

In Search for Lost Intellectual Treasures

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Examples of barely recognized intellectual giants in their own lifetimes imply that there must be many more out there. Nurturing them could be of great benefit to society.

CAMBRIDGE, MA, USA - August 23, 2018

Franz Kafka instructed his friend, Max Brod, to [burn his literary writings after his death](#) for personal reasons. If Brod would have followed the instructions in good faith, Kafka's literary treasures, among the finest in the twentieth century, would have been lost. We would never have been cognizant of such a loss, and thus one cannot help but suspect that there must be many other cases of precious writings that were lost without notice. Such cases would not be restricted to the arts but could also be common in the sciences.

Indeed, we know of other cases. In the life sciences, Gregor Mendel's formulation of the rules of genetic heredity in 1865-66 was forgotten for several decades until the dawn of the 20th century, when his laws were rediscovered and his experimental results were finally understood.

There are also geniuses who were discovered by chance. A notable example is the mathematician [Srinivasa Ramanujan](#) who was plucked out of obscurity based on the recognition of his raw uneducated talent by Professor Godfrey Harold Hardy of Cambridge University. One is left to wonder how many Ramanujans are living in third world countries without the resources and educational facilities to fully realize their talents.

These examples make a convincing case that there must be many intellectual treasures that were lost in the peripheries of human history. Although we cannot recover them, we can, and indeed should, aspire to lose fewer numbers of their newly minted analogs in the future. How can we mitigate the risk of losing rare creations of the human mind?

A simple way to nurture raw talent is to offer prestigious fellowships to brilliant children with limited opportunities from the most common environments of insufficient education or low socio-cultural-economic status. In particular,

governments could allocate more funds towards the nourishment of talented individuals who originate outside the established intellectual clubs of elite universities or academic societies, thereby allowing them to access better training. In this spirit, it is also important to establish incentives that reward individuals for creativity outside the mainstream dogma.

Human potential is limitless. And yet, unfortunately, some of society's most potent intellectual fuel is being burnt outside the exhaust of the rocket engine that propels our progress in the arts and sciences. If we could only harness this wasted energy, we would catapult humanity more efficiently, with a far greater force, towards its inspiring future.