

Abstractions

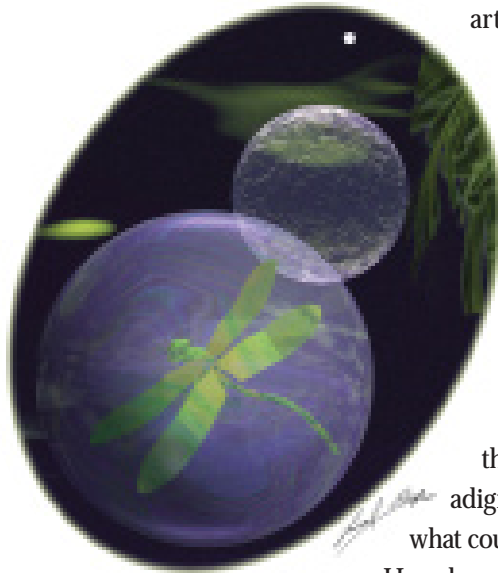
Worlds Apart

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Non est ad astra mollis e terris via...

– *Lucius Annaeus Seneca the Younger*

The modus operandi of great thinkers and doers is often one of determined pursuit of ideas, which once seemed worlds apart, in spite of resistance by the status quo. Galileo Galilei's assertions of a heliocentric universe earned him a life sentence of house arrest and censorship while Charles Darwin's arguments for selective forces in the natural world drew ridicule from scientists and clergymen alike. Nelson Mandela's dream of a color-blind world led to nearly three decades of imprisonment while Pablo Picasso's realm of cubism appalled both artists and art connoisseurs. Yet today we recognize the brilliance of these and other such individuals, not only for their beliefs but the courage to defend and share them through reason and imagination.



The importance of intellectual debate and freedom of expression of ideas is paramount to discovering and bringing together worlds of disparate thought. Stifling revolutionary concepts may seem acceptable and even necessary, given their lack of precedent and incredulity of argument. Those who bring these concepts to bear are often branded agents of insurrection at worst and promulgators of nonsense at best. Society seeks stability and fears those who risk venturing away from its foundation of norms and values for the unknown promise that new ideas offer. Yet, it is this same society that is often strengthened by contributions of these novel paradigms. Thus, we are, at once, constant conflict with what is, what might be and what could not possibly be.

How do we discern the rational yet revolutionary from the ridiculous? An option before us is to simply not permit unimaginable ideas to be disseminated and analyzed. Surely this would prevent quacks from furthering their baseless arguments yet we risk censoring genius as well. At the other extreme, if we not only allow but also unquestionably accept every new scheme presented without skepticism, we risk the dissemination and pollution of faulty ideas into our frameworks of truth and reason. However, the greatest risk is not taking any at all. We must have faith in the promise of new ideas, and at the same time pursue them with dogged skepticism, rigorous analysis and open debate. We must at once criticize and promote them in our discourse. Should these ideas stand and prosper on their merits, they not only present us with a truer picture of the world, but we can rest assured of their place in it.

There is no easy way from the Earth to the stars...

All those who bring together new worlds of thought and understanding are encouraged to share their discoveries and further discourse by writing to the MIT Undergraduate Research Journal at murj@mit.edu.