "But this generation is scary smart."

5 The generation born in the 1990s has pretty much always known things we haven't: Facebook (est. 2004), YouTube (est. 2005), Twitter (est. 2006), Google (est. 1996) and Wiki (est. 2001). Social networking to them is what colour TV was to GenX: It's hard to remember life before it—and just like TV used to be the big scare, we are obsessed over what the Internet does to children of the iGeneration, especially now that they're growing up. All of this freaky attachment to tech is seriously messing with the "social" part of their brains, some experts say. Everyone—including iGeneration itself—is

extremely sensitized to the way young people interact with technology. The list of scientific studies on the topic is as expansive as the more amateur commentary making its way through social media circuits.

6 The conclusions that such technology-attached-brain studies and commentaries reach are overwhelmingly scary. They ring not of advancement and exciting future possibilities, but of one word: beware. Take, for instance, the conclusions of one cautionary book. "Besides influencing how we think, digital technology is altering how we feel, how we behave, and the way in which our brains function," says Gary Small in his book *iBrain: Surviving the technological alteration of the modern mind*, which he co-wrote with his wife, Gigi Vorgan, in 2008. "As the brain evolves and shifts its focus toward new technological skills, it drifts away from fundamental social skills, such as reading facial expressions during conversation or grasping the emotional context of a subtle gesture."

7 In other words, the iGeneration's techno brains are morphing them into socially-inept robots. It's easy—perhaps too easy—to agree with this assessment, but I don't buy it. In my seven years in the classroom, I've witnessed how much more mature this generation is than I ever was as a student. On the upside, this techno brain phenom has resulted in a cohort that can think on its feet, make snap decisions and, on the flip side of all the negative studies about them turning into social morons, there's just as much research to show that students who use tech to communicate are actually fantastic collaborators. It's like they're wired for it. They are fearless about pushing buttons—literally and figuratively—and, as one article put it, it's "as if they've been programmed how to know what to do."

8 I'm in constant contact with my students, partly because they demand it and partly be-

cause it's just easier that way. Why wait a week to get an answer from me, when they can fire off a quick message, get the direction they need and then press on with an assignment? Isn't that just working smarter? I've talked a student through a class project at 8 p.m., while she was still at school and I was grocery shopping. I've conducted a class from my hotel room at Disney World during March Break without a single hiccup. The students didn't think twice about passing me around on an iPad to answer questions. What's more, they all showed up to class, even though they knew I wouldn't be there in body.

9 "This generation is known for its innovation and creativity," laughs Kovary over the phone. "Think outside of the box? Um, they don't even know there is a box." This generation only knows a world where the next-best version is released quarterly. What they've internalized is that there's no need to wait until every detail is perfect. Instead, you make adjustments as needed, in real time. This freedom of approach is what, perhaps, makes them the gutsiest of all generations. As Kovary adds, the iGeneration doesn't get stuck in the older generation's static world, or even in the status quo. Change is okay. In fact, it's great.

10 If the box no longer exists, neither does any sort of social or geographical barrier. Enter the now ubiquitous crowdsourcing movement. What once was a small world has become a teeny, tiny world and no generation is more adept at taking advantage of that than the iGeneration. When I was a kid (Ugh. Did I just say that?), I wanted to be a travel agent. (Don't laugh. Who saw Expedia coming in the '80s?). But I didn't know anyone in the field, I couldn't find a college or university program, and that dream died. Today, those obstacles don't exist. The iGeneration doesn't blink at the thought of finding valuable life, job, or education

connections through technology or social media. Just as those from other generations might ask their spouse, mentor, or close friend, the iGeneration will source hundreds of “friends” and “followers” for love advice, career advice, and even thoughts on what to eat for lunch.

11 It can seem gutsy to put out a public SOS on Facebook or Twitter, but that’s the way the iGeneration rolls. “They will crowdsource, no matter what the challenge,” says Kovary. “Their ‘pack’ is 700 people.” While critics lambasted the generation for its “me-me-me” focus, the truth is that collaboration comes naturally to this extended pack. Their willingness to source what other people have to say almost makes relying on others second nature.

12 In one class, for instance, I blindfolded my students and told them to make their way around the classroom, being sure to touch each of the four walls before returning to their chairs, in an unconventional attempt to teach them about deadlines (newsflash: I set them because I can see what’s coming). Almost the entire group instinctively worked as a team, made a human chain and executed the task in a pack. In the end, I made my point about deadlines (my due date is preventing you from ramming into the proverbial desk you didn’t see) and they reinforced the notion that there is power, and trust, in a pack.

13 Perhaps surprisingly, rather than creating a generation of followers and drifters—as is so often suggested—this ask-everybody-and-anybody-everything-and-anything attitude has created a cohort of peers. This extends to all areas, including business, and pretty much anything, where top-down leadership was once instinctive. Now, says Kovary, everyone within a corporation is a peer. “If a senior manager says ‘email me,’ [this generation] will,” she adds. “If you’re going to tout open communication, get ready!”

14 Whereas other generations were meant to maintain respectful distance, connecting with people—all people—is the iGeneration’s natural expectation. Or as 23-year-old Katie Fewster-Yan puts it, because her generation is able to make so many easy connections with people, the top-down model of leadership seems unappealing, even obsolete. Instead, she suggests the term micro-leaders. She is co-founder of Ruckus Readings. Ruckus is a Toronto-based reading series that promotes spoken word literature, one of many, she admits, that exists in Toronto—an exercise in diversifying options, instead of competing for an audience. “Since it’s so easy to connect with people,” she adds, “You can really choose to follow the ones you’re drawn to.”

15 For Fewster-Yan, this has nothing to do with a sense of entitlement (another common, and tired, criticism of today’s twentysomethings.) In fact, she mostly feels like she has the inverse of entitlement: that her resume is one small sheet in a massive stack of overqualified resumes, not even entitled to minimum wage despite her university education. She guesses that, more than anything, is why many of the iGeneration start things on their own, like she did with Ruckus Readings. It’s not that they feel entitled to be happy or immediately successful or even that they should jump frog over others with more experience. Rather, there is a general sense that the old model of “shimmying in at the bottom, hanging tight, and working your way up” is broken. And why, in this new world of change and crowdsourcing wouldn’t it seem that way? “I think of plenty of people as role models,” says Fewster-Yan, “but I see them more as exemplary peers than superiors.”

16 Or, as 22-year-old Chanelle Seguin says, “The best part is that the older generations are learning from the iGen.” Seguin is the sole staff

reporter at the *Pincher Creek Echo* in Alberta, where she is responsible for writing and designing the weekly community newspaper. In addition to putting in a solid eight hours at the paper, she also works part-time at Walmart to pay off the line of credit she needed to move from Ontario to Alberta for the reporting gig. Plus, she is a volunteer Girl Guide leader, is planning to coach hockey, and is working on her own sports magazine start-up, *Tough Competition*.

17 She says her generation was forced to become leaders. They had to teach themselves how to use Facebook, Twitter, smartphones, Bluetooth—and the list goes on. Her generation doesn't, she adds, follow the same way other generations did. In that way, she admits, they kind of deserve the selfish moniker everyone slaps on them. "We are almost selfish," says Seguin, "because we lead ourselves and don't consider following anyone."

18 Even so, don't ask for an iGeneration's undivided attention because you're not going to get it. It would be like asking a GenX to go back to changing channels without a clicker, or trying to convince a Traditionalist that debt is good. It just feels wrong. The iGeneration is of the "do it now, fix it later" mentality. But why wouldn't they be? They've come of age at a time when technology changes quarterly. Change is good. Rapid change means things are getting cooler.

19 Some have labelled this trait as the desire for immediate gratification, or a lack of stick-with-it-ness, but I think they're wrong. I think it's a matter of momentum. They can't stay static because everything around them, the social life-sustaining technology that triggers their all-consuming dopamine, is in perpetual change. Science tells us that brain function from age 15 to 25 is dopamine induced, which is why this is life's most emotionally-powerful span. It isn't until later, sometime from age 25 onward, that

the ability to control impulses kicks in. Dopamine is the feel-good chemical, it's that little Russell Brand voice in your head that whispers, "Go ahead, luv, have another piece of cake."

20 The iGeneration is swimming in it. Science also tells us that hits of dopamine, for the iGeneration, come from things like Facebook status likes and re-Tweets. It's easy to confuse this with narcissism. While nearly all researchers peg key human development on ages birth to three years, prominent figures in adolescent research beg to elaborate. They say people ultimately become who they are during adolescence. The prefrontal cortex—the steady-Eddie part of our brain—starts developing just before adolescence and doesn't stop until we're in our mid-twenties, which means from puberty until then everything feels really intense. We can blame this intensity on dopamine, a neurotransmitter that helps control the brain's reward and pleasure centres and gushes when we do something that feels good. This entire process is about preparing young people to shape their own notion of who they are as people, as they strive for self-actualization.

21 In Jennifer Senior's article, "Why You Truly Never Leave High School," published in January in *New York* magazine, the power of dopamine is explored. She quotes studies on the "reminiscence bump"—the term used for the fact that, "when given a series of random prompts and cues, grown adults will recall a disproportionate number of memories from adolescence." This explains BOOM radio, mullets in 2013, why NKOTB can still sell out, and why otherwise placid grandparents can still bust a mean jive at a wedding reception. Societal circumstances change with the generations, but basic brain development doesn't. The drastic variable with the iGeneration, though, is the breakneck speed of technology. According to *iBrain*, we haven't

seen this kind of leap since humankind first learned how to use a tool.

22 Every human being experiences the same stages of brain development, in that we're all in prefrontal cortex development from puberty to our mid-twenties. The difference today is that dopamine hits are coming from tech, and tech is everywhere, and tech equals perpetual change. According to Joel Stein's article, "The Me Me Me Generation," published in May [2013] in *Time* magazine, in order to retain this generation in the workforce, companies must provide more than just money; they must also provide self-actualization. "During work hours at DreamWorks (for example)," Stein writes, "you can take classes in photography, sculpting, painting, cinematography, and karate."

23 This whole self-actualization thing is a bit *much* for GenXers and Boomers to stomach, especially in the workplace. I get it. And it took me a few runs at it, but I now see that self-actualization is truly the only way to reach the iGeneration in the classroom. I don't fancy myself

Michelle Pfeiffer's character in *Dangerous Minds*, and I certainly have nothing on *Dead Poets Society*'s captain-my-captain, but when I handed out marshmallows to students in a magazine writing class I knew I grabbed them tighter than Facebook in that lesson. I had found a way to tap into their value system. It was all about them (ahem, self-actualization), yes, but I knew every student also had a story to tell.

24 Still, I had completely underestimated the power of my "marshmallow" lesson. I was humbled when one student's composition described how it made him feel when he and his sister roasted marshmallows by candle flame because, as "apartment kids," they never had the privilege of a backyard campfire. In [the] "marshmallow" [experiment], I expected a literal description of the taste of a marshmallow. Perhaps I underestimated the trust they had in me, and in their classmates, to share such personal stories. Educators need to find out what iGeneration's values are by sneaking up on them with unconventional lessons.

Traditionalists: 1922–1945

IN A WORD: STABLE

CATCH PHRASE: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

CHARACTERISTICS: stayed in the same company, doing the same job, forever; stayed married forever; change only happens for a good reason; maintaining the status quo is just fine

Baby Boomers: 1946–1964

IN A WORD: CAUTIOUS

CATCH PHRASE: "Change fatigue"

CHARACTERISTICS: many lost their jobs during the recessions of the '80s and '90s; had to endure "flavour of the month" leadership changes resulting in lack of enthusiasm for new changes; very politically savvy; must poke holes in a project before committing to it



Critical Thinking

1. Analyze the author's argument, commenting on any argumentative strategies and their effectiveness.
2. Think of a situation involving two alternatives and argue in support of the "least likely" alternative (for example, that a high-school education is more beneficial than a college or university education).

Mary Midgley, "The Selfish Metaphor"

This article, which appeared in the popular science magazine *New Scientist*, considers the role that metaphorical thinking can play in scientific thought. *New Scientist* is designed for readers interested in a wide variety of science-related topics, so it is not an academic journal, though its authors often refer to academic studies.



Preparing to Read

1. What is a metaphor and how is it used in literary writing?
2. Have you ever considered how common metaphors can affect our perception?
3. Can you think of a metaphor that has an everyday use? For example, how is the Internet "web-like"?
4. Access the *New Scientist* website and scan recent articles in order to determine the kinds of articles published.

The Selfish Metaphor

Mary Midgley

New Scientist, 29 January 2011
(1311 words)

1 Selfish genes, survival of the fittest, competition, hawk, and dove strategies. Like all theories, Darwinism has its own distinct vocabulary. So distinct, in fact, that we end up asking how else we can talk about evolution? After all, isn't competitive evolution the only possible context

for explaining the biological facts? The drama implied by competition, war, and selfishness passes unnoticed because people are used to this rather hyped-up way of talking even about current scientific beliefs.

2 The trouble with metaphors is that they don't just mirror scientific beliefs, but they also shape them. Our imagery is never just surface paint. It expresses, advertises, and strengthens our preferred interpretations. It also usually carries unconscious bias from the age we live in—and this can be tricky to ditch no matter how faulty, unless we ask ourselves how and

why things go wrong, and start to talk publicly about how we should understand metaphor.

3 Evolution has been the most glaring example of the thoughtless use of metaphor over the past 30 years, with the selfish/war metaphors dominating and defining the landscape so completely it becomes hard to admit there are other ways of conceiving it. In *How The Leopard Changed Its Spots*, biologist and complexity theorist Brian Goodwin suggested the kind of correction needed, remarking mildly that humans are "every bit as co-operative as we are competitive; as altruistic as we are selfish. These are not romantic yearnings and Utopian ideals; they arise from a rethinking of our nature that is emerging from the sciences of complexity." But that was in 1991—and few were listening.

4 From the merest glance at a wider context, it becomes clear that competition cannot be the ultimate human reality, still less (as philosopher Daniel Dennett argued) the central creative force behind the universe. Entities complex enough to compete cannot exist at all without much internal cooperation. To create cells, organelles must combine; to create armies, soldiers must organize. Even the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins pointed out on the 30th anniversary of publication of his iconic book, *The Selfish Gene*, that genes are actually cooperative rather than egoistic.

5 So why has this imagery become so prevalent? Because it expresses deep conflicts originating in seventeenth-century England which are still unresolved in the western world. The central clash is between communal and separatist views of human nature. It rose out of the English Civil War, which shifted the world picture from a feudal, communal pattern toward the more individualistic, pluralistic model we

officially follow today. Ideals of personal allegiance, heroic warfare and the divine right of kings began to yield to civilian visions based on democracy, technology, and commerce.

6 That individualistic, post-Civil War world view has always been seen as scientific. This was largely because Newtonian physics viewed matter atomistically, as composed of hard, billiard-ball-like particles bouncing off each other in complex patterns—patterns which, under God, shaped that huge clock, the classical universe. Billiards, fashionable at the time, may have helped shape this view, while the vision of a vast, regular, unchanging cosmic machine was certainly reassuring.

7 The reality, however, was that society was changing unpredictably and would need other, very different kinds of metaphors and images—ones better able to reveal shifts and clashes of interest. To fill this need, philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau devised a kind of social atomism, along with the colourful individualistic metaphors it inspired and still inspires. Through this lens, people no longer appeared as parts of a machine: they were still atoms, but distinct, active, independent units.

8 But the philosopher Thomas Hobbes's claim that the natural state of humans was "a war of all against all" (put forward in a bid to stop people supporting misguided governments) accidentally launched a wider revolt against the notion of citizenship. The slogan made it possible to argue later that there is no such thing as society, that we owe one another nothing. This thought also inspired campaigns for admirable things like easier divorce and universal suffrage and it is still strong today, even though physicists themselves no longer see their particles as radically disconnected.

9 In the eighteenth century, economists eagerly applied individualism to commerce, arguing that free competition always serves the general good. Its champions could thus believe they were being scientific while still acting as good citizens. And its emphasis on conflict reassured them they were still heroes, that bourgeois life had not corrupted their machismo. So atomistic thinking, originally drawn from physics, acquired a social meaning in economics and was then returned to science as ideas of competition began to dominate nineteenth-century biology. The resulting jumble of atomistic ontology, *laissez-faire economics* and warlike noises came together fully in the theories of nineteenth-century "social Darwinists" like Herbert Spencer.

10 Charles Darwin actually hated much of it, flatly rejecting the crude, direct application of natural selection to social policies. In *The Descent of Man* he insisted that humans are a deeply social species whose values cannot be derived from selfish calculation. Yet, as a man of his age, he still shared Spencer's obsessive belief in the creative force of competition. He ruled that natural selection was indeed the main cause of evolutionary changes, and—apart from sexual selection—he could not suggest any other possible source.

11 He was sure, however, that natural selection could not be their sole cause. He must be right: natural selection is only a filter and filters cannot be the sole cause of the coffee that comes from them. "Evolutionary coffee"—genuine new developments—could not emerge unless the range of selectables has somehow been shaped to make it possible. If that range were indefinite only randomness could follow, however much time elapsed.

12 Biologist D'Arcy Thompson pointed this out in *On Growth And Form* in 1917, noting the striking natural tendencies which contribute to evolution—the subtle, natural patterns such as Fibonacci spirals that shape all manner of organic forms, and the logic underlying patterns such as the arrangement of a creature's limbs. Thompson's work was little noted in the twentieth-century's concentration on natural selection, but more recently biologists such as Brian Goodwin, Steven Rose, and Simon Conway Morris have developed his work, showing how natural selection is supplemented by a kind of self-organization within each species, which has its own logic.

13 Now the old metaphors of evolution need to give way to new ones founded on integrative thinking—reasoning based on systems thinking. This way, the work of evolution can be seen as intelligible and constructive, not as a gamble driven randomly by the forces of competition. And if non-competitive imagery is needed, systems biologist Denis Noble has a good go at it in *The Music of Life*, where he points out how natural development, not being a car, needs no single "driver" to direct it. Symphonies, he remarks, are not caused only by a single dominant instrument nor, indeed, solely by their composer. And developing organisms do not even need a composer: they grow, as wholes, out of vast and ancient systems which are themselves parts of nature.

14 Recognizing the cultural origins of evolution's metaphors and that we are slowly, painfully, creating new ones takes the drama out of things, but it does mean we will learn how to think about metaphors and their philosophical underpinning. We will discover we need them to serve us as thinking tools, not to turn us into slaves of our own conceits.

Slip-Sliding Away, Down the Ethical Slope

Robert J. Sternberg

The Chronicle of Higher Education, 9 January 2011
(893 words)

1 “You see your roommate at his computer, writing a paper. You notice him transferring text from an online document to the paper he is writing without attribution. He changes a few words here and there so he cannot be accused of plagiarism. Is there a problem here? What, if anything, should you do?”

2 “Professor Johnson is known for not giving back exams because he uses pretty much the same questions from year to year. Your roommate comes back to your room with a big smile. A fraternity brother has managed to slip out a copy of last year’s exam and has given it to him. Your roommate figures he can get an edge on this year’s exam by studying last year’s. ‘Not my fault,’ he says, ‘that Professor Johnson reuses his test questions.’ Is there a problem here? What, if anything, should you do?”

3 In presenting problems such as these to various student groups, I have been taken aback by the number of those who either do not see an ethical breach or, if they do, feel that it is minor or not of concern to them. It’s a problem that goes much deeper than the occasional incident—we find cheating on the rise even before students get to college, and many cheaters are more concerned with getting caught than with actually committing the act.

4 When it comes to unethical behaviour such as cheating, our society has, I believe, engaged in a fundamental misperception. It derives from our conviction that, through religious training

or other ethical training—at home, for example—students have been brought up to know right from wrong and thus to behave ethically. The misperception is that it is easy to do the right thing, and that doing the wrong thing requires extra mental or other effort. In fact, the opposite is true: It is often hard to do the right thing, which is why there is cheating.

5 To behave ethically is not a one-step process: Do the right thing. It is a sometimes arduous eight-step process. To behave ethically, you must:

1. Recognize that there is a situation that deserves to be noticed and reflected upon.
2. Define the situation as having an ethical component.
3. Decide that the ethical component is important enough to deserve attention.
4. View the ethical component as relevant to you personally.
5. Ascertain what ethical rule applies to the situation.
6. Figure out how to apply the ethical rule.
7. Prepare for possible adverse consequences, such as retaliation, if you should act ethically.
8. Act.

6 All of those steps can be relatively difficult to execute, and, unfortunately, behaving ethically can be as challenging for parents as it is for students. Parents may cross the line by going from helping their children with homework, papers, science projects, and writing college-application essays to essentially doing the work. It is then little wonder that students reach college and hire others to do their work for them. This point came home in a *Chronicle Review* article, “The Shadow Scholar,” by an individual who anonymously writes student papers for pay. Of course, it is not clear that professors are immune: Just as students are outsourcing the writing of papers, so are some professors now outsourcing

the grading of papers. One wonders whether our society will eventually eliminate the middlemen—college students and faculty—and simply have the outsourced writers and the outsourced graders work together directly.

7 More realistically, educators need to stop assuming that ethical behaviour is the normal course of action for a well-educated individual, and that cheating and other forms of unethical behaviour are not the norm. Rather, they have to assume that behaving ethically is often challenging, as any fired whistle-blower can tell you.

8 Schools need to teach students the steps involved in ethical behaviour and the challenges of executing them. And they need to do so with real-life case studies relevant to the students' lives. The steps toward ethical behaviour are not ones that students can internalize by memorization, but only through active experiential learning with personally relevant examples.

9 There is a larger question our society must face: Have we abrogated what should be a fundamental responsibility of higher education?

The financiers who helped to create the financial meltdown of 2008 were, for the most part, bright and well educated. Many were graduates of this country's finest colleges and universities. Is it possible that, in placing so much emphasis on grades and test scores, we are failing to select for and teach the qualities that will produce not just ethical individuals but also ethical leaders?

10 We have come, in large part, to use standardized-test scores and other objective measurements to provide opportunities to students who score well—opportunities that are much scarcer for others. But is it enough to look for such narrowly defined academic skills? Is it not time to search for and develop the wisdom and positive ethical skills that we need in order to steer this country *up* the slippery slope rather than *down*?

11 Once started on that slide, it is hard to stop before the crash at the bottom. Just ask any disgraced politician, executive, clergyman, or educator. While unethical behaviour may start in schools with plagiarism or stolen exams, we know all too sadly, and all too well, that it doesn't end there.

Comprehension

1. Identify, then paraphrase, the author's thesis.
2. According to the author, how can schools best address the problem of unethical student behaviour?

Critical Thinking/Research

1. Is this essay just concerned about stopping students from cheating? What other, larger concerns does Sternberg raise? Do you believe they are important ones?
2. In groups, come up with a real-life scenario, like those that begin the essay, in which unethical behaviour might be involved and share them with other members of the class.
3. In the short-term, what specific steps can be taken by instructors or administration to reduce the incidence of cheating at the post-secondary level?
4. Summarize the results of at least two studies that deal with problems of unethical student behaviour published in the last ten years; or, summarize at least two commentaries/editorials on the same topic, making sure the essays are from reliable sources.

John Horgan, "Does Peace Have a Chance?"

In the journalistic essay "Does Peace Have a Chance?" John Horgan takes issue with a common perception concerning the aggressive tendencies of humans, questioning the logic behind the perception primarily through the use of facts and statistics.



Preparing to Read

1. Who is John Horgan? Do an Internet search to answer this question.
2. Reflect on your own position in the debate. Do you believe that war and/or aggression is innate in humans? You could try to answer this question by brainstorming, dividing your ideas into two columns (yes and no); then, look back at your points and decide which are the strongest.

Does Peace Have a Chance?

John Horgan

Slate, 4 August 2009

(1191 words)

1 The West Point War Museum, right across the Hudson River from my home, offers a brisk tour of the history of weaponry, from Paleolithic stone axes to Fat Man, the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki in 1945. A sign at the museum's entrance states, "Unquestionably, war-making is an aspect of human nature which will continue as nations attempt to impose their will upon each other." Actually, this assertion is quite questionable. A recent decline in war casualties—especially compared to historical and even prehistorical rates—has some scholars wondering whether the era of international war may be ending.

2 Counting casualties is fraught with uncertainty; scholars' estimates vary according to how they define war and what sources they accept as

reliable, among other factors. Nevertheless, a clear trend emerges from recent studies. Last year, 25,600 combatants and civilians were killed as a direct result of armed conflicts, according to the 2009 Yearbook of SIPRI, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, to be released 17 August. Two thirds of these deaths took place in just three trouble spots: Sri Lanka (8400), Afghanistan (4600), and Iraq (4000). In contrast, almost 500,000 people are killed each year in violent crimes and well over 1 million die in automobile accidents.

3 SIPRI's figure excludes deaths from "one-sided conflict," in which combatants deliberately kill unarmed civilians, and "indirect" deaths from war-related disease and famine. If these casualties are included, annual war-related deaths from 2004 to 2007 rise tenfold to 250,000 per year, according to "The Global Burden of Armed Violence," a 2008 report published by an international organization set up in the aftermath of the Geneva Declaration. Even this much higher number, the report states, is "remarkably low in comparison to historical figures."

4 For example, Milton Leitenberg of the University of Maryland's School for International and Security Studies has estimated that war and state-sponsored genocide in the first half of the twentieth century killed as many as 190 million people, both directly and indirectly. That comes to an average of 3.8 million deaths per year. His analysis found that wars killed fewer than one-quarter of that total in the second half of the twentieth century—40 million altogether, or 800,000 per year.

5 Even these staggering figures are low in comparison with prehistoric ones, if considered as a percentage of population. All the horrific wars and genocides of the twentieth century accounted for less than 3 per cent of all deaths worldwide, according to one estimate. That is much less than the probable rate of violent death among our early ancestors.

6 The economist Samuel Bowles of the Santa Fe Institute recently analyzed dozens of archaeological and ethnographic studies of hunter-gatherer societies like the ones our ancestors are thought to have lived in for most of our prehistory. Warfare and other forms of violence led to 14 percent of the deaths in these simple societies, Bowles concludes.

7 In his influential book *War Before Civilization*, the anthropologist Lawrence Keeley of the University of Illinois estimates that violence accounted for as many as 25 per cent of all deaths among early societies. Keeley includes not only hunter-gatherers but also tribal societies such as the Yanomamo in Amazonia and the Enga in New Guinea, which practice simple horticulture as well as hunting. These early people racked up such murderous totals with clubs, spears, and arrows rather than machine guns and bombs—and Keeley's stats don't even include indirect deaths from famine and disease.

8 Our prehistory seems to have grown more bellicose as time went on, however. According

to anthropologist Brian Ferguson, there is little or no clear-cut evidence of lethal group aggression among any societies prior to 12,000 years ago. War emerged and rapidly spread over the next few thousand years among hunter-gatherers and other groups, particularly in regions where people abandoned a nomadic lifestyle for a more sedentary one and populations grew. War arose, according to this perspective, because of changing environmental and cultural conditions rather than because of "human nature," as the West Point War Museum suggests.

9 This view contradicts what many people believe about war. Since 2006, when I first started teaching a college course called "War and Human Nature," I've asked hundreds of students and other people whether humans will ever stop fighting wars. More than four in five—young and old, conservative and liberal, male and female—answer "No." Asked to explain this response, they often say that we have always fought wars, and we always will, because we are innately aggressive.

10 Of course, all human behaviour ultimately stems from our biology. But the sudden emergence of war around 10,000 BCE and its recent decline suggest it's primarily a cultural phenomenon and one that culture is now helping us to overcome. There have been no international wars since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and no wars between major industrialized powers since the end of World War II. Most conflicts now consist of guerilla wars, insurgencies, and terrorism—or what the political scientist John Mueller of Ohio State University calls the "remnants of war."

11 Mueller rejects biological explanations for this trend, noting in one paper that "testosterone levels seem to be as high as ever." At least part of the decline, he says, can be attributed to a surge in the number of democracies since

World War II, from 20 to nearly 100 (depending on how democracy is defined). Since democracies rarely, if ever, wage war against each other, we may well see a continuing decline in the magnitude of armed conflict.

12 Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker identifies several other cultural factors contributing to the modern decline of violence, both between and within states. First, the creation of stable states with effective legal systems and police forces has eliminated the endless feuding that plagued many tribal societies. Second, increased life expectancies make us less willing to risk our lives by engaging in violence. Third, as a result of globalization and communications, we have become increasingly interdependent on—and empathetic toward—others outside of our immediate “tribes.”

13 If war is not inevitable, neither is peace. “This past year saw increasing threats to security, stability, and peace in nearly every corner of the globe,” warns the SIPRI 2009 Yearbook.

Global arms spending—especially by the United States, China, and Russia—has surged, and efforts to stem nuclear proliferation have stalled. An al-Qaeda operative could detonate a nuclear suitcase bomb in New York City tomorrow, reversing the recent trend in an instant. But the evidence of a decline in war-related deaths shows that we need not—and should not—accept war as an eternal scourge of the human condition.

14 In fact, this fatalistic view is wrong empirically and morally. Empirically, because war clearly stems less from some hard-wired “instinct” than from mutable cultural and environmental conditions; much can be done, and has been done, to reduce the risks it poses. Morally, because the belief that war will never end helps perpetuate it. The surer we are that the world is irredeemably violent, the more likely we are to support hawkish leaders and policies, making our belief self-fulfilling. Our first step toward ending war is to believe that we can end it.

Comprehension

1. To what does Horgan attribute the increase in group violence after 10,000 BCE?
2. Why does Horgan believe it would not affect his thesis if a single act of terrorism occurred tomorrow (par. 13)?

Organization and Style

1. a. Explain Horgan’s use of personal experience in his essay.
b. Explain his use of compare–contrast. Do you believe he overuses personal experience or compare–contrast? Justify your answer.

Critical Thinking/Research

1. Why do you think Horgan does not address the opposing view other than simply acknowledging it in paragraphs 1 and 9?
2. Which paragraph do you believe is the most effective in the essay? Explain its effectiveness and the ways it strengthens the essay as a whole.