

The Future of Cooperative Learning

In a time of accelerated and massive change, when conventional resources are quickly being depleted, cooperative effort is needed to navigate the “rapids of change.”

ABSTRACT

The only thing that will redeem mankind is cooperation. Bertrand Russell

Cooperative Learning is one of the best researched fields of classroom based practice in the world. Teachers and researchers across several continents know it works, when used well. However, Cooperative Learning has always been about far more than a set of classroom strategies. The principles inherent in the field are the very ones needed for humankind to adapt and survive into the future. As practitioners, we are not necessarily teaching students the broader implications, and implementation of these principles and practices. My contention is that many aspects of our culture are still heavily dependent on adversarial and competitive paradigms of operation. This is not only challenging for those who have learned, and lived, using cooperative learning strategies, but it also an ongoing detriment to our societal health. This discussion paper takes lessons learned about cooperation, collaboration and competition, beyond the classroom, into higher education, corporate and community fields, and explores how to integrate them at a systems level. As cooperative learning practitioners we need to accept we have a responsibility which extends well beyond the classroom, and to ask ourselves some deep questions about our collective educational purpose.

INTRODUCTION

What would the world look like if cooperation was the primary societal driver? This is the question that we, as practitioners, need to ask ourselves every day. In Australia just recently, we have experienced an outpouring of cooperation on a scale previously unseen, where tens of thousands of people took it upon themselves to simply turn up and work together collaboratively with perfect strangers, to clean up the mess left by the devastating floods in Queensland. The ‘mud army’ made news around the world, for a short time, until the media cycles moved on. In Victoria, similarly, the ‘sandbag army’ is (at the time of writing) following a relentless, massive ‘moving inland sea’, cooperating unstintingly to protect the homes of strangers against nature’s wrath. Stories of personal heroism and altruism are shared daily by those touched by Australia’s 2011 disaster which has deluged an area equivalent to France, Germany and the United Kingdom combined.

"A good community will not be invented, discovered or "just grow." It must be forged from the purpose and quality of the lives of the people living in it." Arthur Morgan

The first question is why did they do it? Because cooperation is a natural instinct, integral to the human condition. Micro-organisms flourished initially because of their capacity to

cooperate. Cooperation has formed the basis of indigenous societies for thousands of years. Their very survival depended on it, as has the survival of the people devastated by the floods.

The community also acted because interdependence, connectedness and cooperation are key elements of natural systems. These people collaborated in highly creative ways, using a combination of face-to-face interaction and technology-based social networking, in an environment of trust and innovation, to achieve some semblance of 'normality,' or homeostasis, for those who had lost everything. They did so because psychologically they knew it was the 'right' thing to do, and it formed the basis of their behavioural values. People needed help, they responded. Some used their own resources to drive and fly thousands of kilometres to assist, bringing everything from buckets, brooms and gumboots, to truckloads of food, to give away. The collaborative approach to using technology cooperatively, and for altruistic purposes, also saw lost families found, lost pets reunited with their families and resources made instantly available immediately the request was put out. This technology also provided for coordination of the thousands of volunteers who made themselves available to help.

They also did it because they were asked to. The Premier of Queensland, Anna Bligh showed remarkable leadership in encouraging people to work together to help each other, and in choosing to not publicise any anti-social behaviour. Bligh's behaviour demonstrated clearly the importance of effective leadership in promoting cooperation and its ability to empower similar values in others. Abraham Maslow once stated that *'people live in a very structured world and adapt themselves to the structure'*. In this instance, the structure that was provided through the coordinated and collaborative endeavours of government, defence forces, business and community ensured that the intent of positive collaboration was maintained, and the initial chaos was quickly organised into cooperative endeavour.

Finally, they also did it because of that elusive character trait referred to as the 'Aussie mateship spirit', a peculiar trait of Australian society which appears in abundance during crises and is best characterised as 'working together to help neighbours and strangers out of a big problem that is not of their making.' It is possible that at some time in the future a genetic basis may be found for promoting cooperative or competitive behaviour. Research currently being undertaken by organisations such as the Hominoid Psychology Research Group, in collaboration with the Wolfgang Koehler Primate Research Center, and the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, are seeking explanations for the divergence in behaviour between Bonobos (collaborative, attentive, sensitive) and Chimpanzees (aggressive, competitive, violent) which may have possible repercussions for future investigations into human genetics.

A second, and more vexing question is why are many people so good in a crisis, yet our society reverts to more selfish and competitive pursuits as soon as the news cycles move on. Do we forget? Do we need constant reminding? Does consumerism foster competition rather than cooperation? Do people need a reason to do good work, and a focus for their energies which builds positive social capital, rather than anti-social behaviour? Do we need leadership which encourages people to make discerning decisions about when it appropriate to be

cooperative, competitive and individualistic? Do we understand the evolutionary, psychological and physiological bases of cooperation and competition? How does all of this impact on how we teach and learn? Are we even asking the right questions?

These are issues which were first raised for me back in the early 1980's, when I first discovered Cooperative Learning as a field of research that supported my own views of teaching and learning. Prior to that, my classroom pedagogy did not have a label. Such questions have subsequently led to a professional career which has sought to explore the interfaces with other areas, in a constant search to expand the concepts of Cooperative Learning to their outer limits.

WHY COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Cooperative learning is one of three forms of learning – individual, competitive and cooperative, which we each try to balance as teachers. For many years the argument has been that intra-personal competition provides challenges for students to achieve their personal best, while inter-personal competition leads to aggression and negativity.

My contention is that, instead of looking at the question of balance, we need to reframe the question to ask ourselves how cooperative learning and competitive learning impact on an individual's development, their ability to build community, and their capacity to make pro-social future decisions. We need to understand why some purportedly cooperative people are so competitive, and why some competitive people are so aggressive. We also need to invite and encourage researchers to delve deeper into where the bases of cooperation and competition come from and how they have evolved over human history, and what this means for the future of humankind.

*Dr Perry W. Buffington, Ph.D wrote in his 1986 thesis *Competition vs. Cooperation* that 'scientists have repeatedly verified (that cooperation is more effective than competition) in hundreds of studies since the late 1800s. Yet big business, the educational system, the health-care community, and most parents continue to encourage competition, almost totally neglecting the power of cooperation. None of these groups realizes that unabated competition may be costing billions of dollars in sales and overall decreases in human achievement. Furthermore, researchers have shown that too much competition may cause poor health. Yet we continue to hold the cherished belief that competition (not cooperation), to paraphrase Sigmund Freud, "is the royal road to success." If in fact competition brings out the "beast" in us, then research demonstrates that cooperation surely brings out the "best" in us. This finding has been held in virtually every occupation, skill, or behavior tested. For instance, scientists who consider themselves cooperative tend to have more published articles than their competitive colleagues. Cooperative businesspeople have higher salaries. From elementary grades to college, cooperative students have higher grade point averages. Personnel directors who work together have fewer job vacancies to fill. And, not surprisingly, cooperation increases creativity.'*

Dr. David W. Johnson and Dr. Roger T. Johnson, professors at the University of Minnesota and co-directors of the Cooperative Learning Center, collected in excess of 500 research

papers, on which Buffington's paper was based, add that education and psychology had been at odds on the issue for years. Roger Johnson explains, "*If we are to teach people to be cooperative, then education and psychology must work together. You see, a typical classroom teacher is taught to keep students quiet and apart, indirectly fostering competition. Yet ... people learn best when they work cooperatively with each other. Children who experience this type of learning at an early age carry it with them as they mature.*" David Johnson adds, "*More students feel good about themselves as learners when they cooperate. Their self-esteem goes up, they have a better sense of community, belonging, and acceptance. One can also extrapolate this finding to any setting.*" The work of the Johnson's was expanded and progressed by a plethora of researchers including Robert Slavin, Neil Davidson, Shlomo Sharan, Yael Sharan, Celeste Brody, and many others who have each added particular perspectives to the field too numerous to expound in this brief paper.

If we are to propose, and indeed claim, that cooperation is the basis of a healthy society, we need to understand that there are a range of interpretations of the word 'cooperation' which may lead to differences in the implementation. We also need to further explore how Cooperative Learning integrates with other fields of research and interest to form a comprehensive pedagogy, and a way to influence systemic change.

COOPERATION AND COMPETITION

If co-operation is the practice of individuals or larger societal entities working in common, with mutually agreed-upon goals and possibly methods, instead of working separately in competition, and in which the success of one is dependent and contingent upon the success of another, then a further exploration of the meaning of cooperation is needed.

While cooperation is the antithesis of competition, the need or desire to compete with others is a common impetus that motivates individuals to organize into a group and cooperate with each other in order to form a stronger competitive force.

In his blog *Fightclub: Cooperation vs Competition - Round 1*, 07/14/08, businessperson Paul Taylor writes '*justifications aside, there are plenty of reasons competition can be damaging, as well as many situations where cooperation is just a waste of time. Poorly managed / unfocused meetings, groupwork masquerading as teamwork are a perfect example of cooperation gone wrong.*' He asks the questions: '*What is healthy competition? What is healthy cooperation? If these are being asked in the workforce, which they increasingly are, we, in schools need to pay closer attention as to how we expand student's views of the positive power of cooperation, and how it can be used effectively to counteract the effects of aggressive competition*'.

In his blog and keynote presentation to the International Congress and Convention Association on Information Technology, 26th Aug'08, PrasantSaha, MD, CIM, India offers the following:

'Competition (leads to) less creativity, poorer performance, and reduced satisfaction

Competition (is an) aggressive tool to achieve market power. It means survival of the fittest and (only provides) cost effective solutions to the client. Competition is short-lived, (and provides immediate outcomes).

Cooperation means embracing competitors in partnership to the benefit of all. It is a management instrument for defensive positioning against competition (and corruption). Collaboration across the supply chain has become a crucial element in the creation of business value in today's complex environment to means the whole world is our market place. Saha goes further in proposing that: *'To succeed – we need Co-opetition in order to 'Be Industry speakers and Catalysts of Change'.*

Saha, at this conference, was discussing the future of the Information Technology industry. His comments, while not based on education theory, provide a window into the types of discussions occurring in many businesses and industries across the world where statements to the effect that cooperation is a more effective modus operandi than competition, are now commonplace. For example there are claims that In July 06 the CEO of Pepsi called the CEO of Coca Cola to inform him that someone was trying to sell them the secret 'Coke' formula, showing that these fierce global rivals have a healthy respect for one another. The problem, however, is that they do not have the skills to either teach people to be cooperative, or to reignite the sense of community that comes from cooperation.

We also need to bear in mind that co-operation may be coerced (forced) or voluntary (freely chosen), and consequently individuals and groups might co-operate even although they have almost nothing in common with respect to interests or goals. Examples of that can be found in market trade, military wars, families, workplaces, schools and prisons, and more generally any institution or organization of which individuals are part (out of their own choice, by law, or forced). Cooperation in many areas such as farming and housing may be in the form of a cooperative or, alternately, in the form of a conventional business, however certain forms of cooperation are illegal in some jurisdictions because they alter the nature of access by others to economic or other resources. Thus, cooperation in the form of cartels or price-fixing may be illegal.

In 'The Design of Design', Brooks (2010) puts forth two simple rules for cooperation and competition:

- * If the objectives and constraints are well known, then competition will typically yield the best results.
- * If the objectives and constraints are ambiguous, then cooperation is the preferred approach.

The challenge for us, as teachers, is how to assist our students to develop levels of discernment around these concepts. To do so, we may need to look more closely at how the concept of cooperation interacts as an integral base for other fields of research.

THE INTERACTION OF COOPERATION WITH OTHER FIELDS OF RESEARCH

(1) Resiliency is a highly documented field which integrates seamlessly with cooperative learning to encourage the development to highly resilient and productive students. The

research of Bonnie Bernard, Glenn Richardson, Tim Burns and Jeanne Gibbs built on the seminal work of Margaret Mead and Professor Emmy Werner, to build our understanding of the key importance of psychology in building a healthy sense of self-worth in individuals, and their capacity to interact cooperatively and productively with those around them. The definition of self-worth developed by the Californian Task Force in 1990 was '*Appreciating my own worth and importance and having the character to be accountable for myself and to act responsibly toward others.*' An adaptation of Bernard's work reminds us that the elements of resiliency include:

- Creating conditions for healthy development
- Enabling students to develop possible selves and envisage preferred futures
- Build self worth, *through*
- Opportunities for cooperation and collaboration
- High, and realistic expectations of behaviour and learning
- Providing caring and supportive adults

(2) The importance of cooperation as the basis for building community is also well documented.

Dr M Scott Peck (1981) built on the work of Rogers, Tao and Maslow and created a model of community building with four elements. He believed that building community is a *collective responsibility which requires genuine and not pseudo-cooperation.*

In the Peck model of community development there are four primary stages which have been paralleled with Tuckman's Team building, and Blanchard's leadership. This has been further adapted by Boyd (2000) to reflect cooperative developmental levels.

Tuckman	Blanchard	Peck	Boyd
Forming	Directing	Pseudocommunity	Chaos
Storming	Coaching	Chaos	Dependence
Norming	Mentoring	Emptying	Independence
Performing	Delegating	Community	Interdependence

This concept of developing stages of community has been further translated, by Boyd (2000) into building individual capacity through the adaptation of Arthur Costa's work on the professional maturation of teachers. This was included as an integral part of a core document written for the Victorian Department of Education to launch their statewide coaching initiative.

Teacher Level	Curriculum Focus	Relationships	Outcome
Novice	Activities	Dependence	Efficacy
Advanced Beginner	Content	Independence	Flexibility
Competent Professional	Processes	Interdependence	Craftsmanship
Advanced Professional	Mind States	Coach	Consciousness
Sensai	Ideals	Expert Mentor	Orchestration

Julie Boyd: *Coaching in Context*. Victorian Department of Education 2009

(3) In order to determine the role of Cooperative Learning in building societal change, as practitioners we also need to recognise and address the following issues and explore in detail how each is impacting, and/or could impact, on our education systems:

FORCES DRIVING EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

1. Changing World
2. Changing Work
3. Resiliency/Prevention
4. Intelligence/Body and Brain-based/Constructivist and Developmental Learning/Cooperative Learning
5. Results/Outcomes-Oriented Learning
6. Systems Thinking
7. Expanded Learning Environments and School-work-Higher Learning
8. Communication
9. Technology
10. Environmental Consciousness
11. Useful Assessments and Accountability
12. Increased urbanisation

(C) Julie Boyd 2000

(3) Ecology: All members of an ecosystem are engaged in a subtle interplay of competition and cooperation, involving countless forms of partnership. Similarly, all members of learning communities are engaged in continuously balancing appropriate uses of cooperation and competition. The work of Dr Fritjof Capra identified the key principles of living systems to include:

Partnership/Networks/Community
Connectivity/Interdependence
Diversity
Permeable Boundaries/Structure/Pattern

It is the application of these into education at a systems level through the extension of cooperative learning and learning community building that will enable an evolutionary systems regeneration based on learning and human needs leading to a sustainable society.

(4) A plethora of other fields of research are currently available to inform education to assist sophisticated educators in their search for a way to address the wave of testing based accountability which is currently sweeping across western nations as they compete to have the '*most students to finish college*' (Obama 2011, State of the Union address) and hold teachers accountable for their student's results, rather than their learning. The following is a brief and non-exhaustive list developed by Boyd in her work to assist architects in the design of new schools which are being designed, and built, with a thirty year shelf-life. Each of these listed areas was developed collaboratively using a single criterion 'how do we build a school

which will foster cooperation and accommodate developmental levels in each of these fields?'

<p>Systems, chaos, network, complexity and self-organization theories. Eco-Literacy/ Ecolearning/Natural Systems Sustainability Literacy Resilience and Wellness Research Brain-Based/Heart-Based Learning Community, Citizenship, Ethics Building Curriculum- <i>integral, thematic, spiral, storyform,</i> Multiple Intelligences Sensory Learning Learning Spaces Learning Environments <i>Physical, Virtual, Social, Intellectual</i> Indigenous Pedagogy International Pedagogy Gender Education Adult Learning and Professional Development Effective Teaching and Learning Practices Multi-age learning Middle Schooling Human Psychology Physical development Play based development Holistic Education Leadership and School Change Enterprise/Extre/Entrepreneurship Transitions (eg. primary to secondary, school to work)</p>	<p>Multi-literacies including - Literacy/written - Oracy/spoken - Numeracy/mathematical - Cultural - Global - Social - Technological - Financial - Ecological - Transcultural - Sustainability</p> <p>Social networking Responsible Use of Multi-Technologies Evidence Based Learning Accelerated Learning School-community partnerships Futures Trends – <i>Societal/Economic/ Educational</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Julie Boyd 2009</p>
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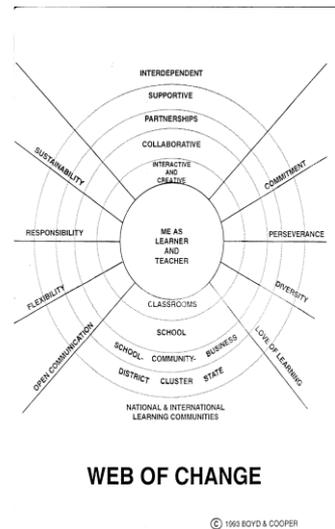
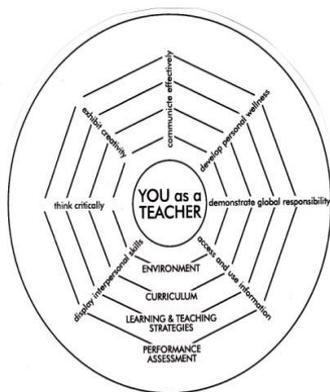
It is the integration of key elements of these fields into a cohesive whole which will provide the basis for the systemic development of the following elements of building community capital, and the rethinking and future development of curriculum.

Considerations for BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPITAL

- Social
- Environmental
- Intellectual
- Health
- Economic
- Cultural
- Intercultural
- Creative
- Governance
- Technological

COOPERATION- A DEVELOPING PEDAGOGY and SYSTEM DRIVER

Cooperative Learning has never been about a set of classroom strategies. It is a way of being, an attitude toward self and others, and a basic value which drives natural systems. An integral perspective of cooperative learning as a pedagogical basis has been developed through a series of frameworks created by Julie Boyd et al. including the following which assume that cooperative learning forms a key component of the classroom environment:



Collaborative Approaches to Professional Learning and Reflection, Boyd, Cooper 1995

Building on these frameworks which were utilised to develop curriculum in several Australian states during the 1990's, Boyd articulates, in a paper written for the South Australia Department of Education, the following pedagogical drivers to embed cooperative learning as a basis for education, that learning needs to be:

- Rigorous
- Relevant
- Resourceful
- Relational
- Responsive
- Reflective

'Pedagogy: Beyond E-Learning' South Australian Department of Education 2009

PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Finally, if we are to accept the proposition that Cooperative Learning has a far broader intention than simply a set of strategies to use in a classroom, we need to examine the public purpose of education, and to muster research and argument as to how this needs to be articulated in future.

The DeLors Report commissioned by UNESCO (1990), determined the following as the five bases of schooling to be implemented internationally.

- Learn to know*
- Learn to do*
- Learn to be*
- Learn to live together*
- Learn to live sustainably*

Cooperative Learning, used well, addresses each of these elements.

John Goodlad, in the 1997 book ‘The Public Purpose of Education and Schooling’ proposed ‘*an expanded mission for education that both identifies schooling as a moral and civic endeavour offers a framework for leading the charge for meaningful school reforms.*’ Goodlad further identified that ‘*We do not want to confuse education and schooling. Education is a deeper, more profound, undertaking than we hope, in the political entities that are schools serving a purpose in a democratic society.*’

The challenge offered by Goodlad and his colleagues, including Linda Darling-Hammond, Theodore Sizer and Roger Soder continues to provide increasing meaning in today’s educational environment across first world, capitalist societies such as America, England and Australia, where increasing pressure for assessment conformity and improved test scores as measures of a teachers worth, clash at a base values level with what highly effective teachers know about good teaching and learning. The statement of Goodlad et al that ‘*Every member of this panel is critically concerned about what appears to be the lack or disappearance of public purpose in our schools,*’ is as contemporary now as when it was first made.

A Brief History of the Purpose of Public Schooling

AGRICULTURAL ERA

Purpose: To promote common culture and citizenship
 Metaphor: Community Centre serving political and civic needs
 View of students: Neophytes- needing to be socialized
 View of teachers: Sacred profession- called to service

INDUSTRIAL ERA

Purpose: To ‘Australianise’ the immigrant and prepare workers for industrial society
 Metaphor: A factory- serving economic needs, assembly line production
 View of students: Raw materials- products to be standardised, and controlled
 View of teachers: Supervisors, administrators and managers

SOCIAL ERA

Purpose: Social reform to meet the needs of all kids
 Metaphor: Hospital- for victims of social injustice, meeting cultural and social needs
 View of students: Vulnerable- to be protected
 View of teachers: Caretakers. District staff diagnose and prescribe.
 Administrators as chiefs of staff

LIFELONG LEARNING ERA

Purpose: To teach people how to learn and to love learning lifelong
 Metaphor: Collaborative learning community engaged with the larger world
 View of students: Learners and leaders, creators and problem-solvers
 View of teachers: Teachers as facilitators and coaches. Administrators as resource brokers and links to community.

ELECTRONIC/DIGITAL ERA

Purpose: Networks-Interconnected and Embedded and Consistent
 Metaphor: Spider web
 Students: Explorers and constructors of knowledge, both producers and consumers
 Teachers: Learners, Coaches and Guides

SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS ERA

Purpose: Macro and micro-system stewardship of living systems
 Metaphor: Natural Gardens, communities.
 Students: Cooperative leaders responsible for social, ecological, economic and natural capital
 Teachers: Multi-locational learning guides, opportunity facilitators, co-learners

© Julie Boyd 2000

Professor Alan Reid, in his 2003 discussion paper to the Australian Deans of Education, argues for Public Education as an '*Education Commons*'. He quotes Proposition 7 of *New Learning: A Charter for Australian Education* (ACDE, 2001) which boldly asserts that in the new century '*the place of the "public" and the "private" in (school) education will be redefined*' (p. 121)', and proceeds to quote '*the operative concepts (should be) not around market choice, but around community autonomy, responsibility, self-governance and diversity....(W)ith an approach to learning which stresses collaboration over competition, it may be possible to mix and match resources and even programs between public and community-based schools* (ACDE, 2001, p. 124).

He further states that his paper is based on a commitment to the public and democratic purposes of education, and argues that '*in the current environment the pursuit of these purposes calls for a reassessment of established arguments*' and the development of strategies that recognize and directly respond to the factors that are shaping contemporary education policy.

Val Klenowski, in her paper *Public Education Matters: Reclaiming Public Education for the Common Good in a Global Era*, concurs, offering the argument that *public education needs to be reclaimed to fulfill its role as a "democratising force" to address social and economic inequality and to respect and recognise diversity and difference.*

Alan Walker, in his paper *The Value of Public Education*, adds his view. '*The common spaces we call public schools should be places characterised by plurality and diversity because it is here that we can teach that a respect for difference is precisely what binds our society together. Such lessons are not possible when our schooling system is organised to separate out, rather than to mix young people from a variety of backgrounds. It is within these public spaces that students can serve an apprenticeship in democracy. The knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to function as effective and participating citizens are not things people are born with, they need to be taught systematically.*'

To achieve these outcomes, Val Klenowski, Queensland University of Technology believes that universities have a key role to play. '*Rather than be content with the frivolous, scholarly lax forms of teacher education and weak teaching prevailing in the world today, we should work towards education that truly takes the unattained potential of human beings as its starting point*'.

This is not an easy challenge. As Clay Shirky(2008) points out "*Institutions will try to preserve the problem to which they are the solution.*"

However another writer, Clay Christensen demonstrates in his book, *The Innovator's Dilemma*, how disruptive technologies almost always arise from the margins of an industry, where they start out as insignificant solutions, which then become accepted and finally institutionalised. If Cooperative Learning is to become truly institutionalised we, as educators, need to take a much broader view of the concept.

CONCLUSION

For Cooperative Learning to be seen as a ‘public purpose’ for education, leading to societal sustainability, requires that influential educators lay out an argument, firstly as to why; secondly—how Cooperative Learning interfaces with other key research fields to provide a coherent pedagogy, thirdly- when it is appropriate to promote cooperation over competition, and also how such a challenge might manifest across each level of education systems and society.

If we are to mature into a truly interdependent community, or series of communities, then as researchers we need to be marshalling further evidence as to the importance of cooperation, and as practitioners we need to be raising our personal and systemic expectations to provide a vision for our own preferred future of a cooperative society.

As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races.

Charles Darwin

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