

# The Flaw That May Make or Break Us

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Humans have a tendency to develop misguided judgements toward each other. We nitpick the flaws of our fellow brothers and sisters, and formulate inflated false images of them based on these imperfections. Some of us may not do it as often as others, but that's really not the point. The point is, why do it at all? Is it a human-specific genetic attribute that once was vital to our primitive ancestral ability to detect ideal mates and potential threats? If so, making judgements about one another should ideally band us together as a society, and allow prosperity and health to thrive throughout our community. "Society" and "community" here refer to the human race as a whole. The human race itself, however, is divided into hundreds of thousands of societies who judge those separate from their own and determine whether or not those individuals should be considered outsiders. As humans, we have an obvious innate sense of importance and superiority. The compulsion to put so much emphasis on isolating each other may also be a direct cause of the Earth's present condition in two ways. One, we are too focused on ourselves and each other, and thus fail to recognize the Earth's relevance to our existence. Two, we lack an understanding of the Earth (animals, plants, insects, bacteria, i.e. all inhuman existence), treating it the same as we do "outsiders," and, thus, consciously neglect it. Much of science fiction discusses these issues and explores two main concerns: the humanity that we should have, devoid of judgement, in which compassion and empathy are dominant traits, and a world without mankind altogether. The works of Ursula K. Le Guin and Octavia Butler shed light on these issues and provoke thought regarding such matters. Skillfully and creatively, they inject their literature with relevant concerns present in modern society as to humans' impact on one another and the world around us.

Ursula K. Le Guin exposes our tendency to isolate individuals for the better of society in her short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas." With a seemingly utopian image, Le Guin deliberately introduces Omelas as a "joyous" (273) community and implicitly suggests that the lifestyle here is unimpeded by "real world" problems present within most communities. As the story of Omelas unfolds, it is abruptly revealed that it isn't any different than any other civilization. In fact, the tale can be interpreted in such a way that it presents a very relevant issue prevalent throughout many current societies. In an attempt to sway the reader's acceptance of Omelas' ability to accomplish such a lifestyle, Le Guin unveils the modus operandi, the spark that sets flame to these people's fiery existence and the way in which they manage to sustain such a blissful city: selective isolation. Literally speaking, the isolated subject is a single child confined within a locked room that is only seen by those who choose to visit it, to whom it

is vulnerable to any ill-will (except death, presumably) that they choose to inflict upon the child. What judgements are made by the city when selecting the child are unknown, but based on the child crying, "Please let me out. I will be good," (Le Guin 276) one can assume it behaved in a manner deemed unacceptable at some point and was therefore selected to be imprisoned. This conscious decision to ignore the child's suffering in Omelas, and to accept it as a necessary evil for the sake of the city's happiness, mirrors the trend of people who are considerably aware of the suffering inflicted on others, through poverty and hunger, for example, yet have developed a tolerance for it as simply "the way the world works." Like the people of Omelas, we are divided into communities that fight the notion of compassion toward those outside our inner circles in order to preserve our ideals and sense of security.

In her essay "American SF and the Other," Ursula K. Le Guin explicitly describes the ways in which judgements made by social groups instantaneously cause alienation of other groups in terms she refers to as "The Other" and "social Alien" (Le Guin 97). She emphasizes the segregation that judging one another inflicts on humanity as a whole and how easily we separate ourselves from each other the moment we deem ourselves to be different. The validity of her claim is expressed eloquently in the following passages:

The question involved here is the question of The Other—the being who is different from yourself. This being can be different from you in its sex; or in its annual income; or in its way of speaking and dressing and doing things; or in the color of its skin, or the number of its legs and heads. In other words, there is the sexual Alien, and the social Alien, and the cultural Alien, and finally the racial Alien. (Le Guin 97)

If you deny any affinity with another person or kind of person, if you declare it to be wholly different from yourself—as men have done to women, and class has done to class, and nation has done to nation — you may hate it, or deify it; but in either case you have denied its spiritual equality, and its human reality. You have made it into a thing, to which the only possible relationship is a power relationship. And thus you have fatally impoverished your own reality. (Le Guin 99)

When we deem others to be something, or someone, other than what, or whom, they present themselves to be, is it our intention to alienate them? Is it a subconscious method of Social Darwinism, our way of filtering out the "weaker" genes that we can see on a higher level, perhaps with our third eye? Those we tend to isolate in mass quantities show no signs of inferiority or incompetence. As Le Guin stated, social groups most commonly judge based on gender, status, and race, categories that encompass ironically everyone. "Gender" is genderless considering we all have a gender, and therefore to be judged on a subcategory whether it be male or female should be irrelevant; the same applies to status and race. This way of thinking may be abstract, but it's objective in its purest form. The sooner more people can grasp this concept and overcome petty judgements, the more likely we

are to unify and direct our efforts toward solving human rights issues such as the lack of available food, shelter, health and individual freedom that billions of people struggle with today.

Octavia Butler's "Bloodchild" explores the notion of a world independent of human impact. The setting suggests a world in which the roles of humans and insects are essentially reversed, and the significance of being human is restricted to that of being a surrogate for the insect race, by whom humans are used as vessels and then discarded. Species alteration isn't the only modification Butler makes. Rather than the human experience of women bearing children, Butler assigns this role to men in her world. These two manipulations turn what we know to be life completely upside down. Where does a world in which insects rule as the dominant species, and human men are subject to carrying their offspring leave us as a species? What is *our* purpose as an entire race? From this perspective, viewing people as a race seems much simpler now that we are governed by a common superior being that we all must submit to. Butler presents a world where the only importance of our human existence is to facilitate the continuation of another species altogether. The familiarity in this lies in the way in which we manage our relationship with the Earth. The only reason our species is able to survive generation after generation is because of the resources the Earth provides us. Plants, for example, are responsible for every single one of our breaths. Were it not for plants, and trees, we would suffocate from high levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and die and no human would be powerful enough to avoid this fate. Global rainforest coverage has gone from 14% to 6%, and consequently, emissions of carbon dioxide have increased by 20% ("Deforestation," ThinkGlobalGreen). One may wonder the improvements we could make as people if we were able to focus our energy toward creating viable solutions in terms of saving *our* Earth before time runs out.

Science fiction is a very clever genre, in the sense that it often presents itself to the reader as a glorified and fantastic image of what it really is. Its core message is derived from the truth, which may be entirely mundane or on the contrary wholly fundamental, and in turn is glamorized in such a way that captivates the reader to be aware of said truth, whether he or she is consciously aware of it or not. Ursula K. Le Guin discusses this paradox in the introduction to her novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, "What is Science Fiction?" In her introduction, Le Guin makes a very powerful statement when she writes: "*The only truth I can understand or express is, logically defined, a lie. Psychologically defined, a symbol. Aesthetically defined, a metaphor.*" The magnitude of this testimony is undeniable. We've considered the issue of passing judgement against each other on the surface and its impact on our humanity as well as the Earth. Now consider that some individuals may willfully be seeking judgement, portraying an illusion of themselves, so as to inform an audience of a significant message, a truth. Actors, for example, are they not perhaps the most talented of all liars? As an audience, we agree to believe their lies and allow ourselves to be manipulated throughout the duration of films. We form judgements of the characters and with each judgement is procured a thought and a feeling, an assessment of what we

think they're trying to tell us. In this case, judging isn't shallow and isolating, but capable of establishing a bond between hundreds of thousands of people and stimulating the mind to think outside of ourselves.

The fact that being judgmental is a human quality isn't a negative. It's an attribute that if utilized with morality and common sense is extremely useful and has the potential to lead one in the right direction. In the world we live in, we cannot rely solely on our impulsive sense of judgement when examining our surroundings, and we must learn to apply knowledge, along with compassion, toward our conclusions. In science fiction, the unimaginable is done when writers transport their audience to entirely foreign realms to expose them to whatever they desire. Science fiction creates realities that are nearly free of judgement, and perfectly derived from the notion of existing in worlds where the judgements we know and place on each other are countered.

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