

Wednesday, January 30, 2008

## **The Inner Game of Tennis**

Random House recently sent me a copy of W. Timothy Gallwey's classic "The Inner Game of Tennis", so I suppose it's only fair that I say a few words.

I'm not much of a tennis player, and probably never will be. I likely won't join a club and thus worry about my placement on the club ladder. I probably won't play in tournaments. I do like hitting a tennis ball with A from time to time. All of this might make one think that I wouldn't get much out of a book about how to master the mental side of tennis, but of course, as you might predict from my paragraph and sentence structure here, that's not true. Gallwey's techniques, if you can call them that, are explicitly meant to be applicable to all kinds of sports and all areas of life. The basic take away is "stop letting your conscious take over". That is, don't think about your technique, don't think about the last shot you missed (or made), don't think about anything -- just do it.

The key reason why Gallwey advocates this method is because he believes the part of your mind that controls your body during physical activity can't be made to understand the verbal language employed by the other part of your mind. Your body doesn't really understand "bring the racket back higher" -- it understands how it feels to bring the racket back higher and can replicate that motion as long as it doesn't have some inner voice shouting at it "higher higher higher!" (Or an ultimate frisbee example: your body doesn't understand "elbow out on the flick!" -- it understands how it feels to throw with the entire arm unconstricted, away from the body, without the whole upper part of your arm locked to your ribs.)

As for how one is supposed to learn basic technique, Gallwey essentially advocates a combination of feeling it out for yourself, seeing what works, and watching other people. In the last, the key is not analyzing what they're doing and trying to translate their motion into language: don't go, "Ah ha, he brings his left foot back to that angle to prepare his forehand". Instead, just do what he did. Let your body emulate the motion.

One does occasionally get frustrated reading the book because Gallwey makes it all seem so easy. Anyone who has tried to "just relax" or meditate or any other kind of activity where you have to turn off or ignore the constant babbling of the conscious mind knows how difficult this is. Gallwey does acknowledge that it takes a lot of practice, a lifetime of practice, really, but he doesn't really give much in the way of tips on how to accomplish this centeredness he advocates. (Of course, you should probably expect that he wouldn't -- after all, Gallwey's entire system is dependent on the idea that these things can't be translated into verbal language, so of course he can't tell you how to let go of the conscious mind.)

Feel free to skip right over Pete Carroll's new foreword. It adds nothing to the book, and was presumably only written so that Random House could slap his name on the cover.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Books at 19:39

Wednesday, January 23, 2008

### James Flynn & Walter Benn Michaels ...

... opposite sides of the world, same side of the debate.

That is, read Flynn's passage: Tolerance school fallacy ... Somehow my coining this term has not made it into common currency, but no doubt that is merely a matter of time. It underlines the fallacy of concluding that we should respect the good of all because nothing can be shown to be good. This fallacy puts a spurious value on ethical skepticism by assuming that it entails tolerance, while the attempt to justify your ideals is labeled suspect as a supposed source of intolerance. It surfaced in William James, was embraced by anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict, and is now propagated by postmodernists who think they invented it. James R. Flynn, *What is Intelligence?*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.150.

Compare this to Michaels' *The Trouble With Diversity*.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Books at 09:11

### Intelligence blogging

[T]here is one way in which individuals can make their own luck. He or she can internalize the goal of seeking challenging cognitive environments -- seeking intellectual challenges all the way from choosing the right leisure activities to wanting to marry someone who is intellectually stimulating. The best chance of enjoying enhanced cognitive skills is to fall in love with ideas, or intelligent conversation, or intelligent books, or some intellectual pursuit. If I do that, I create within my own mind a stimulating mental environment that accompanies me wherever I go. Then I am relatively free of needing good luck to enjoy a rich cognitive environment. I have constant and instant access to a portable gymnasium that exercises the mind. Books and ideas and analyzing things are easier to transport than a basketball court. No one can keep me from using mental arithmetic so habitually that my arithmetical skills survive.

James R. Flynn, *What is Intelligence?*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007, p. 87.

So marry the smartest person you can find, read books like Flynn's, and take challenging classes in high school and college. The nice thing about the practical wisdom resulting from the Dickens/Flynn model (that is, the model of intelligence that results in the above characterization of individuals making their own luck) is that it can't hurt. Even if you don't actually gain intelligence, IQ, from taking harder classes, what do you have to lose? (Grade grubbers who only care about an impressive GPA to show the law schools need not comment.)

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Books at 07:51

Sunday, January 7, 2007

### **Today's playoff picks / Why I'm not going to be an agent**

I have no documentation of this, but I had both the Colts and Seahawks in yesterday's games (the Colts because they're a vastly better team than the Chiefs and the Seahawks because they were playing at home). I figured the Seahawks game would be close, but obviously you can't anticipate the craziness that ensued.

I'll try to go 4-0 today as I pick Philadelphia and New England to win. Those aren't exactly controversial picks, although some people will get seduced by the Giants' offensive talent.

The Patriots-Jets game is tough because while I'm not a Patriot-hater, they're not my favorite team to root for, and I really like Chad Pennington and Eric Mangini, so I'd like to root for the Jets, but I just don't think they're ready to beat Bill Belichick in the playoffs.

Also, check out this story in Variety and/or Jerry Crasnick's book License to Deal to see why I've completely abandoned the idea of becoming an agent. It's a ridiculously cutthroat business, and I'm not the type of person that would succeed there, I think.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Books, Football, Law, Magazines, Movies, Non-Fiction, Reading at 12:39

Tuesday, February 21, 2006

### Freedom of Expression

I finished Kembrew McLeod's *Freedom of Expression: Overzealous Copyright Bozos and Other Enemies of Creativity*. There's a lot to recommend it, including the fact that McLeod is a UMass-Amherst grad (his PhD, anyway) and that he's generally very angry about the continued legal sanctioning of the stifling of creativity in America (and beyond).

That said, I don't know if I'd call it a good book. I sort of felt while reading it that he didn't say anything you couldn't go find out in Lawrence Lessig's *Free Culture*. That's not entirely fair, because there is lots and lots of interesting material cited as examples of what our culture could be if the muffling effects of intellectual-property law could be re-lesened. For example, McLeod writes about sampling in hip-hop, collage in subversive art, and Todd Haynes's (in?)famous *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*. Each story is compelling, but I never really felt it all come together.

Which is not to say his point isn't clear. It certainly is. But is it clear because it's obvious from the first five pages what his point is, or is it clear because he's structured his book and his anecdotes in such a way that each one makes his argument a little clearer, a little more convincing? I'd say the former.

Then again, I'm biased. I did read *Free Culture*. I'm predisposed to agree with these ideas, and I'm already more familiar with them than McLeod's intended audience might have been. Could this book, then, serve as a primer, a gateway to Lessig's books (which themselves could be gateways to more technical work by other lawyers and academics)? Maybe. If I were making a personal recommendation, though, to someone interested in finding out a little more about, say, the file sharing arguments, I'd advise skipping straight to the head of the class with Lessig's work.

I ought to note, also, that McLeod has done an interesting thing and made his work freely downloadable (as a PDF) at his website (linked above). The book is licensed under a Creative Commons license (the same license, actually, that I use on this site).

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Books at 18:15

Saturday, July 16. 2005

### Free Culture

I finished Lawrence Lessig's Free Culture last night, and I think I have a new purpose in life.

Ok, so maybe that's a little strong.

The idea of the book is that media companies today are (a) bigger and more consolidated than in the past; and (b) have deeper and longer copyright protection than ever before. The combination of these two things, Lessig claims, will vastly reduce the ability of the citizens of this country to freely produce creative work because large portions of creative work are, in fact, based upon the work of the past. With mammoth corporations zealously protecting their copyright using squads of lawyers, people will have trouble accessing, much less using, culture from the past.

Lessig's arguments are convincing and tailored to appeal to both those on the left and the right. He sometimes comes off as the ultimate free marketeer and sometimes as a big-government liberal. Whichever side he's arguing from, though, he makes his case well that big media has successfully lobbied Congress to pass laws that do not fit in America's tradition of "free culture." Many of his points revolve around the fact that the justice system in the United States vastly favors those who can pay lawyers for hours and hours of work, to the point that in many cases, justice can not be served at all. The bullying of alleged file sharers by the RIAA ("You might win if you fight us in court, but it'll cost more money in legal fees than you have, so we'll just settle for taking your entire life's savings.") is one such example.

Whether or not I end up working in intellectual property (and the book has definitely pushed me in that direction), there are implications here for any area of law. Will I be able to do what I think is right and still make a living? How often, and to what degree, will I be forced to compromise my own values because they conflict with those of my client? How can I avoid such situations? These aren't questions I have answers to, and I'm not sure anybody else does, either.

EDIT: (Cross-posted at Non Compos Mentis)

Posted by jason in Books, Non-Fiction, Personal, Reading at 15:22