

Words Poorly Used #129 — Specialization

Aaron White's piece on Modernity caused me to think about specialization. It is not synonymous with elitism. All one has to do to understand what I'm getting at is to read "I, Pencil" by Leonard Read. One of the premises of "I, Pencil" is that specialty does not set an individual apart in a special class of more intelligent or crafty experts, it only sorts people into economic slots where each is useful in the larger scheme of things. There is no single task in making a pencil that requires rocket science, but there are lots of tasks that require the opportunity to do something in an optimum return situation. A lone pencil maker would have to switch jobs and be proficient in each. But in the real world it is not practical for the person who harvests the wood to also fashion the lead and to formulate the paint and affix the eraser. While none of these tasks is particularly challenging, it is unlikely to be done by one jack-of-all-trades.

This kind of specialization suggests a self-ordering phenomenon without the elitism of expertise.

I am suspicious of priesthoods. As with lawyers and accountants, process has overwhelmed the intended product. Hiding behind the arcane seems to be the trick.

— Kilgore Forelle