Words Poorly Used #119 — Inherent vs Adherent

We often hear about flaws in a system, and sometimes a speaker will add the word "inherent" to emphasize the flaw that they are indicting. First of all, this is a redundancy. All flaws are inherent in that they arise at or after the creation of their host, and the condition that allowed them or a subsequent condition was present *ab initio*. But many flaws are adherent, that is they arise through complications among inherent traits and subsequent external events. For instance, a primary English speaker (born in an English speaking environment) may be a poor secondary French Speaker (born in a non-French speaking environment); the problem may be a fundamental linguistic flaw (inherent) but it could also be a not-enough-practice flaw (adherent). Neither "inherent," and certainly not "adherent," add any useful information when used for rhetorical purposes. The difference, when significant, needs to be emphasized with particulars. When dealing with possible solutions, an inherent flaw would have to be backed all the way back to the origin of the system, while an adherent flaw can be undone only to the inherent flaw that gave it rise.

— Kilgore Forelle