

# Why Create When There Is No Recognition, No Reward?

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## Abstract

Why run the race when there is no trophy?

The creative human being is often not  
recognized, not rewarded. What to do?

Written in memory of the passing of my friend, Robert Leon Carroll, April, 1997.

These days it seems there is a prize for everything. Everyone seems to win something. But the prizes awarded are for achievements people recognize as achievements. What happens to the person whose work is not understood? There is no tangible prize, no award.

What is it that motivates a person who knows there will be no prize? I remember a dream shared with me by my theoretical physics professor, Dr. Robert Leon Carroll of West Virginia. It was 1971. Dr. Carroll told me he saw a huge wheel rolling towards eternity. A voice in the dream told him to look closely at the spokes. When he did, he saw faces, the faces of those who contributed to the advance of civilization. He remembered particularly the face of James Clerk Maxwell, he told me. Maxwell, as we know, was not understood in his day.

What motivated James Clerk Maxwell? It seems to me Maxwell was self-fulfilled, internally content. Why? Because he had done what it was given him to do. He knew that he had accomplished what he was supposed to.

When I was 12 years old, my father said to me: “Do not expect a thank you every time you do something. Do something because it must be done.” Maxwell’s father must have told him the same thing.

There are several theories about what motivates people. I think the maker of things, the creator of ideas is motivated by the ideas. No external motivation is necessary. The prize is the development of the idea. That is all that is necessary.

The theoretical scientist may never see his or her work put to use, but he or she must do what it is in him or her to do. The sea turtle lays eggs and leaves them to survive on their own. So must the maker of ideas.

Civilization advances by the work of unsung heroes, the faces in the wheel propelling humankind to eternity.

#### Bibliography

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